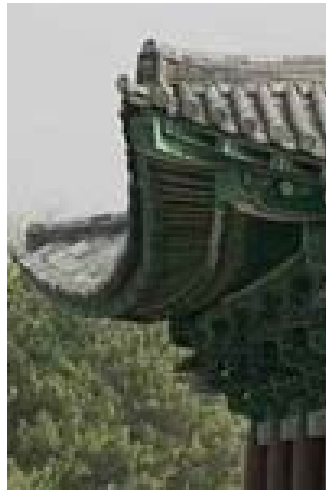


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**Forward**

Welcome to the September Issue of the Asian EFL Journal. This edition reflects our eclectic editorial policy in that it covers a wide range of topics and writing styles spanning many geographical areas within and beyond Asia. Our journal attempts to attract papers by leading international specialists and by authors writing for the first time in an international academic journal. Some papers are of a practical nature and others are examples of academic scholarship reporting research that is less immediately applicable to the classroom, but which sheds light on areas that are relevant to language acquisition or materials and curriculum planning. Others are designed to stimulate debate on current topics of interest to the profession such as competence in teaching English as an International language and form-focused instruction.

We are delighted to be able present the written version of Rod Ellis's keynote address at the inaugural Asian EFL conference in Pusan earlier this year. In his contribution, he suggests that "If SLA is to offer teachers guidance, there is a need to bite the bullet and proffer advice, so long as this advice does not masquerade as prescriptions or proscriptions." It is interesting to see such a prominent SLA specialist commit himself to ten principles and to express them so clearly and concisely. His paper not only provides a concise overview of the field, but also challenges teachers and educational planners alike to consider the implications of SLA research. Mark Helgesen challenges us to consider the idea of input raised by Ellis, in a very practical way, arguing persuasively in favour of extensive reading programmes, and Alex Poole raises the important issue of the precise nature of the benefits of form-focused instruction, suggesting that students, at least in his context, attend to lexical rather than grammatical cues. We are also fortunate to have a practical piece by an acknowledged international specialist on teaching vocabulary, Paul Nation.

Helping to edit this journal requires many hours at the computer, often in one enclosed location, but fortunately provides the vicarious pleasure of online travel to our expanded and overworked editorial team of volunteers. We have discovered with Yang et al. the value of collaborative e-learning in a Hong Kong middle school. Ali Al-Issa's piece from Oman is a refreshing example of a more narrative style of writing, while Esmat Babaii and Hasan Ansary from Iran provide us with an example of meticulous and detailed scholarship in the systemic linguistic tradition. From Vietnam, Na Pham leads us skillfully into the intricacies of topic-comment structures in Vietnamese illustrating the difficulties of translating these into subject-predicate structures in English, whereas Phan Le Ha challenges us to consider the complex issues surrounding the characterization of English as an International English. Ahmet Acar from Turkey revisits the linguistic/communicative competence controversy and my own piece is designed to present a challenge to future Asian EFL authors by raising the issue of competence in relation to English learnt as an international language. We would welcome contributions on this topic for future issues and would also like to develop our teaching section. Papers that have direct classroom relevance, descriptions of classroom approaches and rationales of curriculum and materials design would be most welcome.

Dr. Roger Nunn, Senior Associate Editor

## **Important Tasks of English Education: Asia-wide and Beyond**

**David Nunan**

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We need to look deeply at times into the specific needs of learners in Asia and the Pacific region who we cannot forget are still very much living in local contexts -not only an evidently increasingly global one. That being said, there is much to learn from these studies that can be borrowed and lent across a number of frontiers. Further, it is evident that we must not exclude research into second language learning because of its geographical or cultural source. That has to underlay an important part of the integrity of research and this book is very much devoted to that principle.

One approach, that does seem to meet a wide range of cross-regional needs and to which a number of the authors deal with directly or indirectly is one to which I have continuously been drawing attention and analysis for more than two decades. It is that of task based learning. Interestingly, its popularity is accelerating in East Asia as well as elsewhere. A demonstration of this is the fact that I was asked by the Chinese Government to prepare a new task based publication for the English curriculum. China represents, as Li (2004) states in his included work, the world's largest source of English learners, let alone the largest segment of EFL learners anywhere in the world.

India with its huge population and apparent new boom for English learning as mentioned by Gupta (2005) is also a large beacon of English learning. Just these two countries alone and their appetites for English education give us a new sense of the increased diversity of language ownership; something Phan Le Ha (2005) touches on in her article on the internationalization of the language and non-natives increasing critical role in teaching, development and learning. It signals the reality that those learning English will be significantly centered around or originating from Asia.

Therefore educators need evermore to recognize the importance and distinctive context based needs of those requiring education in English outside the traditional native speaker contexts. This is not inherently contradictory with those with persistent arguments that many general principles of acquisition should be understood and appropriately applied by educators within their distinctive classroom settings and communities.

In keeping with such thoughts, I believe it can be reasonably well argued that the task based teaching as I have largely described in various publications -more recently, *"An introduction to Task Based Teaching"*, 2004, Cambridge University Press- does provide a flexible, functionally compatible and contextually sensitive approach for many learners, as well as teachers. There may not be a magic approach anywhere for this region or others, but let us look at some of the attractive features of task based learning. It offers the potential for the following:

1. A replacement to or a supportive infusion of more student centered learning to certain single approach based syllabi.
2. Utilizing more authentic experiences and materials as well as principles of constructivism compared to top down teaching.
3. More of a sense of personal and active accomplishment including developing a greater sense of language ownership.
4. Increased student participation when task teaching is well planned and implemented sensitive to learners' learning styles, learning and communicative strategies, personalities, multiple intelligences and the overall local contexts, for example.
5. Making specific lesson goals more evident through movement towards and/or success of task completion.
6. Important and ongoing assessment and "washback" to both teacher and learner.

Tasks, well chosen and developed which are centered around relevant acquisition principles, as well as sensitive to context have also the potential to lessen the need for test cramming and excessive reliance on a result/test based oriented syllabi. Cramming, described by Poole (2003) in the Asian EFL Journal amongst others as part of an "Exam Hell" represents a significant phenomenon in a large part of Asia. Further, a result based syllabus, especially one with a narrow focus on grammar-translation and reading and vocabulary may not provide a full set of language skills needed by various L2 learners including those wishing to become communicatively capable.

Tasks can be also fun and highly student centered when borrowing on effective games and other such activities though task is not a substitute word for games. Where students are conscious of marks, including many Asian high school students, if tasks are not clearly supportive of good grades, they may find such activities as either irrelevant or even label them as bad teaching. For games may not be always supportive of important curricular goals. Nevertheless, it can be argued that putting fun (back) into learning represents positive motivation that can achieve even worthwhile outcomes in respect to the curriculum. It is really difficult to think of most learners whatever their context as appreciating boring teaching on a sustained basis.

It is also learners' complaints that that they do not always understand the teaching goals through teacher centered lectures that make task based teaching potentially dynamic for learning. Such task approaches can represent to students not only achieving the better learning of a language item but in organizing time effectively, learning to work cooperatively -an important Asian value- and using a variety of intelligences and skills such as computer mediation. Thus, students can become cognitively and pragmatically more fully engaged which can reduce tedium and make class work more challenging and relevant to their wider needs and interests.

Again, too many students in the region and elsewhere may become overly committed to rote, passive approaches and formulaic thinking associated with certain multiple choice questions that are simply re-stylized from practice tests. Combined within a teacher centered, top down approach, students may simply associate English with a kind of assembly line and formulaic work to be tolerated but not to be enjoyed. The end

result is that English becomes firmly embedded within some students thinking as a chore and not really being authentic enough to act as a door to a whole new world of possibilities, career or otherwise -be it in the business world or other sectors. Rather, many students in Asia and elsewhere may, see their own world and future successes in terms of fulfilling tasks especially when the teacher reinforces such a link with practical activities.

It is not to argue against there being merit at times for the grammar-translation, audio-lingual approaches or lexical approaches, many of which remain popular and central to quite a few teachers in the region. Learners' needs, proficiency, teacher competency and confidence, government policy and a host of other factors may determine the validity of how instructors best deal with instructed learning.

In fact, Chew (2005) in her article on reviewing the evolution of syllabi in Singaporean English education, indicates that the single centered approach to a syllabus may be waning, increasingly substituted by a more eclectic one. Whether this experience will be replicated in other countries in the region, may be difficult to exactly say. It may be that we are in a period of the "end of methods". But like others in different social sciences who harkened the end of ideology, it may be more prudent to view change as largely evolutionary with recurring ebbs and flows depending upon the current contextual streams of challenges.

However, the attractiveness of task based learning relates not only to the enumerated benefits. It provides rather a useful practice that that can be applied across many approaches, as well as boundaries. Task based learning may provide an enduring legacy that meets the test of time. It may also provide a curricular and syllabus framework of flexibility that logically students and teachers will be drawn to even if it need not be the central leitmotif for certain places.

For example, tasks could include, completing a grammar bingo game after a contrastive analysis, grammar-translation based presentation. Subsequently, task based communicative teaching practices could be supported to incorporate the appropriate grammar into developing two way oral skills through an interview activity. Again, the task approach does not deny that in some Asian classes -or anywhere in the world for that matter- that certain traditional approaches need to have their day. Rather it is especially supportive of an integrated approach, or even where the needs of the learner may be solely communicative. However, again task selection and development is the key to better ensure specific needs are met. In doing this, the educator needs to be conscious of principles and aspects of acquisition.

In this respect Ellis, (2005) has so well summarized here with authority and clarity the general understanding in the profession on instructed language learning. We are further faced with the fact that the true task of learning a second language in the many EFL environments that Asian learners find themselves are removed from a lot of 'naturalistic', non-classroom, English speaking settings. Such an understanding of these realities and the principles that surround realistic classroom learning can be of service to classroom teachers wondering what methods, approaches and practices to choose at a specific time. It reminds us of the value of the extensive reading programmes to which Helgesen (2005) alludes can be so useful for Asian learners where they are limited in their accessibility to communicative English in a natural environment.

Teachers in such contexts may need to be reminded, at times to extend the task work outside the classroom with proper direction that permits students to develop independent learning skills that facilitate students to do the extensive work necessary to gain fluency. In cultures where top down approaches are in the main, instructors be they native teachers or not, need to be cognizant of these realities and limitations. We can not simply, for example, put all learners on the Internet or through CALL, clap our hands and say "go to it". Again learning context, as related to acquisition can be highly relevant, which Ellis (2005) would seem to imply.

Countries that have ESL environments, some of which appear comparatively advanced in terms of their English education systems such as Singapore and Hong Kong, may for historical or special leadership reasons have cultivated English as a second language. Here students may have to be approached differently in general as they may be better motivated through seeing English on a daily basis in coming to terms as to why they may be spending more than a thousand hours to learn it within the school system. They may also have more opportunities to integrate classroom learning into day to day usage if not immediately then possibly in the relatively near future when they obtain employment. Task work in such circumstances can even draw on giving real world assignments of surveying store managers and others in English that extend instruction quantitatively to a level that helps develop real authentic competency.

It therefore makes sense to use "English Education" in the book's title rather than using EFL. Simply speaking, English is not foreign to all parts of the region. This should draw more Asian educators towards thinking about what techniques and experiences within their own region itself that can be borrowed and/or adapted from places like Hong Kong. This is a place I know personally for its significant daily use of English especially in the professional areas.

Whatever one argues is precisely workable, there is no denying that the future of English education, as so well discussed by the likes of Ellis, (2005) Chew, (2005) Helgesen (2005) and many others who presented at the Asian EFL Journal Conference (2005) is well secured in respect to its growth. English education in this region thus needs the specific valuable attention that this publication so well gives it.

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## **Principles of Instructed Language Learning**

**Rod Ellis**

**University of Auckland**

### **Introduction**

Second Language Acquisition (SLA), as a sub-discipline of applied linguistics, is still a very young field of study. While it may not be possible to identify its precise starting point, many researchers would agree that the late sixties marked the onset of an intense period of empirical and theoretical interest in how second languages are acquired. Much of this research has been directed at understanding and contributing to more effective instructed language learning. In addition to the numerous studies that have investigated the effects of instruction on learning (Norris and Ortega's meta-analysis published in 2000 identified 79 studies), much of the theorizing about L2 instruction has been specifically undertaken with language pedagogy in mind, for example Krashen's Monitor Model (Krashen, 1981), Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), DeKeyser's skill-learning theory (DeKeyser, 1998), VanPatten's input processing theory (VanPatten, 1996; 2002) and my own theory of instructed language learning (Ellis, 1994) all address the role of instruction in L2 acquisition.

However, the research and theory do not afford a uniform account of how instruction can best facilitate language learning. There is considerable controversy (see Ellis, forthcoming). In particular, there is no agreement as to whether instruction should be based on a traditional focus-on-forms approach, involving the systematic teaching of grammatical features in accordance with a structural syllabus, or a focus-on-form approach, involving attention to linguistic features in the context of communicative activities derived from a task-based syllabus or some kind of combination of the two. Nor is there agreement about the efficacy of teaching explicit knowledge or about what type of corrective feedback to provide or even when explicit grammar teaching should commence. These controversies reflect both the complexity of the object of enquiry (instructed language acquisition) and also the fact that SLA is still in its infancy.

Given these controversies, it might be thought unwise to attempt to formulate a set of general principles of instructed language acquisition. Hatch's (1978a) warning – 'apply with caution' – is as pertinent today as it was some thirty years ago. Nevertheless, I think there is a need to try to draw together a set of generalisations that might serve as the basis for language teacher education, and I am not alone in this, for Lightbown (1985; 2000) has felt and responded to a similar need. If SLA is to offer teachers guidance, there is a need to bite the bullet and proffer advice, so long as this advice does not masquerade as prescriptions or proscriptions (and there is always a danger that advice will be so construed) and so long as it is tentative, in the form of what Stenhouse (1975) called 'provisional specifications'. I have chosen to present my own provisional specifications in the form of 'principles'. I do not expect that all SLA researchers or all language teachers will agree with them. I hope, though, that they will provide a basis for argument and for reflection.

***Principle 1: Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence.***

Proficiency in an L2 requires that learners acquire both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which cater to fluency, and a rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules, which cater to complexity and accuracy (Skehan, 1998). There is now widespread acceptance of the importance played by formulaic expressions in language use. Native speakers have been shown to use a much larger number of formulaic expressions than even advanced L2 learners (Foster, 2001). Formulaic expressions may also serve as a basis for the later development of a rule-based competence. N. Ellis (1996), for example, has suggested that learners bootstrap their way to grammar by first internalising and then analyzing fixed sequences. Classroom studies by Ellis (1984), Myles, Mitchell & Hooper (1998; 1999) and Myles (2004) demonstrate that learners often internalize rote-learned material as chunks, breaking them down for analysis later on.

Traditionally, language instruction has been directed at developing rule-based competence (i.e. knowledge of specific grammatical rules) through the systematic teaching of pre-selected structures – what Long (1991) has referred to as a focus-on-forms approach. While such an approach certainly receives support from the research that has investigated direct intervention in interlanguage development, curriculum designers and teachers need to recognize that this type of instruction is as likely to result in students learning rote-memorized patterns as in internalizing abstract rules (Myles, 2004). This need not be seen as an instructional failure however as such patterns are clearly of value to the learner. It points instead to an acknowledgement of what can be realistically achieved by a focus-on-forms approach, especially with young, beginner learners.

If formulaic chunks play a large role in early language acquisition, it may pay to focus on these initially, delaying the teaching of grammar until later, as I have proposed in Ellis (2002). A notional-functional approach lends itself perfectly to the teaching of prefabricated patterns and routines and may provide an ideal foundation for direct intervention in the early stages. Clearly, though, a complete language curriculum needs to ensure that it caters to the development of both formulaic expressions and rule-based knowledge.

***Principle 2: Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.***

The term ‘focus on meaning’ is somewhat ambiguous. It is necessary to distinguish two different senses of this term. The first refers to the idea of semantic meaning (i.e. the meanings of lexical items or of specific grammatical structures). The second sense of focus on meaning relates to pragmatic meaning (i.e. the highly contextualized meanings that arise in acts of communication). To provide opportunities for students to attend to and perform pragmatic meaning, a task-based (or, at least, a task-supported) approach to language teaching is required. It is clearly important that instruction ensures opportunities for learners to focus on both types of meaning but, arguably, it is pragmatic meaning that is crucial to language learning.

There is an important difference in the instructional approaches needed for semantic and pragmatic meaning. In the case of semantic meaning, the teacher and the students can treat language as an object and function as pedagogues and learners. But in the case of pragmatic meaning, they need to view the L2 as a tool for communicating and to function as communicators [1]. In effect, this involves two entirely different orientations to teaching and learning.

The opportunity to focus on pragmatic meaning is important for a number of reasons:

1. In the eyes of many theorists (e.g. Prabhu 1987; Long 1996) , only when learners are engaged in decoding and encoding messages in the context of actual acts of communication are the conditions created for acquisition to take place.
2. To develop true fluency in an L2, learners must have opportunities to create pragmatic meaning (DeKeyser, 1998).
3. Engaging learners in activities where they are focused on creating pragmatic meaning is intrinsically motivating.

In arguing the need for a focus on pragmatic meaning, theorists do so not just because they see this as a means of activating the linguistic resources that have been developed by other means, but because they see it as the principal means by which the linguistic resources themselves are created. This is the theoretical position that has informed many highly successful immersion education programmes around the world (see Johnson and Swain, 1997). However, in advocating this principle, I do not wish to suggest that instruction needs to be directed exclusively at providing learners with opportunities to create pragmatic meaning, only that, to be effective, instruction must include such opportunities and that, ideally, over an entire curriculum, they should be predominant.

***Principle 3: Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form.***

There is now a widespread acceptance that acquisition also requires that learners attend to form. Indeed, according to some theories of L2 acquisition, such attention is necessary for acquisition to take place. Schmidt (1994), for example, has argued that there is no learning without conscious attention to form [2].

Again, though, the term ‘focus on form’ is capable of more than one interpretation. First, it might refer to a general orientation to language as form. Schmidt (2001) dismisses this global attention hypothesis, arguing that learners need to attend to specific forms. Second, it might be taken to suggest that learners need to attend only to the graphic or phonetic instantiations of linguistic forms. However, theorists such as Schmidt and Long are insistent that focus on form refers to form-function mapping (i.e. the correlation between a particular form and the meaning(s) it realises in communication). Third, ‘focus on form’ might be assumed to refer to awareness of some underlying, abstract rule. Schmidt, however, is careful to argue that attention to form refers to the noticing of specific linguistic items, as they occur in the input to which learners are exposed, not to an awareness of grammatical rules.

Instruction can cater to a focus on form in a number of ways:

1. Through grammar lessons designed to teach specific grammatical features by means of input- or output processing. An inductive approach to grammar teaching is designed to encourage 'noticing' of pre-selected forms; a deductive approach seeks to establish an awareness of the grammatical rule.
2. Through focused tasks (i.e. tasks that require learners to comprehend and process specific grammatical structures in the input, and/or to produce the structures in the performance of the task).
3. By means of methodological options that induce attention to form in the context of performing a task. Two methodological options that have received considerable attention from researchers are (a) the provision of time for strategic and on-line planning (Yuan and Ellis, 2003; Foster and Skehan, 1996) and (b) corrective feedback (Lyster, 2004).

Instruction can seek to provide an intensive focus on pre-selected linguistic forms (as in a focus-on-forms approach or in a lesson built around a focused task) or it can offer incidental and extensive attention to form through corrective feedback in task-based lessons. There are pros and cons for both intensive and extensive grammar instruction. Some structures may not be mastered without the opportunity for repeated practice. Harley (1989), for example found that Anglophone learners of L2 French failed to acquire the distinction between the preterite and imparfait past tenses after hours of exposure (and presumably some corrective feedback) in an immersion programme, but were able to improve their accuracy in the use of these two tenses after intensive instruction. However, intensive instruction is time consuming (in Harley's study the targeted structures were taught over an 8 week period!) and thus there will be constraints on how many structures can be addressed. Extensive grammar instruction, on the other hand, affords the opportunity for large numbers of grammatical structures to be addressed. Also, more likely than not, many of the structures will be attended to repeatedly over a period of time. Further, because this kind of instruction involves a response to the errors each learner makes, it is individualized and affords the skilled teacher on-line opportunities for the kind of contextual analysis that Celce-Murcia (2002) recommends as a basis for grammar teaching. Ellis et al (2001) reported that extensive instruction occurred relatively frequently in communicative adult ESL lessons through both pre-emptive (i.e. teacher or student-initiated) and reactive (i.e. corrective feedback) attention to form. Loewen (2002) showed that learners who experienced such momentary form-focused episodes demonstrated subsequent learning of the forms addressed in both immediate and delayed tests. However, it is not possible to attend to those structures that learners do not attempt to use (i.e. extensive instruction cannot deal with avoidance). Also, of course, it does not provide the in-depth practice that some structures may require before they can be fully acquired. Arguably, then, instruction needs to be conceived of in terms of both approaches.

***Principle 4: Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge.***

Implicit knowledge is procedural, is held unconsciously and can only be verbalized if it is made explicit. It is accessed rapidly and easily and thus is available for use in rapid, fluent communication. In the view of most researchers, competence in an L2 is primarily a matter of implicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge 'is the declarative and often anomalous knowledge of the phonological, lexical, grammatical, pragmatic and socio-critical features of an L2 together with the metalanguage for labelling this knowledge' (Ellis, 2004). It is held consciously, is learnable and verbalizable and is typically accessed through controlled processing when learners experience some kind of linguistic difficulty in the use of the L2. A distinction needs to be drawn between explicit knowledge as analysed knowledge and as metalingual explanation. The former entails a conscious awareness of how a structural feature works while the latter consists of knowledge of grammatical metalanguage and the ability to understand explanations of rules.

Given that it is implicit knowledge that underlies the ability to communicate fluently and confidently in an L2, it is this type of knowledge that should be the ultimate goal of any instructional programme. How then can it be developed? There are conflicting theories regarding this. According to skill-building theory (DeKeyser, 1998), implicit knowledge arises out of explicit knowledge, when the latter is proceduralized through practice. In contrast, emergentist theories (Krashen, 1981; N. Ellis, 1998) see implicit knowledge as developing naturally out of meaning-focused communication, aided, perhaps, by some focus on form. Irrespective of these different theoretical positions, there is consensus that learners need the opportunity to participate in communicative activity to develop implicit knowledge. Thus, communicative tasks need to play a central role in instruction directed at implicit knowledge.

The value in teaching explicit knowledge of grammar has been and remains today one of the most controversial issues in language pedagogy. In order to make sense of the different positions relating to the teaching of explicit knowledge, it is necessary to consider two separate questions:

1. Is explicit knowledge of any value in and of itself?
2. Is explicit knowledge of value in facilitating the development of implicit knowledge?

Explicit knowledge is arguably only of value if it can be shown that learners are able to utilize this type of knowledge in actual performance. Again, there is controversy. One position is that this is very limited. Krashen (1982) argues that learners can only use explicit knowledge when they 'monitor' and that this requires that they are focused on form (as opposed to meaning) and have sufficient time to access the knowledge. Other positions are possible. It can be argued that explicit knowledge is used in both the process of formulating messages as well as in monitoring and that many learners are adroit in accessing their explicit memories for these purposes, especially if the rules are, to a degree, automatized. However, this does require time. Yuan and Ellis (2003) showed that learners' grammatical accuracy improved significantly if they had time for 'on-line planning' while performing a narrative task, a result most readily explained in terms of their accessing explicit knowledge.

Irrespective of whether explicit knowledge has any value in and of itself, it may assist language development by facilitating the development of implicit knowledge. This involves a consideration of what has become known as the **interface hypothesis**, which addresses whether explicit knowledge plays a role in L2 acquisition. Three positions can be identified. According to the non-interface position (Krashen, 1981), explicit and implicit knowledge are entirely distinct with the result that explicit knowledge cannot be converted into implicit knowledge. This position is supported by research that suggests that explicit and implicit memories are neurologically separate (Paradis, 1994). The interface position argues the exact opposite. Drawing on skill-learning theory (DeKeyser, 1998), it argues that explicit knowledge becomes implicit knowledge if learners have the opportunity for plentiful communicative practice. The weak interface position (Ellis, 1993) claims that explicit knowledge primes a number of key acquisitional processes, in particular ‘noticing’ and ‘noticing the gap’ (Schmidt, 1994). That is, explicit knowledge of a grammatical structure makes it more likely learners will attend to the structure in the input and carry out the cognitive comparison between what they observe in the input and their own output. These positions continue to be argued at a theoretical level.

The three positions support very different approaches to language teaching. The non-interface position leads to a ‘zero grammar’ approach, i.e. one that prioritizes meaning-centred approaches such as task-based teaching. The interface position supports PPP – the idea that a grammatical structure should be first presented explicitly and then practised until it is fully proceduralized. The weak interface position has been used to provide a basis for consciousness-raising tasks (Ellis, 1991) that require learners to derive their own explicit grammar rules from data they are provided with.

This principle, then, asserts that instruction needs to be directed at developing both implicit and explicit knowledge, giving priority to the former. However, teachers should not assume that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge, as the extent to which this is possible remains controversial.

***Principle 5: Instruction needs to take into account the learner’s ‘built-in syllabus’.***

Early research into naturalistic L2 acquisition showed that learners follow a ‘natural’ order and sequence of acquisition (i.e. they master different grammatical structures in a relatively fixed and universal order and they pass through a sequence of stages of acquisition on route to mastering each grammatical structure). This led researchers like Corder (1967) to suggest that learners had their own ‘built-in syllabus’ for learning grammar as implicit knowledge. Krashen (1981) famously argued that grammar instruction played no role in the development of implicit knowledge (what he called ‘acquisition’), a view based on the conviction that learners (including classroom learners) would automatically proceed along their built-in syllabus as long as they had access to comprehensible input and were sufficiently motivated. Grammar instruction could contribute only to explicit knowledge (‘learning’).

There followed a number of empirical studies designed to (1) compare the order of acquisition of instructed and naturalistic learners (e.g. Pica, 1983), (2) compare the success of instructed and naturalistic learners (Long, 1983) and (3) examine whether attempts to teach specific grammatical structures resulted in their acquisition (Ellis, 1984). These studies showed that, by and large, the order and sequence of acquisition

was the same for instructed and naturalistic learners, a finding supported by later research (e.g. Ellis, 1989; Pienemann, 1989); that instructed learners generally achieved higher levels of grammatical competence than naturalistic learners and that instruction was no guarantee that learners would acquire what they had been taught. This led to the conclusion that it was beneficial to teach grammar, but that it was necessary to ensure it was taught in a way that was compatible with the natural processes of acquisition.

How, then, can instruction take account of the learner's built-in syllabus? There are a number of possibilities:

1. Adopt a zero grammar approach, as proposed by Krashen. That is, employ a task-based approach that makes no attempt to predetermine the linguistic content of a lesson.
2. Ensure that learners are developmentally ready to acquire a specific target feature. However, this is probably impractical as teachers have no easy way of determining where individual students have reached and it would necessitate a highly individualized approach to cater for differences in developmental level among the students. Also, as we noted earlier, such fine-tuning may not be necessary. While instruction in a target feature may not enable learners to 'beat' the built-in syllabus, it may serve to push them along it as long as the target structure is not too far ahead of their developmental stage.
3. Focus the instruction on explicit rather than implicit knowledge as explicit knowledge is not subject to the same developmental constraints as implicit knowledge. While it is probably true that some declarative facts about language are easier to master than others, this is likely to reflect their cognitive rather than their developmental complexity, which can more easily be taken into account in deciding the order of instruction. Traditional structural syllabuses, in fact, are graded on the basis of cognitive complexity [3].

***Principle 6: Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input.***

Language learning, whether it occurs in a naturalistic or an instructed context, is a slow and laborious process. Children acquiring their L1 take between two and five years to achieve full grammatical competence, during which time they are exposed to massive amounts of input. Ellis and Wells (1980) demonstrated that a substantial portion of the variance in speed of acquisition of children can be accounted for by the amount and the quality of input they receive. The same is undoubtedly true of L2 acquisition. If learners do not receive exposure to the target language they cannot acquire it. In general, the more exposure they receive, the more and the faster they will learn. Krashen (1981; 1994) has adopted a very strong position on the importance of input. He points to studies that have shown that length of residence in the country where the language is spoken is related to language proficiency and other studies that have found positive correlations between the amount of reading reported and proficiency/ literacy. For Krashen, however, the input must be made 'comprehensible' either by modifying it or by means of contextual props. Researchers may disagree with Krashen's claim that comprehensible input (together with motivation) is all that is required for successful acquisition, arguing that learner output is also important (see Principle 7 below) but they agree about the

importance of input for developing the highly connected implicit knowledge that is needed to become an effective communicator in the L2.

How can teachers ensure their students have access to extensive input? In a 'second' language teaching context, learners can be expected to gain access to plentiful input outside the classroom, although, as Tanaka (2004) has shown in a study of adult Japanese students learning English in Auckland, not all such learners are successful in achieving this. In a 'foreign' language teaching context (as when French or Japanese is taught in schools in the United Kingdom or United States), there are far fewer opportunities for extensive input. To ensure adequate access, teachers need to:

1. Maximise use of the L2 inside the classroom. Ideally, this means that the L2 needs to become the medium as well as the object of instruction. A study by Kim (forthcoming) revealed that foreign language teachers of French, German, Japanese and Korean in Auckland secondary schools varied enormously in the extent to which they employed the L2 in the classroom (i.e. between 88 and 22 percent of the total input).
2. Create opportunities for students to receive input outside the classroom. This can be achieved most easily by providing extensive reading programmes based on carefully selected graded readers, suited to the level of the students, as recommended by Krashen (1989). Elley (1991) reviewed studies that showed that L2 learners can benefit from both reading and from being read to. Also, ideally, if more resources are available, schools need to establish self-access centres which students can use outside class time. Successful FL learners seek out opportunities to experience the language outside class time. Many students are unlikely to make the effort unless teachers (a) make resources available and (b) provide learner-training in how to make effective use of the resources.

It can be claimed with confidence that, if the only input students receive is in the context of a limited number of weekly lessons based on some course book, they are unlikely to achieve high levels of L2 proficiency.

***Principle 7: Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output.***

Contrary to Krashen's insistence that acquisition is dependent entirely on comprehensible input, most researchers now acknowledge that learner output also plays a part. Skehan (1998) drawing on Swain (1995) summarises the contributions that output can make:

1. Production serves to generate better input through the feedback that learners' efforts at production elicit;
2. it forces syntactic processing (i.e. obliges learners to pay attention to grammar);
3. it allows learners to test out hypotheses about the target language grammar;
4. it helps to automatize existing knowledge;
5. it provides opportunities for learners to develop discourse skills, for example by producing 'long turns';



6. it is important for helping learners to develop a 'personal voice' by steering conversation on to topics they are interested in contributing to.

Ellis (2003) adds one other contribution of output:

7. it provides the learner with 'auto-input' (i.e. learners can attend to the 'input' provided by their own productions).

The importance of creating opportunities for output, including what Swain (1985) has called pushed output (i.e. output where the learner is stretched to express messages clearly and explicitly), constitutes one of the main reasons for incorporating tasks into a language programme. Controlled practice activities typically result in output that is limited in terms of length and complexity. They do not afford students opportunities for the kind of sustained output that theorists argue is necessary for interlanguage development. Research (e.g. Allen et al, 1990) has shown that extended talk of a clause or more in a classroom context is more likely to occur when students initiate interactions in the classroom and when they have to find their own words. This is best achieved by asking learners to perform oral and written tasks.

***Principle 8: The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency.***

While it is useful to consider the relative contributions of input and output to acquisition, it is also important to acknowledge that both co-occur in oral interaction and that both computational and sociocultural theories of L2 acquisition have viewed social interaction as the matrix in which acquisition takes place. As Hatch (1978b) famously put it 'one learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of the interaction syntactic structures are developed' (p. 404). Thus, interaction is not just a means of automatizing existing linguistic resources but also of creating new resources. According to the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), interaction fosters acquisition when a communication problem arises and learners are engaged in negotiating for meaning. The interactional modifications arising help to make input comprehensible, provide corrective feedback, and push learners to modify their own output in uptake. According to the sociocultural theory of mind, interaction serves as a form of mediation, enabling learners to construct new forms and perform new functions collaboratively (Lantolf, 2000). According to this view, learning is first evident on the social plane and only later on the psychological plane. In both theories, while social interaction may not be viewed as necessary for acquisition, it is viewed as a primary source of learning.

What then are the characteristics of interaction that are deemed important for acquisition? In general terms, opportunities for negotiating meaning and plenty of scaffolding are needed. Johnson (1995) identifies four key requirements for interaction to create an acquisition-rich classroom:

1. Creating contexts of language use where students have a reason to attend to language
2. Providing opportunities for learners to use the language to express their own personal meanings

3. Helping students to participate in language-related activities that are beyond their current level of proficiency
4. Offering a full range of contexts that cater for a 'full performance' in the language.

Johnson suggests that these are more likely to occur when the academic task structure (i.e. how the subject matter is sequenced in a lesson) and the social participation structure (i.e. how the allocation of interactional rights and obligations shapes the discourse) are less rigid. Once again, this is more likely to be provided through 'tasks' than through activities. Ellis (1999) suggests that a key to ensuring interaction beneficial to acquisition is giving control of the discourse topic to the students. This, of course, is not easily achieved, given that teachers have a duty to ensure that classroom discourse is orderly, which, in turn, is most easily achieved by taking control of the discourse topic by means of IRF (teacher initiate - student respond - teacher feedback) exchanges. Thus creating the right kind of interaction for acquisition constitutes a major challenge for teachers. One solution is to incorporate small group work into a lesson. When students interact amongst themselves, acquisition-rich discourse is more likely to ensue. However, there are a number of dangers in group work which may militate against this (e.g. excessive use of the L1 in monolingual groups).

***Principle 9: Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners.***

While there are identifiable universal aspects of L2 acquisition, there is also considerable variability in the rate of learning and in the ultimate level of achievement. In particular, learning will be more successful when:

1. The instruction is matched to students' particular aptitude for learning.
2. The students are motivated.

It is probably beyond the abilities of most teachers to design lessons involving the kind of matching instruction employed in Wesche's (1981) study, which used language aptitudes tests to identify different learning styles and then sought to match the kind of instruction provided to the learners' preferred approach to learning. However, teachers can cater to variation in the nature of their students' aptitude by adopting a flexible teaching approach involving a variety of learning activities. They can also make use of simple learner-training materials (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, 1989) designed to make students more aware of their own approaches to learning and to develop awareness of alternative approaches. Good language learner studies (e.g. Naiman et al, 1978) suggest that successful language learning requires a flexible approach to learning. Thus, increasing the range of learning strategies at learners' disposal is one way in which teachers can help them to learn. Such strategy training needs to foster an understanding that language learning requires both an experiential and an analytical approach and to demonstrate the kinds of strategies related to both approaches. School-based students often tend to adopt an analytical approach to learning (even if this does not accord with their natural aptitude) as this is the kind of approach generally fostered in schools (Sternberg 2002). They may have greater difficulty in adopting the kind of experiential approach required

in task-based language teaching. Some learner-training, therefore, may be essential if learners are to perform tasks effectively [4].

Dornyei's research has shown the kinds of teaching strategies that teachers can employ to develop and maintain their students' intrinsic motivation. Dornyei (2001) also makes the obvious point that 'the best motivational intervention is simply to improve the quality of our teaching' (p. 26). He points in particular to the need for 'instructional clarity' and refers to Wlodkowski's (1986) checklist for achieving this. This includes such obvious recipes as 'explain things simply' and 'teach at a pace that is not too fast and not too slow'. Teachers also need to accept that it is their responsibility to ensure that their students are motivated and stay motivated and not bewail the fact that students do not bring any motivation to learn the L2 to the classroom. While it is probably true that teachers can do little to influence students' extrinsic motivation, there is a lot they can do to enhance their intrinsic motivation.

***Principle 10: In assessing learners' L2 proficiency, it is important to examine free as well as controlled production***

Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis of studies investigating form-focussed instruction demonstrated that the extent of the effectiveness of instruction is contingent on the way in which it is measured. They distinguished four types of measurement:

1. metalinguistic judgement (e.g. a grammaticality judgment test)
2. selected response (e.g. multiple choice)
3. constrained constructed response (e.g. gap filling activities)
4. free constructed response (e.g. a communicative task).

They found that the magnitude of effect was greatest in the case of (2) and (3) and least in (4). Yet, arguably, it is (4) that constitutes the best measure of learners' L2 proficiency, as it is this that corresponds most closely to the kind of language use found outside the classroom. The ability to get a multiple choice question right amounts to very little if the student is unable to use the target feature in actual communication.

Free constructed responses are best elicited by means of tasks. The performance elicited by means of tasks can be assessed in three ways (Ellis, 2003); (1) a direct assessment of task outcomes, (2) discourse analytic measures and (3) external ratings. (2) is not practical for busy classroom teachers as it requires transcribing speech and then painstakingly calculating such measures as number of error free clauses and clause complexity. (3) is practical but it requires considerable expertise to ensure that the ratings of learner performance are valid and reliable. (1) holds out the most promise. However, it is only possible with closed tasks (an i.e. task for which there is a single correct outcome). An example would be a Spot the Difference Task where learners are asked to interact in order to find a specified number of differences in two similar pictures. In this task, assessment would consist of establishing whether they were able to successfully identify the differences

### Conclusion

These general principles have been derived from my understanding of SLA. I have drawn on a variety of theoretical perspectives, although predominantly from what Lantolf (1996) refers to as the computational model of L2 learning. I am aware that this model has its limitations and is open to criticism, in particular that it is not socially sensitive because it fails to acknowledge the importance of social context and social relations in the language learning process (see Block (2003) for an extended critique along these lines). It would be clearly useful to attempt to formulate a set of principles based on the broader conceptualisation of SLA of the kind advocated by Block and others, but this was not my aim here. There will always be a need for a psycholinguistic account of how learners internalize new linguistic forms and how they restructure their linguistic knowledge in the process of acquisition. Language use is not language acquisition, only a means to it. To my mind, the computational model provides a solid foundation for developing a set of principles that articulate the relationship between language use and acquisition. It also constitutes a metaphor that teachers can easily relate to.

### Notes

1. It is also possible to teach pragmatic meaning as an 'object'. That is, specific pragmatic meanings (e.g. requesting or apologizing) can be identified and instructional materials developed to teach learners the linguistic means for performing these strategies. See Kasper and Rose (2002) for examples of studies that have investigated the effectiveness of this approach. Such an approach constitutes a version of 'focus on forms', discussed on p. xx. Here, however, I wish to emphasise the need to create materials that allow students to create their own pragmatic meanings through communication.
2. The extent to which attention to form is necessary for learning remains controversial however. A number of researchers (e.g. Williams, forthcoming) have provided evidence to demonstrate that some learning takes place without awareness. Schmidt (2001) has modified his position somewhat to allow for the possibility of non-conscious registration of linguistic form, arguing only that 'more attention results in more learning' (p. 30).
3. A good example of where 'cognitive complexity' and 'developmental complexity' can be distinguished is subject-verb agreement in English. This is typically introduced very early in structural courses, but it is invariably only mastered at a very advanced stage of development.
4. Foster (1998) reports that the adult ESL learners she investigated engaged in very little negotiation of meaning when performing tasks because they failed to take them seriously. They viewed them as 'games' and eschewed negotiation because it would detract from the 'fun'.

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## **Extensive Reading Reports – Different Intelligences, Different Levels of Processing**

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### **Introduction:**

Extensive Reading (ER) is an important aspect of any English as a Foreign/Second Language reading program. In this paper, I will consider a definition of ER and benefits of including it in a program. In the main part of the paper, I will explain four reporting forms that work with different intelligences and levels of processing.

While there are many variations in ways to implement an ER program, what they all have in common is that the learners read very large amounts of material in the target language.

Extensive Reading can be defined as:

Students reading a lot of easy, enjoyable books (Helgesen, 2005).

Each element of this definition includes elements which contrast ER with skills-based methodologies that focus on skimming, scanning, main idea identification and the like. The first point is that the students spend most of their time actually reading, not answering comprehension questions, writing reports or translating. They may do those things, but such tasks are subordinate to actually reading. The second element is that the students are reading a lot. Bamford and Day (2004) suggest that, although specific targets will vary, goals such as "a book a week or 50 pages a week" are realistic. This is in sharp contrast to traditional reading programs which had learners reading a single book over a term or a year and doing a detailed analysis of it. The easy aspect of the definition is important. Easy books build speed and reading fluency. Anderson (1999) suggests that 200 words per minute is a useful and realistic goal for second language readers. To achieve this target, the books need to be easy. Enjoyable is also a key part of ER. ER is much like the way people read for pleasure in their native languages. Enjoyable is, of course, a relative term – it can only be determined by the reader. For that reason, Day and Bamford (1998) suggest that it is best if the books are self-selected. There is no assumption that learners are all reading the same book. Indeed, it would be unusual and perhaps impossible to find a single title that all members of a class find interesting.

Different learners will prefer mysteries, love stories, biography and other forms of non-fiction, even comics. In the ER classroom, these genre preferences are respected. The final element of the definition is books. While any reading material can be used, graded readers which present stories with controlled vocabulary and, at times, limited grammar and information flow are often used.<sup>1</sup> These are books that can help learners become fluent, skilled readers.

In a review of ER research, Day and Bamford identify several benefits of ER including the following:

- Increased reading ability. This is unsurprising since that is the stated goal of ER.
- Increased affect and motivation. It should be noted that reading is one type of study that can actually be enjoyable as it is being done. Students are reading books they choose at a level they can enjoy. This pleasure orientation seems to impact their overall feeling about learning English.
- Improved vocabulary. Students need to meet vocabulary in context many times to acquire it. ER seems to be a good way to achieve this.
- Improved listening, speaking and spelling abilities. Interestingly, even if listening and speaking are not the goals of the class, ER seems to support these skills, possibly because of the increased exposure to English vocabulary and discourse.
- Facilitation of acquisition. Most current theories of second language acquisition recognize the roles of language input and intake. ER provides these necessities.

Typically, much of the student reading in ER happens largely outside the classroom. With students required to read large amounts of English – typically several books a month rather than one book a term or a year – there simply is not enough class time for all that reading to happen during class time. (Helgesen 1997, Anderson, 2005). If the goal of ER is to develop a reading habit, it can not be limited to being a classroom activity. Also, teachers often choose to provide a balance of extensive and intensive reading activities (Waring, 2005). In such cases, class time is frequently used for skill building activities while ER is done outside of class.

Classroom management and grading requirements may require a way to keep track of what learners are reading. In some cases, this involves having learners keep a reading portfolio (Markovic, 2005) or, in a portfolio's simpler form, a reading notebook (Helgesen, 1997) to report on books they are reading.

The remainder of this paper is to present four written report models. The models intend to accomplish several goals:

- to allow students to report using several different sensory modalities (Jensen, 1995) and intelligence types (Gardner, 1993), thus insuring that, at times, everyone is working in the type(s) that they find most comfortable.
- to provide variety and avoid habituation (Howard 2000). That is, by giving learners a range of ways to report on the books, teachers can avoid the fatigue and boredom that comes with repeating the same task many times.
- to reach several levels of comprehension. Barrett (cited in Richards, 1990) suggests that comprehension can be considered on a the following continuum:

5. Appreciation (affective) – highest level of comprehension
4. Evaluative
3. Inference
2. Reorganization

### 1. Literal (lowest level of comprehension).

The forms provided here exercise comprehension across this range of levels. Four reading reaction report forms.

The following are the forms<sup>2</sup> students in my university use in their ER classes. They are introduced in the order given here. Each form is introduced two to three months after the previous one. Learners must use each type at least once. After that, they are free to use whichever previously introduced form they like. Reports are glued into a student reading portfolio notebook. The portfolios are collected weekly and read by the teacher who stamps "OK" on the page and writes an occasional comment or question.

The "student voice" comments following each form are taken from anonymous questionnaires my students submitted. On the questionnaire, they rated each form for interest and wrote comments about each. Comments were accepted in either English or their native language.

#### "Summary/reaction" form

This is the first form the learners meet. It is the most traditional, asking them simply to summarize what happened in the story and give their opinion. It deals with what Gardner (1993) calls "linguistic intelligence." They are reacting to language and using language to do so. Since they are reporting what happened in the story, they are processing primarily on a literal level. Asking for their opinions about the story is an attempt to encourage them to incorporate their feelings (intrapersonal intelligence) and process at a level of evaluation or appreciation.

<b>Reading for pleasure</b>	
<b>Reaction Report</b>	Date _____
Your name: _____	
Book's title _____	
Type (circle): NON-FICTION: <b>cu</b> - culture <b>hs</b> - history <b>bio</b> - biography <b>se</b> - science <b>nf</b> - other non-fiction: _____	
FICTION: <b>hm</b> - humor <b>my</b> - mystery <b>lv</b> - love <b>ad</b> - adventure <b>sf</b> - science fiction <b>of</b> - other fiction: _____	
Publishers (circle): <b>B</b> - Black Cat <b>C</b> - Cambridge <b>H</b> - Heinemann <b>L</b> - Longman <b>M</b> - Macmillan <b>O</b> - Oxford <b>P</b> - Penguin <b>F</b> - Fennon <b>PF</b> - Perfection Form <b>HB</b> - Harcourt <b>S</b> - Scholastic Other: _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Movie tie-in? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Seen it? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
Level: _____	Pages _____ × _____ = <input type="checkbox"/> Weighted pages <input type="checkbox"/>
	real value (lev. 1 = 0.5, lev. 2 = 0.75, lev. 3 = 1.0, levels 4-6 = 1.25)
<b>Reaction Report:</b> (Include: • what the book was about • what you thought of it)	
<p>&lt; <b>Write quickly.</b>  <u>10 minutes or less.</u>            Don't waste time erasing.            It is OK to <del>cross out</del>.</p>	
<p>.....</p>	
<b>Evaluation:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Good.</b> I'd recommend this book to a friend.
Check (✓) one	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Average.</b> It was just so-so.
	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Poor.</b> This book was not interesting.

Figure one: Summary / opinion form

Student voices:

- I like this because it fits any type of story.
- This type is good because I can write any kind of feelings.
- This is easy to write.

Teacher’s reaction.

• The fact that this is the most standard school task-type included in the forms may be why the learners find it easy to do. Since the idea of ER and of reading English for pleasure is new to most learners, it is probably useful to start with a fairly simple task.

“Draw a picture” form

Two months after starting the ER program, students get this form. Note that they are asked to draw a picture from their imaginations, not copy one from the book. This reporting method is an attempt to get them to use “bodily-kinesthetic” intelligence. At a minimum, learners have to reorganize information – transfer the words into a mental, then a drawn image. In practice, their pictures often reflect emotion more typical of an evaluative or appreciative response.

**Reading for pleasure Draw a picture** Date \_\_\_\_\_

Book's title \_\_\_\_\_ Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Type (circle): **NON-FICTION:** **cu** - culture **hs** - history **bio** - biography  
**se** - science **nf** - other non-fiction: \_\_\_\_\_


**FICTION:** **hm** - humor **my** - mystery **lv** - love **ad** - adventure  
**sf** - science fiction **of** - other fiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Publishers (circle): **B** - Black Cat **C** - Cambridge **H** - Heinemann  
**L** - Longman **M** - Macmillan **O** - Oxford **P** - Penguin **F** - Ferron  
**PF** - Perfection Form **HB** - Harcourt **S** - Scholastic Other: \_\_\_\_\_

yes  no  Movie tie-in?  yes  no Seen it?  yes  no

Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Pages \_\_\_\_\_ × \_\_\_\_\_ = Weighted pages \_\_\_\_\_  
real value (lev. 1= 0.5, lev. 2=0.75, lev. 3 = 1.0, levels 4-6 = 1.25)

**1. Draw a picture of a scene from the story.**  
 Don't copy a picture. Draw one from your imagination.



**2. Explain the picture**  
 What is happening? What happened before this picture? What happened next?

**3. Your opinion.** What did you think of the book?

Evaluation: Check(✓) one  Good ☺  Average ☺  Poor ☹

Figure two: “Draw a picture” form

Student voices:

- I used this many times. This type is good for thinking and imagining.
- I can't draw pictures well but I like this type.
- It was useful when I didn't (know the words to) explain the story.
- I like this because sometimes I want to change forms.

#### Teacher's reaction.

• The comment "I can't draw well" was frequent. It caused some learners to dislike this form. Others, like the one who commented here, weren't satisfied with their drawings but still like the form.

• The student who commented that drawing a picture was useful when she didn't know a word was touching on the fact that reading is a receptive skill. We can always understand more language than we can produce so the drawing task works well here as a compensation strategy.

• The comment about wanting to change forms deals with habituation. When teachers and students follow the same routine too rigidly, boredom and disinterest can set in. Using a different form can combat this.

#### "Your own questions" form

Learners using this form are asked to preview the book by looking at the title and cover illustration and to read the blurb on the back of the book. They then look through the book and find three illustrations, ideally one near the beginning, one in the middle and one toward the end. They write a question about each picture – something they actually want to know. This appeals to an analytic "logical-mathematical" type of intelligence and requires inferencing and speculation. It also gets student to "think ahead." That is, they preview the book and think about what may be happening. This is similar to what we do in our first language when reading something like a magazine where we often look ahead. Also, when we read in our first language, we normally know why we are reading – for pleasure, to find out certain information, and so on. Writing their own questions allows learners to set their own tasks. They decide what they want to find out.

Of course, this task requires books with pictures. While not all ER graded readers are illustrated, most are so this requirement is not usually a problem.



went on to point out incidents of sadness before the princess' heartbreaking fatal accident. Then, in the parallel panel, she wrote about her own life: "I know tragedy, too. Last year, my father died from cancer." She went on to explain and draw comparisons.

Reading for pleasure The story and you Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Book's title \_\_\_\_\_ Your name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Type (circle): NON-FICTION: **cu** - culture **hs** - history **bio** - biography  
                                   **se** - science **nf** - other non-fiction: \_\_\_\_\_  
 FICTION: **hm** - humor **my** - mystery **lv** - love **ad** - adventure  
                                   **sf** - science fiction **of** - other fiction: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Publishers (circle): **B** - Black Cat    **C** - Cambridge    **H** - Heinemann  
                           **L** - Longman **M** - Macmillan **O** - Oxford    **P** - Penguin **F** - Ferron  
                           **PF** - Perfection Form    **HB** - Harcourt    **S** - Scholastic Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 yes  no     Movie tie-in?  yes  no    Seen it?  yes  no  
 Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Pages \_\_\_\_\_ x \_\_\_\_\_ = Weighted pages \_\_\_\_\_  
                           real                   value (lev. 1 = 0.5, lev. 2 = 0.75,  
   lev. 3 = 1.0, levels 4-6 = 1.25)  
 1. Think about the story. What happened?  
 What was the same as your life? What is different?  
 The story: \_\_\_\_\_ My life: \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. Reaction Report: Your opinion. What did you think of the book? Why?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Evaluation: Check (✓) one  Good 😊  Average 😐  Poor ☹️

Figure four: "The story and you" form  
 Student voices:

- I can compare my life to the hero.
- This is good because I think about my life again. I feel it's interesting.
- It's useful but I think it's hard to find a book (with) which we can compare my life and the story.
- I think the "kind of book" is important.
- This is good for (books about) the history of the person (biography).
- This is not good for mysteries.

Teacher's reaction.

- Several students commented that this form is easiest with biographies. Of course, it is possible to compare nearly any kind of book to one's own life by comparing personalities or experiences but biographies tend to be less abstract than some other books so the comparisons are easier.

In this paper, I have attempted to make a case for Extensive Reading in the EFL/ESL classroom and present a series of forms which allow learners to report on their own reading in ways that fit a variety of intelligences and levels of understanding. ER can be a useful, powerful tool for our students.

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### Notes:

1. For information on various graded readers series, see <http://www.extensivereading.net/er/materials.html>  
For a somewhat impressionistic description of the the most popular series, see [http://eltnews.com/features/thinktank/023\\_mh.shtml](http://eltnews.com/features/thinktank/023_mh.shtml)
2. These forms are available as downloadable jpgs on the Internet <http://www.extensivereading.net/er/marcreports.html>
3. For a critique of literal comprehension questions and more information on Barrett's taxonomy of comprehension, see <http://www.mgu.ac.jp/~ic/helgesen/marc.article1.htm>



## Internet resources

[www.extensivereading.net](http://www.extensivereading.net) - a resources site for teachers

<http://www.ials.ed.ac.uk/eper.html> - The Edinburgh Project for Extensive Reading

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ExtensiveReading/> - a discussion list for teachers interested in ER

[www.erfoundation.org](http://www.erfoundation.org) - The Extensive Reading Foundations, an independent, non-profit organization which promotes ER. The foundation awards the “Language Learner Literature” awards to the best graded readers each year.

## **Toward a Critical Notion of Appropriation of English as an International Language**

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### **Biography:**

Dr. Phan Le Ha has a BA (Arts) in English, from Vietnam National University, Hanoi BA (Social Sciences) in International Studies, from Vietnam National University, Hanoi MA (TESOL) from Monash University, Australia PhD from Monash University, Australia

Phan Le Ha has been working as a university lecturer and researcher in Vietnam and Australia. She is currently the Editorial Assistant of the Australian Journal of Education. She has also taught in BA (Arts) and MA (TESOL) courses at Monash University. Her research interests are the relationships between language, culture and identity; postcolonial Englishes; Critical Discourse Analysis; and English teacher education.

She has given presentations at international conferences, and published in international journals, such as *ELT Journal*, *Australian Journal of Education*, and *Asian EFL Journal*.

### **Foreword**

Undoubtedly, English has gained itself the status of a world language, an international language, or a lingua franca in almost all settings (Crystal, 1997; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2003; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; McKay, 2003; Llorca, 2004). There are a number of ways to view EIL. Widdowson (1998, pp. 399-400) suggests that EIL can be seen as “a kind of composite lingua franca which is free of any specific allegiance to any primary variety of the [English] language.” EIL is also used interchangeably with other terms, such as English as a lingua franca, English as a global language, English as a world language, and English as a medium of intercultural communication (cf Seidlhofer, 2003, p.9). Seidlhofer uses the term ‘International English’ rather than the short term EIL, arguing that the former is “more precise because it highlights the international use of English rather than suggesting, wrongly, that there is one clearly distinguishable, unitary variety called ‘International English’” (p.8). This paper takes Seidlhofer’s proposition of ‘International English’.

Although users of English, to various extents, have been able to appropriate the language for their own purposes (Canagarajah, 1999; Hashimoto, 2000; Phan Le Ha, 2004), this paper argues that when the native speaker norms are in contact with the norms of other speakers of English, it is often the case that the former are used to make judgements against the latter. Despite its international status, English in different forms of uses is still used to exclude many of its users, to construct an inferior Other. As such, it celebrates globalisation yet limits integration, and strengthens the power of certain dominant forms of English. As long as these limitations of EIL are not acknowledged and remain unresolved, its users still face discrimination and unfair judgements.

Together with acknowledging the international status of English, this paper aims to re-examine the social, cultural and political aspects of this status so as to obtain an insight into how English is beneficial to most users yet at the same time a “killer language” and a “tyrannosaurus rex” (Pakir, 1991; Swales, 1997; cited in Llorca, 2004, p. 314). Afterwards, the paper will propose the author’s critical notion of EIL pedagogy.

It is important to note that although I draw on postcolonial theory and use many of their terms, such as Self, Other, Inner Circle, Centre/centre and Periphery/periphery, I am also aware, like many other authors such as McKay (2003), of the limitations of these terms.

### **Centre Englishes versus other Englishes**

This section examines in what way EIL is still problematic and can still be used to discriminate against many of its users. Discussions are drawn on from the literature about how the Englishes in the Centre are still treated as ‘better’ and standard Englishes compared to other Englishes.

To begin with, although many authors have argued for the co-existence of a family of ‘Englishes’ (Kachru, 1986; Brutt-Griffler, 2002) given the widespread use of English and the way people have adapted it for their own uses, this family has not co-existed with equality yet. The notion of a family suggests a sense of support, love and care among its members. However, the Englishes in this family seem to enjoy a fiercely hierarchical relation, in which some members play the dominant role trying to ‘support’ and at the same time ‘bullying’ their weaker yet vulnerable ‘sisters’ and ‘brothers’. Although there are varieties of English, such as Singaporean English, Indian English, African English, Australian-English, American-English, and British-English, it is arguable that international norms and rules of the language are not set by all these Englishes, nor even negotiated among them. Only the so-called ‘native’ speakers of English have a voice in the matter (Pham Hoa Hiep, 2001). We can see examples of this in the norms of English academic writing (Farrell, 1997a, b; Phan Le Ha, 2001), or in the debate of cross-cultural issues (Kaplan, 1966; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991, 1997; Liddicoat, 1997; Phan Le Ha, 2001; Phan Le Ha & Viete, 2002), or in the case of many students who have been using English since they started schooling in their countries (some African and Asian ones) but still have to take TOEFL or IELTS tests for their entrance into universities in the US and UK.

When looking at the English languages, McArthur (1998) examines the forms of Englishes, linguistic insecurities and other related issues. His analysis suggests that Standard English has its own triumphant and decisive status, no matter how many Englishes have come into being. As one example, in the US Black English, also known as Afro-American English, is institutionally considered inferior with low quality, and thus those who speak it are labelled low level achievers (p.197).

Standard English is what Pham Hoa Hiep (2001) criticises. He argues that it is native speakers who set the norms for what is called Standard English. He clarifies his argument by drawing on definitions of ‘Standard English’ made by a number of authors. For example, Strevens says that Standard English is “a particular dialect of English, being the only non-localised dialect, of global currency without significant variation, universally accepted as the appropriate educational target in teaching English, which may

be spoken with an unrestricted choice of accent" (cited in Pham Hoa Hiep, 2001, p.5). Pham Hoa Hiep also refers to Quirk's discussion of Standard English, which Pham expresses in his own words as "the natural language that educated English native speakers use" (p.5). Thus, according to Pham, it cannot be assumed that English belongs to no particular culture, or is "culture-free" (p.4). Indeed, he argues that the use of English does play an important part in both one's desire to communicate with the world and one's will to preserve one's identity. Put differently, English does affect identity formation, and Pham urges EFL teachers to assist students in achieving these two aims.

Native speakers of English, apart from the pride of owning the language of international communication, may see their language at risk of being 'corrupted' or 'polluted', since it has been modified and promoted everywhere without any control (Marzui, 1975a; Crystal, 1988, cited in Pennycook, 1994). In order to oppose this trend, native speakers of English have found a way to protect Standard English by calling "anything that isn't 'standard' ... 'dialect' if lucky and slang if not" (McArthur, 1998, p.200). For example, McArthur shows that the issue of Standard English versus Afro-American English is a matter in educational agendas in the city of Oakland in California, USA. The English Afro-Americans speak is perceived by educators as "a distinct language spoken by the descendants of slaves" (Woo & Curtius, 1996, cited in McArthur, 1998, p.198).

Let me now take a specific look at the forum on EIL initiated and sustained by Widdowson (1997) to examine in more depth what aspects of EIL are still controversial. Widdowson (1997), partly in response to authors such as Phillipson (1992), takes a provocative position in the discussion concerning 'EIL, ESL, EFL: global issues and local interests' raised in *World Englishes Journal*. Since Widdowson "wanted to raise a number of questions for discussion" and thus made his paper "provocative" to invite debates (p.135), I would like to respond to several points he raises.

Firstly, Widdowson makes an analogy between Englishes and Latin languages, assuming that the evolution of Englishes, such as "Ghanaian and Nigerian [developing] out of English", parallels the development of "French and Italian from Latin" (p.142). Although I understand that Widdowson wants to argue for the independent status of all languages that develop out of English, I still find this assertion problematic. It obviously ignores the fact that French and Italian are separate and independent from Latin, a dead language that was mainly confined to Europe. This is far different from the story of Ghanaian and Nigerian being dependent on English, the language of developing dominance and inherent hegemony. The names Widdowson uses, "Ghanaian and Nigerian", position these languages as other than English. They are not English, so there is only one English, and the question of whose English again comes implicitly onto the scene. I understand that Widdowson does not want his discussion to be viewed this way, but the politics associated with English deny his 'positive' assertion. Evidence suggests that within the English-speaking world, there is a dichotomy between the superior Self and the inferior Other, and the political aspect of English does play an important role in this dichotomy (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998). Thus the question turns to 'power': whose English is the standard? Whose norms are to be followed? At this point, the question is no longer as simple as 'French and Italian developing from Latin.' It becomes a site of struggle between the 'centre Englishes' and the peripheral ones. For example,

materials for English teaching and learning in the Periphery are mainly from the Centre (Phillipson, 1992). Moreover, testing systems, such as TOEFL and IELTS, developed by the Centre have been used universally to assess learners' competency of English. This suggests that the centre Englishes and their related pedagogies are generally used as international standards, while other Englishes are for local uses only.

This argument of the relationship between power and English has been challenged by Widdowson (1998) in his reply to authors, such as Brutt-Griffler (1998). He clearly states that he wants to argue for English as "a kind of composite lingua franca which is free of any specific allegiance to any primary variety of the language" (pp. 399-400) including the English from the Inner Circle. He strongly supports his view, asserting that it is because he is aware of the politics of English and its consequences that he attempts to urge English users to look at it as the language "used internationally across communities as a means of global communication" (p. 399), but not as the language owned by the Inner Circle. This implies that he wants to encourage others to see English as politics free. However, many authors have pointed out that English walks hand in hand with politics, and there is always some kind of politics underlying English and ELT (Auerbach, 1995; Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2004; Edge, 2003). Moreover, as long as there are norms and requirements set by the Inner Circle in cross-cultural communication (Farrell, 1997a, b; 1998) or paradigms of nativeness/non-nativeness still function (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999), Widdowson's position is weakened.

Secondly, in an attempt to soften the debate about Englishes, Widdowson (1997) suggests seeing EIL as a composite of registers, such as English for science and English for finance. Put differently, he argues that EIL "is English for specific purposes" (p.144). However, Brutt-Griffler (1998, p.382) points out contradictions and unreasonableness in his suggestion, arguing that "there are no free-standing registers." Thus, "the question inevitably poses itself: Registers of which language?" (p.382). Moreover, I find his use of 'register' unrealistic when he suggests taking ESP (English for Specific Purposes) away from the issues of "community and identity" and viewing it in terms of "communication and information" (p.143). Furthermore, as Widdowson states in his article, it is impossible to control language once it is used. It is thus clear that ESP cannot be taken as the exception.

Although Widdowson tries to avoid Quirk's (1987) view of "the importance of maintaining the standard language" (p. 143) by assuming that we can take a neutral view of English, he once again ignores what lies beneath ESP. Many authors have showed that English embodies political and cultural missions that have made it a non-neutral language (Phillipson, 1992; Brutt-Griffler, 1998; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2004). Also, I argue that EAP (English for Academic Purposes), a register, in cross-cultural settings acts as a harsh gatekeeper to keep many non-native speakers of English out of its game, as EAP norms are based on the Self's standards (Farrell, 1997a, b; Phan Le Ha, 2001, Johnston, 2003). Johnston (2003) examines the issue of testing/assessment and values in ELT, and he argues that testing is value-laden in many ways. For example, testing compares students to others, and testing in fact reflects the real world surrounding the student instead of being just about the content being tested. He claims that standardized tests, particularly TOEFL, do not consider any individual circumstances of candidates. In

other words, these tests are developed based on the Self's standards and ignore the cultural, social and learning realities of those who have to sit for these tests. So EAP obviously empowers the Self and at the same time prevents the Other from participating in many academic events. Thus, even though Widdowson tries to put 'the standard' aside, it cannot stay aside without causing trouble when it is problematic in its own right.

Regarding registers, I agree with Widdowson that many native speakers of English are incompetent in a number of English registers while many non-native speakers are highly knowledgeable in these registers. However, the point here is that the former, in many cases, are still the ones who have the power to imply to the latter that 'I don't like your English because it is not the English I use', and thus 'your English is not valued'. Examples of this can be found in Farrell (1998), Phan Le Ha (2000) and Kamler (2001). These authors explore how English academic writing is assessed in Australian schools and institutions and find out that examiners value a certain way of writing, the "Anglo" style, and if students fail to present their writing in this style, their writing is not acknowledged and valued. At this point, neither English nor ESP could be neutral, in contrast to Widdowson's suggestion.

Thus far it is clear that although English has achieved its international status and been globalised, that EIL is for all and for cross-cultural communication still has many limitations.

### **Englishes in the Periphery**

So far this paper has suggested that Centre Englishes have more power in terms of ownership. Now it is time to consider how beliefs about possession of English affect equality and justice within the Periphery itself. Periphery here includes both the Outer Circle and the Expanding Outer Circle.

In many Periphery countries, English is purposefully used to exclude people from power and social positions, and to create discrimination among people in their societies. Following are examples. India is a highly hierarchical society, where there are clear-cut borders among classes. According to Ramanathan (1999), Indian society is divided into an inner circle and an outer circle of power, and the classes that belong to the inner circle have more access to power and privilege. The middle class belongs to this inner circle. Ramanathan argues that the Indian middle class has used English as a tool to maintain its status and at the same time to lengthen its distance from particular groups of people in India. He finds that even in India, a country of the periphery, "an English-related inner-outer power dichotomy appears to exist" (p.212). This suggests that power and English adhere to each other in this country. In order to consolidate power, the Indian middle class has intentionally made English a gatekeeper excluding those of lower income and lower caste. Institutional and educational practices with the effective assistance of English go hand-in-hand to keep outer circle students "out of the more powerful circle" (p.218).

Phillipson (1992) argues how discrimination and power distance have been exercised through English in Africa. He observes that although English enjoys high status in many areas of Africa, sufficient access to it still belongs only to a small group of elites. Although both the elites and the masses see the advantage of English and its connection

to power and resources, English is still somehow a luxury property owned by the powerful. So English obviously accompanies inequality and injustice in many African countries.

The use of English - the language of power – in many African countries is responsible for silencing other African languages as well, as Phillipson (1992) puts it. "The colonial language [is] still ... used in high status activities, a dominant local language ... [is] ... used for less prestigious functions, and local languages [are] used for other purposes" (p.27). This practice suggests that English really belongs to high-status groups of people, and their achievements are more guaranteed because they have the most access to English. This also suggests the belief in the superiority of English over local African languages, and thus those who have most access to English are assumed to be superior.

Gamaroff (2000) indicates that in South Africa, within the domain of ELT, there arises a major issue which is the controversial distinction between English as L1 and L2. He states that "these notions [of L1 and L2] are so heavily value-laden that there is a danger of the distinction between these two notions being interpreted as a form of linguistic apartheid" (p.297). He cited Young (1988:8) who "advocates that the 'apartheid' labels 'L1' and 'L2' should be discarded because they imply that black 'natives' are not able to assimilate western language and culture" (cited in Gamaroff, 2000, p.297). It is noteworthy to cite Paikeday's (1985, p.76) views on this matter:

When theoretical linguists claim an innate facility for competence in a language on behalf of the native speaker ... it seems like a white South African's claim that he [or she] can walk into a railway station in Pretoria any day, purchase a first-class ticket, get into any first-class coach, occupy a window seat, and travel all the way to Cape Town without getting thrown out at the first stop, as though a black or a coloured could not do it. (cited in Gamaroff 2000, p.297)

Gamaroff observes that many other authors, in their support of the elimination of the apartheid label of L1 and L2, argue that "it is socially and racially discriminatory to compare levels of proficiency between L1 and L2 learners" (p. 297). Given the sociopolitical difficulties in South Africa, for these authors, this practice of ELT is inherently problematic. It suggests that this practice is power related and implicitly used to maintain the discriminatory nature already rooted in the society.

The role of English and its relation to power in other periphery countries, such as Vietnam and Japan, where English is learnt as a foreign language, also needs to be documented. Vietnam and Japan are selected because Vietnam is considered a developing country whereas Japan is a highly developed nation. The dominant status of English also varies in these two countries. While English is the most popular foreign language among several other ones to be taught in Vietnam, it is a must for all Japanese students in order to enter university. Moreover, English seems to have influenced Japan in a much deeper level, compared to Vietnam. For example, Japanese tend to believe that in order for them to communicate well in English and to be understood in English they have to have a concrete identity as Japanese (Kawai, 2003, Suzuki, 1999). Moreover, Japanese people's ideologies of English also reflect a deep level of influence of English in Japan (Kubota, 1998). This will be discussed on the part about Japan below.

It should be noted that Vietnam has witnessed the rise and fall of a number of dominant foreign languages in its own territory. Chinese, French, and Russian respectively had once enjoyed dominant foreign language status in Vietnam, but English has replaced Russian since the early 1990s, after the Vietnamese government introduced the open-door policy in 1986. The collapse of the Former Soviet Union after that contributed to the welcoming of English and the decline of Russian in Vietnam. English is introduced at almost all school levels and has been present in almost every corner of urbanised areas and has rapidly reached tourist attractions in remote areas. The early 1990s witnessed the explosive growth of the English language, resulting in “an official acknowledgement of the role and status of English” (Do Huy Tinh, 1999, p.2). The Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam (MOET) conducted its first survey of language needs in late 1993, contributing to the formation of “A National Strategy for Foreign Language Teaching and Learning throughout All Levels of Education” (MOET, 1994c). The status of foreign languages, especially English, then was “reconfirmed by an Order, signed by the Prime Minister (August 15, 1994), in which government officials are required to study foreign languages, usually English” (Do, 1999, p.2). Do (1999, p.2) strongly states that “in contemporary Vietnam, there has never been a stronger, clearer decision concerning foreign language education policy and planning made at the highest-level authority.”

Although English in Vietnam does not seem to have anything to do with social classes, it does act as a gatekeeping tool in the society, particularly with employment and educational opportunities. Almost all jobs require a certificate in English, and even work promotion now starts considering English proficiency a criterion (Nunan, 2003). The high status of English has thus resulted in those who do not have sufficient competency in English feeling excluded from positions which may lead to power.

The sudden replacement of Russian by English in Vietnam has caused the society to have negative attitudes toward Russian, and thus made teachers of Russian struggle for their living. Phan Le Ha and Song-Ae Han (2004) has shown that English and ELT have lent a hand in creating distance and even confrontation between teachers of different languages, particularly teachers of Russian and teachers of English in Vietnam. Teaching and learning English is no longer neutral or politics free.

Japan is a country highly regarded by the West (Pennycook, 1998). As an economic superpower, Japan does not suffer from cultural, economic and structural disadvantages of developing countries. However, it is Japan’s ideologies of English that are a matter of concern. As observed by Kubota (1998, p.295)

the dominance of English influences the Japanese language and people’s views of language, culture, race, ethnicity and identity which are affected by the world view of native English speakers, and ... teaching English creates cultural and linguistic stereotypes not only of English but also of Japanese people.

Thus, “through learning English, the Japanese have identified themselves with Westerners while regarding non-Western peoples as the Other” (p.299). This apparently has to do with whom has power, and hence supports Westernisation (which is often spelt out as internationalisation) while turning a blind eye to “global socio-linguistic perspectives” (p.302). Power does matter and English has been inexhaustibly made use of



by all parties to gain power. But within the game of power, English is not an equal property for all.

Together with creating inequalities inside a number of peripheral countries, English as an international language is also used by these countries to judge each other's level of development. I remember when a group of Malaysian tourists came to Vietnam in 1996 and they were astonished to find out that Vietnamese students could speak very good English (I was at university in Vietnam then). They commented "You're so intelligent. You can speak English so fluently. How come you can achieve that? We used to think in Vietnam few people could speak English or knew it, so before we came here we were afraid of facing a lot of problems." They, perhaps, subconsciously related fluency in English with "intelligence" and at the same time assumed that knowing English was more civilised, and thus superior.

After all, whether learning English for good and practical concerns or for other reasons, everyone or every country wants to gain power. If the Centre sets communication norms, such as whose English counts, for the Periphery, then peripheral countries judge each other based very much on how possession of English is connected to development, representation and recognition. Not only does English have sufficient power to be regarded as a measure of ability and mentality to communicate with native English speakers, it also plays a key role in facilitating a country's international integration. Because English is used in regional and international conferences and forums, even Japan is afraid they will be "under represented in the international community" if its leaders are not able to speak English "directly with their counterparts" (L'estrage, 2000, p.11).

From the above discussions of the ownership of English, it is clear that English is not yet a global/world property. No matter how much 'good' English has done in the world, its cultural, political and social aspects together with its continual adherence to imperialism have confirmed its guilt and intentional engagement in 'oppressing' speakers of other languages with the assistance of the ELT industry. However, I do not think the story stops here. English users may be better served by proactively taking ownership of its use and its teaching. English users, particularly non-native speakers of English, will then "be the main agents in the ways English is used, is maintained, and changes, and who will shape the ideologies and beliefs associated with [EIL]" (Seidlhofer, 2003, p.7).

### **A critical notion of appropriation of EIL**

Many authors have been investigating the tendency of English to become a world language, and suggesting the establishment of related critical literacy pedagogies (Canagarajah, 1999; Gee, 1999; Pennycook, 2001; McKay, 2003). Examples can be seen in their efforts to appreciate the role of speakers of other languages in spreading and transforming English into a world language (Modiano, 2001; Brutt-Griffler, 2002). Likewise, a critical approach to second language acquisition has been constructed to destabilise the L1 norms (Cook, 1999; Kramsch, 2000, 2001; McKay, 2003). Alternative teaching methods have been proposed to replace the problematic Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), such as the Context Approach (Bax, 2003). Also, some TESOL courses have been re-designed to make students from non-English-speaking backgrounds aware of how their images have been constructed through English and ELT,

and in what way their voices can be heard (for example, in the TESOL course for Masters students offered by the Faculty of Education, Monash University, with the subject Language, Society and Cultural Difference, students are exposed to postcolonial theories and have the chance to challenge the dichotomy of Self and Other).

Let me discuss one point raised by Widdowson (1997) to seek a solution for more 'ethical' English and ELT. I agree with Widdowson that "as the language [in this case, English] is used it cannot be kept under your control" (p.136). People do appropriate it. However, on this point, different views have been expressed. On the one hand, Lin et al., (2001) show that no matter how people appropriate it, the Other is still seen as second-class users of English. These authors suggest a quite fixed story about the Self and Other, in which the Other is always inferior, just because they are the Other speakers of English. The word 'Other' in TESOL already carries this dichotomy and implication. On the other hand, Canagarajah (1999) demonstrates that Sri Lankans have been able to appropriate English for their own purposes taking into account local cultural and political factors. He offers an approach that resists "linguistic imperialism in English teaching" as the title of his book suggests. Pennycook (2001, p.71) also supports Canagarajah's view, suggesting change and possibilities of "third spaces" or "third cultures" (*italics in the original*), notions that are discussed by Kramersch (1993).

Developing her views in relation to how users of English can appropriate English, Kramersch (2001) stresses the importance of how English language teachers can assist students in acquiring their own voices in using English to "secure a profit of distinction" (*italics in the original*) (Kramersch, 2001, p.16). She contends that language teachers' responsibility is

to help students not only become acceptable and listened to users of English by adopting the culturally sanctioned genres, styles, and rhetorical conventions of the English speaking world, but how to gain a profit of distinction by using English in ways that are unique to their multilingual and multicultural sensibilities (Kramersch, 2001, p.16).

The views expressed by Canagarajah (1999), Pennycook (2001) and Kramersch (2001) actually challenge and disrupt linguistic imperialism and the postcolonial dichotomy of Self and Other. However, they do not reject English. Instead, they support the use of English for one's own benefit and equality, but at the same time urge English users to work together to eliminate the discourses of colonialism active in current imperial forms. These views suggest a new and more sophisticated notion of 'appropriation', which consists of resistance and reconstitution.

Therefore, appropriation, as I would argue, necessitates the Other's awareness of resistance and conscious selection to reach reconstitution under one's own control. Hashimoto (2000) provides an example of how a country resists Western globalisation and English dominance. He argues that "the commitment of the Japanese government to internationalisation in education actually means 'Japanisation' of Japanese learners of English" (p.39). Indeed, the use of English plays an important part in both one's desire to communicate with the world and one's will to preserve one's identity (Kubota, 1998, Pham Hoa Hiep, 2001). It also influences one's perception of one's identity (Kramersch, 2001; Lin et al., 2001). Put differently, English contributes to identity formation, which

constitutes both dynamics and the sense of belonging. This notion of appropriation, I believe, would somehow facilitate English to serve global citizens and at the same time would not take their sense of belonging away. However, if only the Other takes up this notion of appropriation, part of the effort is still left unsupported. The Self should also adapt its notion of the ownership of English to this idea of appropriation for the sake of all. In the context of English and ELT, facilitating appropriation by learners of English is part of the job that world English language teachers and applied linguists need to fulfill. If this could be achieved, then the issue of power and the politics of language would become less pressing in the arena of English and ELT.

Before closing this paper, I would like to add one more point to McKay's (2003) appropriate EIL pedagogy. She agrees with Brutt-Griffler (2002) that the recent worldwide spread of English is mainly due to "macroacquisition", the term coined by Brutt-Griffler (2002), and thus this nature necessitates alternative pedagogy for EIL. McKay offers a number of features of EIL, such as many learners of English learn the language for specific purposes and use it in multilingual contexts. They also learn English to communicate their cultures and knowledge with others. She calls for a pedagogy which goes against assumptions commonly held in ELT, that the spread of English is because of linguistic imperialism, that the native speaker model is no longer valid for learning and teaching goals, and that the focus on only the native speaker's culture is no longer beneficial to both teachers and learners. I agree with McKay's (2003) points, however, I want to emphasise that when it comes to academic assessment, users of English will normally lose their sense of 'owning the tongue' or at least feel insecure. Still, certain norms are employed to make judgements, and thus certain power is exercised. So the point here is that if we all work hard for an EIL and for fairness in the teaching and learning of EIL but do not have the same attitudes towards academic assessment, then our efforts will be in vain. Likewise, as long as non-native teachers of English "are still anchored in the old native-speaker dominated framework" and "non-native speakers of English are not conscious of being speakers of EIL" (Llurda, 2004, pp. 319-20), EIL will not be recognised and appreciated.

So I suggest, together with encouraging and valuing users' appropriation of English, TESOL workers also need to promote an EIL pedagogy in which the teaching and learning of EIL should involve valuing and nurturing the expression of other cultural voices in English, making explicit the values that support judgements about 'good' English and individual ability, and helping students to construct identities as owners, meaning makers, and authorised users of EIL.

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## Teaching Vocabulary

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### **Introduction:**

Deliberately teaching vocabulary is one of the least efficient ways of developing learners' vocabulary knowledge but nonetheless it is an important part of a well-balanced vocabulary programme.

The main problem with vocabulary teaching is that only a few words and a small part of what is required to know a word can be dealt with at any one time. This limitation also applies to incidental learning from listening or reading, but it is much easier to arrange for large amounts of independent listening and reading than it is to arrange for large amounts of teaching. Teaching can effectively deal with only a small amount of information about a word at a time. The more complex the information is, the more likely the learners are to misinterpret it.

**Table 1:** Ways of quickly giving attention to words

1	Quickly give the meaning by (a) using an L1 translation, (b) using a known L2 synonym or a simple definition in the L2, (c) showing an object or picture, (d) giving quick demonstration, (e) drawing a simple picture or diagram, (f) breaking the word into parts and giving the meaning of the parts and the whole word (the word part strategy), (g) giving several example sentences with the word in context to show the meaning, (h) commenting on the underlying meaning of the word and other referents.
2	Draw attention to the form of the word by (a) showing how the spelling of the word is like the spelling of known words, (b) giving the stress pattern of the word and its pronunciation, (c) showing the prefix, stem and suffix that make up the word, (d) getting the learners to repeat the pronunciation of the word, (e) writing the word on the board, (f) pointing out any spelling irregularity in the word.
3	Draw attention to the use of the word by (a) quickly showing the grammatical pattern the word fits into (countable/uncountable, transitive/intransitive, etc), (b) giving a few similar collocates, (c) mentioning any restrictions on the use of the word (formal, colloquial, impolite, only used in the United States, only used with children, old fashioned, technical, infrequent), (d) giving a well known opposite, or a well known word describing the group or lexical set it fits into.

**Principles**

- 1 Keep the teaching simple and clear. Don't give complicated explanations.
- 2 Relate the present teaching to past knowledge by showing a pattern or analogies.
- 3 Use both oral and written presentation - write it on the blackboard as well as explaining.
- 4 Give most attention to words that are already partly known.
- 5 Tell the learners if it is a high frequency word that is worth noting for future attention.
- 5 Don't bring in other unknown or poorly known related words like near synonyms, opposites, or members of the same lexical set.

We need to see learning any particular word as being a cumulative process where knowledge is built up over a series of varied meetings with the word. At best, teaching can provide only one or two of these meetings. The others involve deliberate study, meeting through meaning-focused input and output, and fluency development activities.

The positive effects of vocabulary teaching are that it can provide help when learners feel it is most needed. This is particularly true for vocabulary teaching that occurs in the context of message-focused activities involving listening, speaking, reading and writing, and where the teaching deals with items that learners see as being very relevant for the activity. Table 1 lists ways of quickly dealing with words. The small amount of research on such teaching indicates that it has a strong effect on vocabulary learning.

The first decision to make when teaching a word is to decide whether the word is worth spending time on or not. If the word is a low frequency word and is not a useful technical word and not one that is particularly useful for the learners, it should be dealt with as quickly as possible. Usually when words come up in the context of a reading or listening text, or of learners need a word or phrase when speaking or writing, they need quick help which does not interrupt the activity too much.

Sometimes however a teacher may want to spend time on a word. In general, time should be spent on high frequency words or words that fill a language need that the learners have. When deciding how to spend time on a word, it is useful to consider the learning burden of the word.

**What is involved in knowing a word?**

Part of effective vocabulary teaching involves working out what needs to be taught about a word. This is called the learning burden of a word and differs from word to word according to the ways in which the word relates to first language knowledge and already existing knowledge of the second language and or other known languages.



**Table 2** Discovering learning burden

Meaning	Form and meaning Concept and referents Associations	Is the word a loan word in the L1? Is there an L1 word with roughly the same meaning? Does the word fit into the same sets as an L1 word of similar meaning?
Form	Spoken form Written form Word parts	Can the learners repeat the word accurately if they hear it? Can the learners write the word correctly if they hear it? Can the learners identify known affixes in the word?
Use	Grammatical functions Collocation Constraints on use	Does the word fit into predictable grammar patterns? Does the word have the same collocations as an L1 word of similar meaning? Does the word have the same restrictions on its use as an L1 word of similar meaning?

The way to work out the learning burden systematically is to consider each aspect of what is involved in knowing a word. Table 2 lists the kinds of questions that can be asked to discover the learning burden of a word. When asking the questions it is necessary to have a particular L1 in mind. If the teacher has a class of learners with a variety of L1s or if the teacher has no knowledge of the learners' L1 then the best that can be done is to think if the word fits into regular patterns in the L2. For example, is it regularly spelled? Does it fit into the same grammatical patterns as other L2 words of similar meaning? Does it have a narrow range of senses with a clear underlying core meaning?

**Table 3** Useful vocabulary learning exercises that require little or no preparation

<b>Word meaning</b>	
Find the core meaning	The learners look at dictionary entries and find the shared meaning in the various senses of the word.
Word card testing	The learners work in pairs. Each learner gives their pack of cards to their partner who tests them on their recall of the meaning by saying the word and getting them to give the translation. This can also be done by giving the translation and getting them to give the word form.
Using the dictionary	When a useful word occurs in a reading text, the teacher trains learners in the strategy of using a dictionary.

Guessing from context	Whenever a guessable word occurs in a reading text the teacher trains the learners in the guessing from context strategy.
<b>Word form</b>	
Spelling dictation	The teacher says words or phrases and the learners write them.
Pronunciation	The teacher writes words on the board and the learners pronounce them getting feedback from the teacher. Each learner picks what word to say.
Word parts	The teacher writes words on the board and the learners cut them into parts and give the meanings of the parts.
<b>Word use</b>	
Suggest collocates	The learners work together in pairs or small groups to list collocates for a given word.
Word detectives	A learner reports on a word he or she has found in their reading. They talk about the meaning, spelling, pronunciation, word parts, etymology, collocates and grammar of the word.
<b>Choosing the words</b>	
1	As words come up in class, one learner (the class secretary) has the job of noting them for future attention.
2	The teacher chooses words that have appeared in work in the last week or two.
3	The teacher chooses words that the learners need to know.

Let us look at two examples to see how learning burden can be worked out. The purpose of working out learning burden is to find what aspects will be difficult when learning a particular word and thus where the teacher can give useful help.

Let us take the word *friend* as an example. We will look at it from the point of view of a native speaker of Thai. *Friend* has a few pronunciation difficulties for a Thai, namely the /r/ sound and the two consonant clusters /fr/ and /nd/, but they may not be so much of a problem by the time this word is learned. The spelling of the word is not wholly predictable. If the learners heard the word they would want to write it as *frend*, so the *ie* part needs some attention (*ie* representing /e/ is an irregular spelling in English). It does not have any prefixes or suffixes, but it may be worth giving attention to *friendly*. *Friend* is not a loan word in Thai, so learning is needed here. Thai has a word that is roughly similar in meaning to *friend* (puean). Thais however use other words for *friend* too, but this need not be a concern at this point. *Friend* has the collocates *good* (*a good friend*), *close* (*a close friend*), *old* (*an old friend*), *family* (*He=s a friend of the family*). *Friend* is a regular countable noun. It cannot be used as a verb. It has no restrictions on its use. That is, it is not a rude word or a formal word, and is not restricted to a particular dialect of English. Thus we can see the learning burden of *friend* lies largely in its spelling, the form-meaning connection (Thais have to learn that *friend* means Apuean@), and in its collocations.

**Table 4** Useful prepared exercises for vocabulary learning

<p><b>Meaning</b>  Word and meaning matching  Labelling  Sentence completion  Crossword puzzles  Semantic analysis  Completing lexical sets</p> <p><b>Form</b>  Following spelling rules  Recognising word parts  Building word family tables</p> <p><b>Use</b>  Sentence completion  Collocation matching  Collocation tables  Interpreting dictionary entries</p>
<p><b>Criteria</b>  A good vocabulary exercise</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 focuses on useful words, preferably high frequency words that have already been met before.</li> <li>2 focuses on a useful aspect of learning burden. It has a useful learning goal.</li> <li>3 gets learners to meet or use the word in ways that establish new mental connections for the word. It sets up useful learning conditions involving generative use.</li> <li>4 involves the learners in actively searching for and evaluating the target words in the exercise.</li> <li>5 does not bring related unknown or partly known words together. It avoids interference.</li> </ol>

Let us take the adjective *free* as a second example. The form aspects - sound, spelling and word parts - do not need particular attention. *Free* is a loan word in Thai but only has the meaning 'does not need to be paid for'. Its most common meaning in English however is 'not restricted, not tied down' and this is probably best treated as a different word. For this meaning, learning is needed and the teacher should give attention to the various related uses of *free* drawing attention to their shared meaning - *Are you free at six o'clock? They were set free. Free speech. The free world.* *Free* can also be a verb but this use could be left until later. *Free*=s collocates include *world, trade, time*, and these deserve some attention. So the learning burden of *free* lies largely in the area of meaning with this reflected in the collocations.

Working out the learning burden of a word helps a teacher make the second important decision about teaching words, namely, what aspects of the word should I spend time on?

As well as providing direct teaching on those aspects of the word that require attention, the teacher can also set the learners to work on some of these aspects. Table 3 lists a range of vocabulary activities that require very little preparation by the teacher. Note that these activities have been organised according to the aspects of what is involved in knowing a word. Many of these activities involve learners working together in pairs or small groups.

### **Prepared vocabulary exercises**

Some vocabulary exercises need to be carefully prepared in advance. These may be part of a course book and may be planned to systematically cover a certain area of vocabulary. Table 4 lists the most useful of these. The major values of prepared exercises are that they can be made to systematically cover an area of vocabulary, and learners can do them independently of the teacher. Most published books of prepared vocabulary exercises use the *Teach, test, and mark* format. That is, some aspects of the words are taught, and then the learners do labelling, completion, rewording, classifying, correcting or matching activities which they later mark using an answer key (see for example McCarthy and Dell, 1994). If such exercises are done in pairs or small groups, then there is the added opportunity for learners to learn from each other.

### **Getting repeated attention to vocabulary**

Useful vocabulary needs to be met again and again to ensure it is learned. In the early stages of learning the meetings need to be reasonably close together, preferably within a few days, so that too much forgetting does not occur. Later meetings can be very widely spaced with several weeks between each meeting.

**Table 5** Ways of helping learners remember previously met words

1	Spend time on a word by dealing with two or three aspects of the word, such as its spelling, its pronunciation, its parts, related derived forms, its meaning, its collocations, its grammar, or restrictions on its use.
2	Get learners to do graded reading and listening to stories at the appropriate level.
3	Get learners to do speaking and writing activities based on written input that contains the words.
4	Get learners to do prepared activities that involve testing and teaching vocabulary, such as <i>Same or different?</i> , <i>Find the difference</i> , <i>Word and picture matching</i> .
5	Set aside a time each week for word by word revision of the vocabulary that occurred previously. List the words on the board and do the following activities. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) go round the class getting each learner to say one of the words.</li> <li>b) break the words into parts and label the meanings of the parts.</li> <li>c) suggest collocations for the words.</li> <li>d) recall the sentence where the word occurred and suggest another context.</li> <li>e) look at derived forms of the words.</li> </ol>

High frequency vocabulary needs to be met across all four strands of a course - meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency

development. Some low frequency vocabulary may not need to become part of the learners' output and so it is not important for it to be part of the meaning-focused output strand. Table 5 lists various ways of getting learners to meet the same vocabulary again and again.

The direct teaching approach suggested in this article is based on the following guidelines.

- 1 If the word is a high frequency word or one that will be of continuing importance for the learners, a) give it attention, preferably focussing on its learning burden, b) make sure the learners will come back to it again. If the word is a low frequency word, pass over it without comment or give some brief attention to it focussing on what is needed in that instance.
- 2 Direct teaching should be clear and simple. Rely on repeated meetings to develop an understanding of the complexities of a word. Don't try to deal with the complexities by intensive teaching.

The deliberate teaching of vocabulary is only one part of the language -focused learning strand of a course. The amount of time spent on it needs to be balanced against the other types of language-focused learning such as intensive reading, deliberate learning, and strategy training, and needs to be balanced against the other three strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. Table 6 tries to show this wider perspective, indicating the small amount of time that should be given to vocabulary teaching.

**Table 6.** The proportion of time in a course that should be given to vocabulary teaching

Meaning-focused input		
Meaning-focused output		
Language-focused learning	pronunciation vocabulary	strategy development intensive reading word card learning <b>vocabulary teaching</b>
	grammar discourse	
Fluency development		

Vocabulary learning, both within and outside the domain of reading has been a key part of English education in many Asian contexts where it has been traditionally stressed. There is a need for more student centered approaches that improve both the retention and usage in a progressive fashion that goes beyond rote memorization. The analysis here is supportive to this end.

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## The “Communicative Competence” Controversy

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Ahmet Acar is a research assistant at Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey, where he earned his M.A. degree and is currently a doctoral student. He has been to Syracuse University with a Fulbright scholarship, where he studied TESOL, theoretical linguistics, sociolinguistics, and taught Turkish as a foreign language to students at Syracuse University, Cornell University and Colgate University at the same time through multipoint videoconferencing, which was carried out the first time in the USA and was accepted as a successful pilot project. Acar's research interests are the role of culture in language teaching, bilingualism, foreign and second language teaching methods, teaching languages from distance, ELT syllabus design and textbook evaluation.

### Abstract

The main aim of this article is to question Hymes' theory of communicative competence as developed in his paper “On Communicative Competence” (1971) and to critically examine the implications it had for the field of foreign and second language teaching. The article examines the model of language presented by the theory of communicative competence with the claim that the theory is based on highly unsound and unidealized evidence. The impact of such a theory of language in the foreign and second language teaching field will be critically discussed in broad terms at the level of goals and the specification of the language content to be taught and learned. In the treatment of this topic, no specific reference to Asia is made since the debate is relevant in all contexts.

**Key words:** communicative competence, theory of language, communicative approach, competence for use, competence for grammar, acquisition of language.

### Introduction

While there has already been much debate about linguistic competence and communicative competence in the foreign and second language teaching literature, the result has always been the consideration of communicative competence as a superior model of language following Hymes' opposition to Chomsky's linguistic competence. This opposition has been adopted by those who seek new directions toward a communicative era by taking for granted the basic motives and the appropriacy of this opposition behind the development of communicative competence.

Munby, for example, in his development of “Communicative syllabus design” refers to Hymes' effect both on his work and the foreign and second language teaching field:

The upsurge of interest in the content of the language syllabus, following the concern with communicative competence generated by Dell Hymes, reflects inter alia a feeling that we ought to know much more about what it is that should be taught and learned if a non native is to be communicatively competent in English (Munby 1978, p. 1).

However, those who adopted and applied Hymes' linguistic theory, namely, communicative competence, to the foreign and second language teaching field gave justification to this new linguistic theory without questioning the basic premises underlying the theory of communicative competence.

As a contrast to this trend, I intend to show that Hymes' theory of communicative competence is based on quite misleading assumptions and that it led the foreign and second language teaching field to adopt a rather controversial model of language in the specification of teaching and learning goals and the selection of the language content to be taught and learned. I think that it is relevant to raise this debate again now at a time when we are moving into a so-called "post-communicative" era, because the profession might need to ask itself whether it has treated Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence with due respect.

### **A critical look at the basis of communicative competence**

In this section, I intend to explore the basis on which Hymes develops his theory of communicative competence. It is pointed out that the basic premises underlying the theory of communicative competence are sketchy and they lack any idealizations. Much of Hymes' justification for the development of his theory of communicative competence is based on his criticism of Chomsky's linguistic competence. In other words, communicative competence was developed as a contrast to Chomsky's linguistic competence.

Hymes begins his justification for his new theory by criticizing a quotation from Chomsky about linguistic theory:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-hearer, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3).

Hymes criticizes such a statement of linguistic theory as irrelevant as far as the language problems of disadvantaged children are concerned:

From the standpoint of the children we seek to understand and help such a statement may seem almost a declaration of irrelevance. All the difficulties that confront the children and ourselves seem swept from view (Hymes, 1971, p. 270).

Hymes delivered his paper 'On Communicative Competence' at the Research Planning Conference on Language Development among Disadvantaged Children and with his statement above he probably implies the need for the consideration of the problems of such children for the development of a new linguistic theory. Besides his claim of irrelevance, Hymes considers such a linguistic theory in Chomsky's statement a limited conception of linguistic theory which presents an image of a child with just an ability of producing and understanding only the grammatical sentences of language. It cannot, Hymes states, explain the communicative differences among children:



The limitations of the perspective appear when the image of the unfolding, mastering, fluent child is set beside the real children in our schools. The theory must seem, if not irrelevant, then at best a doctrine of poignancy: poignant, because of the difference between what one imagines and what one sees; poignant too, because the theory, so powerful in its own realm, cannot on its terms cope with the difference. To cope with the realities of children as communicating beings requires a theory within which socio-cultural factors have an explicit and constitutive role; and neither is the case (Hymes 1971, p. 271).

So far, Hymes' criticism of Chomsky's linguistic theory depends on the inefficiency of Chomsky's linguistic theory in explaining the language problems of disadvantaged children and the communicative capacity of normal children. Neither, however, is Chomsky's concern in his specification of the linguistic theory. Such a theory, Chomsky claims, in the first quotation, would require methodological and theoretical limitations. Such a limitation in perspective is necessary since the system of language or linguistic competence has distinct characteristics specific to itself like phrase structure and inflectional system. Language clearly exhibits grammatical relations of which systematic structure or the language system can be studied in its own right. As to the use of language, it relates to both linguistic and nonlinguistic data. Thus, while Hymes considers Chomsky's study of the language system a limitation and attempts to form a communication theory, he puts the language specific processes in the same scale as the communication processes, which show characteristics different from the language system.

Hymes' criticism of Chomsky continues with his claim that Chomsky's linguistic competence does not include a social aspect of language. To Hymes, linguistic theory must also account for performance since it is the only sector which can be related to the social aspect of language:

The concept of performance will take on great importance, in so far as the study of communicative competence is seen as an aspect of what from another angle may be called the ethnography of symbolic forms, the study of the variety of genres, narration, dance, drama, song, instrumental music, visual art, that interrelate with speech in the communicative life of a society and in terms of which the relative importance and meaning of speech and language must be assessed (Hymes, 1971, p. 284).

Hymes' statement reveals his other justification for his development of communicative competence, the study of the ethnography of symbolic forms. Communicative competence developed thus partly on the basis of the study of the ethnography of symbolic forms, which refers to the amalgam of linguistic and nonlinguistic factors with different characteristics, and his attempt to contrast such a theory to Chomsky's linguistic competence, which draws a clear demarcation between the language system and non linguistic factors, underlie crucial controversies.

Hymes' other statement underlying his attempt to indicate the necessity of the ability of use as part of competence is:

The specification of ability for use as part of competence allows for the role of non cognitive factors, such as motivation, as partly determining competence. In speaking of competence, it is especially important not to separate cognitive from affective and volitive factors, so far as the impact of the theory on educational practice is concerned; but also with regard to speech design and explanation (Hymes, 1971, p. 283).

To Hymes, the consideration of the ability for use as part of competence necessitates a consideration of non cognitive factors such as motivation as partly determining competence and in the specification of competence, cognitive, affective and volitive factors should be considered together. Besides, Hymes considers the necessity of the inclusion of ability for use as part of competence for educational purposes, which reveals another controversy since linguistic theory is not a theory of education but a theory of language. Hymes' attack on Chomsky with such an assumption underlying the theory of communicative competence is also inappropriate since Chomsky did not intend to develop linguistic competence for educational purposes but for the study of the language system.

Furthermore, Hymes' consideration of the ability for use as part of competence necessitates a consideration of non cognitive factors such as motivation. The same is, Hymes claims, true of the consideration of the cognitive, affective and volitive factors in the specification of competence. How Hymes correlates motivation, affective, volitive factors on the one hand, and language description on the other hand, is vague in the consideration of the communicative competence as a new model of language.

Hymes' justifications for his development of the theory of communicative competence discussed so far are based on the language problems of disadvantaged children, communication capacity of normal children, the study of ethnography of symbolic forms, noncognitive factors such as motivation, cognitive, affective and volitive factors and educational practice. Hymes' theory of communicative competence developed on these assumptions lacks a specific basis and it lacks scientific idealizations. Hymes' following statement may illustrate the point most clearly: "I should take competence as the most general term for the capabilities of a person" (1971, p. 282).

### **Competence for use and competence for grammar**

Hymes' other motive for his development of the theory of communicative competence on the criticism that Chomsky's linguistic competence is a limitation in perspective is his consideration that the acquisition of competence for use can be stated in the same way as the acquisition of competence for grammar. Hymes (1971, p. 279) states that competence for use is part of the same developmental matrix as competence for grammar.

There is, however, good evidence that competence for use is not part of the same developmental matrix as competence for grammar and that the acquisition of the competence for use cannot be stated in the same terms as acquisition of competence for grammar. The evidence is that while the acquisition of the grammatical knowledge of language, what Chomsky calls linguistic competence, is complete in a certain period of

time, is acquired unconsciously, and once it happens in childhood, shows almost no change throughout the life of an individual, the ability in the use of language appropriately in appropriate situations and contexts develops throughout the life of an individual. It is not complete in the same acquisition period as that of the competence for grammar and hence may involve conscious learning or learning through life experience. This ability develops as the individual becomes more conscious about the status of the people, the formality of the situation, the importance of the occasion he/she is in, etc.

Consider an English child, for example, at the age of ten who is in an embassy with his/her parents and goes into a room and asks a diplomat a question. In such a case he/she may not know how to speak in an appropriate manner to the diplomat but his/her parents would be more successful than the child about the relevant appropriateness. As to the grammatical knowledge of the child and his/her parents, there is no difference. They both form, for example, the yes/no questions or relative clauses in the same way.

What does the evidence imply then? It implies that the acquisition of the competence for grammar and the competence for use do not occur in the same way and under the same conditions. Thus, Hymes' (1971, p. 279) proposal that the acquisition of competence for use, indeed, can be stated in the same terms as acquisition of competence for grammar is not so valid. It implies that Chomsky's notion of perfect competence indicating a person's perfect grammatical knowledge of his/her language has a basis: The ten-year-old English child has no problem in forming grammatical sentences. It implies that the notion of a homogeneous speech community is a necessary idealization at least in terms of a grammatical description, in that English community, the child's and his/her parents' or another person's knowledge of how to form relative clause constructions or yes/no questions do not change from one person to another. Their grammatical knowledge is the same. It implies that the competence for grammar can be studied in itself as it shows distinct characteristics specific to itself.

### **Implications for foreign and second language teaching**

Presentation of such a theory of communicative competence has had a great impact on the second and foreign language teaching field. The theory of communicative competence has been taken as an aim within the communicative approach, an aim of making a non-native communicatively competent in the target language.

It also presented an understanding of the language content to be used in the selection and grading of language items to be taught and learned. It put the language use, however it is selected and sequenced, in the center and shadowed or ignored the essential role of grammatical knowledge just because the theory of communicative competence was developed as a contrast to linguistic competence.

Chomsky considers linguistic competence to carry specific characteristics of its own which are different from other communication elements and specifies linguistic competence as a study in itself. The model of linguistic competence, however, was not developed with pedagogical motivation or for a pedagogical aim but for the description of the language system. Hymes' motives for the development of communicative competence as discussed in this paper, however, are not consistent with each other.

Perhaps the most significant inconsistency is the consideration of the pedagogical reasons to put forward a model of language for linguistic theory. While the motivation behind linguistic competence generated by Chomsky was the description of the language system, the motivations behind communicative competence ranging from educational practice and linguistic theory are complicated and vague.

Thus, a very broad hypothesis of communicative competence which was developed on an unsound basis and which emerged out of an inappropriate opposition has become the main focus of the foreign and second language teaching field, and slogans like “There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar are useless” (Hymes, 1971, p. 278.) have had the foreign and second language teaching field pursue this very general and complicated theory of communicative competence about the real content of which we know very little.

### Notes

**1** This paper is a revision and an extension of my article “A Critical Review of Hymes’ on Communicative Competence” “Acar 2003”. In my first paper, I critically examined the theory of communicative competence as developed by Hymes without any reference to foreign and second language teaching. This article questions both the underlying assumptions of the theory of communicative competence and critically examines its implications with special reference to the foreign and second language teaching field.

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## Competence and Teaching English as an International Language

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### Biography:

Roger Nunn has been a language teacher for over 29 years in six different countries, including more than 20 years in Asia. He is currently Professor of ELT in the International Studies Department of Kochi University, Japan. He has a Trinity College TEFL diploma, an MA and Ph.D. in TEFL from the University of Reading, UK. His Ph.D. study was on teaching methodology and curriculum development across cultural boundaries. He has published widely on a variety of topics and is particularly interested in international perspectives on language teaching.

**Key Words:** Linguistic Competence, Communicative Competence, EIL, English as a International Language, Corpora

### Abstract:

*Roger Nunn considers different types of competence in relation to the teaching of English as an International Language, arguing that linguistic competence has yet to be adequately addressed in recent considerations of EIL. The paper first discusses the need to reconsider the scope of 'communicative competence' and then goes on to consider other kinds of competence relevant to EIL including linguistic competence. It critically examines demographic descriptions of World English use in relation to competence and discusses the kinds of competence that are embodied in the corpora that are currently being used for the development of teaching materials. This paper is intended to stimulate discussion in the Asian EFL journal about 'competence' and the teaching of English as an International Language.*

### Introduction

For English language educators, the most problematic aspect of defining English as an international language remains the notion of competence. This paper, proposed as an introduction to a long term project aiming at defining competence for EIL more fully, will attempt to introduce the issues in order to stimulate debate in the Asian EFL context and particularly, it is hoped, in the pages of this journal on the issue of competence in EIL education.

On the one hand, "international" communication seems to require multiple competences. Studies of pragmatic and discourse competences, that focus on the process of achieving mutual intelligibility in whole spoken or written texts, are assuming increasing significance. (See, for example McKay, 2002, pp. 49-76). In addition, developing the kind of strategic competence that has already been highlighted as an important aspect of "communicative competence" (e.g., Kasper and Kellerman, 1997, Bachman, 1990), is also inevitably worthy of renewed attention, as international communication seems to require the ability to adjust to almost infinitely diverse

intercultural communication situations. Traditionally, however, “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972) has been used to refer to the adaptation to single and well-established speech communities. Preparing for communication between people from a broad range of backgrounds, who will often communicate beyond their own or their interlocutors’ speech communities in some kind of ill-defined third zone, implies the need to have a highly developed repertoire of communication strategies.

Although an increased focus on multiple competences is both necessary and inevitable, a related concern is that there is a danger of “international” becoming a byword for reduced *linguistic* competence. For language teachers, “knowing” a language has not commonly been a question of pragmatic or strategic competence, yet linguistic competence has still to be adequately addressed in discussions of so-called “International English”. Indeed, some would argue (e.g., Acar, 2005) that it has never been adequately addressed throughout the so-called “communicative” era. Considering English as a language increasingly used for international communication is not the same as defining English as an “International Language”. To become competent in a language, it has always been assumed that there is a body of linguistic knowledge that needs to be learned, whether this be phonological, grammatical or lexical, often in relation to particular speech communities.

### **Communicative Competence for International Communication**

As Kasper (1997, p.345) points out, “in applied linguistics, models of communicative competence serve as goal specifications for L2 teaching and testing.” The notion of ‘communicative competence’ as applied to language teaching theory (Hymes 1972) needs to be reconsidered for the teaching of English for international communication. Richards et. al. (1985, p.48) suggested that a communicative approach foregrounded “communicative competence” as “the goal of language teaching”. Working from an ethnographic perspective, Hymes emphasized the way language was used in speech communities, arguing that there were, “rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless.” (Hymes 1972, in Brumfit and Johnson 1979, p.14). The change of emphasis in language teaching theory, while not always followed in practice, towards a more “communicative” approach was partly dependent on the influence of this view of language.

An important notion of communicative competence is “appropriateness”. Hymes (1980, p.49) argued that “appropriateness” was a “universal of speech”, related to the social codes of speech communities, what he refers to (p.42) as “shared understandings of rights and duties, norms of interactions, grounds of authority, and the like.” For Hymes, communication is “pre-structured by the history and ways of those among whom one inquires.” (p.74) Learning to communicate “appropriately” has sometimes been taken to imply learning to fit into a particular way of communicating in a target community. Learning might, for example, have focused among other things on the appropriate use of speech acts as social functions used in particular speech communities, such as how to give and receive invitations or how to apologize. Students’ own norms would then be seen as inappropriate, interfering with successful communication in a target culture.

It is not new for teachers to challenge this view when carried to extremes, resulting in unconscious cultural imperialism in the very situations where the opposite is intended. In 1984, for example, I found myself in the unreal situation of being required to teach the kind of indirect requests to Bedouin Arab students I could never remember using myself during my Northern English upbringing, but which we British were thought to use, such as, “I wonder if you could direct me to the station?” This approach may have been and may still be justifiable, for example, in language schools where students are learning English in Britain to use in Britain or for professional training. However, in the more varied and unpredictable contexts in which many students will use English in this new century, it is clearly inappropriate to teach language that is only appropriate in limited situations in a target culture that may never be visited by the students. What constitutes making an “appropriate” contribution in international communication cannot be defined in terms of a single speech community and there is no such thing as a global speech community in any definable sense.

Work already available for more than twenty years has not neglected the kind of competences needed for international communication. Canale and Swain’s (1980) and Canale’s (1983) four-part framework included linguistic, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competences. Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) include grammatical competence, which encompasses vocabulary, syntax morphology and phonemes/ graphemes (See Skehan 1998, pp. 157-164 for a full discussion). In this discussion we can identify an important distinction between what we could term linguistic knowledge and abilities which enable us to better apply or compensate for lacunae in linguistic abilities. (See Kasper and Kellerman, 1997).

Applying linguistic competence involves the activation of a body of knowledge that has been learned and stored in memory for retrieval. Performance will never reflect the full body of knowledge available to a language user, because many other factors from the situation will intervene, whether they be psychological (e.g., stress), physiological (fatigue), social (group dynamics or power dynamics), situational or genre related requiring specialized situational knowledge or non-standard language, (hospital appointments, business meetings), cultural (valuing reduced communication, such as silence or understatement) or task-related (complexity, difficulty). Nevertheless, acquiring a body of linguistic knowledge for use is an essential part of any language

learning. In this early stage of the development of our understanding of international English, there is unity in diversity in that there can be no agreed body of standard English available to be taught or learnt. Very diverse arguments about what should be learnt are available. Usable descriptions whether in the form of corpora, grammars, dictionaries are increasingly well-developed for native varieties of English (inner-circle), but there is as yet no notion of how to develop a body of standard grammatical English in the expanding circle countries. Yet competence in a language, whether labelled international or not, does require linguistic competence.

### **Predicting the Future**

McKay (2002, p.127) underlines the inevitability of changes that will naturally occur in “English” as a result of its international role, stating, “those changes that do not impede intelligibility should be recognized as one of the natural consequences of the use of English as an international language.” But, there can be no “academy” acting as a “big brother” to regulate and to impose a unified notion of competence on the world’s English speakers. A pluralistic notion of “World Englishes” is easier to justify and valuable work is being done to describe different varieties in works such as Melchers and Shaw (2003) and McArthur (2002) who provide encyclopaedic descriptive evidence of different varieties of English around the world.

It is important to note that broad non-commercial endeavours need to remain extremely modest in the face of the enormity of the descriptive task. Melchers and Shaw (p.x) readily acknowledge that “although we have found all varieties rich and fascinating, it is inevitable that our personal knowledge and experience is not evenly distributed.” Importantly, global-minded scholars such as Melchers and Shaw are the first to recognize, as we all must, that in any cross-cultural endeavour we remain “prisoners of our prejudices” (p.x.).

The development of “English” and “Englishes” is more easily seen as a natural organic development, both difficult to predict and impossible to control. For educators, however, the relationship between “intelligibility” and linguistic “competence” remains problematic. Achieving “intelligibility” in particular intercultural speech events depends on important pragmatic and intercultural abilities and is sometimes possible between people using not only different linguistic norms, but also between people with widely different levels of linguistic competence. Pragmatic failure is also regularly observed between people who have excellent linguistic knowledge. (See, for example, Moeschler, 2004, who argues that linguistic competence can actually impede pragmatic understanding in intercultural situations.)

Furthermore, it is difficult to see linguistic competence as just knowledge of an impervious, independent linguistic system when it is applied to use. It is far from easy to dissociate many features of linguistic competence from pragmatic, discourse and even strategic competences. Interlocutors are constantly called upon to make appropriate linguistic choices that are sensitive to the dynamic aspects of context as their communication progresses. An utterance may embody an inappropriate linguistic choice



of, for example, article use or modality, without there being any internal structural linguistic problem.

A further aspect of linguistic competence to consider is bilingual and multilingual competence. More than half the world's population is not monolingual. Crystal (2003, p.51) implies that bilingual competence is something *less*, rather than something *more*, than monolingual ability.

Definitions of bilingualism reflect assumptions about the degree of proficiency people must achieve before they qualify as bilingual (whether comparable to a monolingual native speaker, or something less than this, even to the extent of minimal knowledge of a second language).

McKay, (2002, pp. 34–47) argues strongly that native competence is inappropriate as a goal of EIL, but does not define native, bilingual or EIL competence. Transitional views of competence are inappropriate in so far as they imply replacing one monolingual competence with another, whereas SL, FL and IL learners are adding to and maintaining existing competences (Baker, 2000 and 2002). For educational settings, Baker (2000, p. 78) makes a useful distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive/ Academic Language Proficiency).

To counter the negative impact of the dominance of English on other languages it is becoming increasingly important to think of trilingual competence as an aim. Paradoxically, however, EIL *use* is almost always in monolingual situations, between people who have no other *lingua franca*. The implication is that a learning process is needed that develops bilingualism or multilingualism at the same time as maximizing monolingual input and output.

EIL competence, then, cannot be reduced to a single, limited, monolingual or monocultural concept. It is composed of a set of interlocking and interdependent competences that sometimes compensate for each other, sometimes counteract each other and sometimes reinforce each other. A normal human being and even a gifted communicator and linguist cannot expect to possess it totally. However, while acknowledging this reality, *linguistic* competence is in danger of being sidelined in considerations of EIL pedagogy.

### **Statistics and EIL Competence**

While demographic statistics provide the evidence for redefining English as an International language, broad demographic surveys do not provide clear information about competence. The status of English as a “Language of International Communication” is no longer in dispute and rarely attracts the kind of critical scrutiny that an emerging field of inquiry requires. Important conceptualizations such as Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles, (‘inner’, where English is used as a first language, ‘outer’, where it is used as a second official language and ‘expanding’, where it is still classified as a foreign language) also require further scrutiny in relation to competence. Modiano (1999), for example, importantly suggests that Kachru's circles appear to predetermine competence according to nationality and argues that competence should be determined

independently of origin. The key factor is the increase of the relative use of English across non-native settings compared to its use within native settings or between native and non-native settings. Crystal (1997, p.22) points out that “the speed with which a global language scenario has arisen is truly remarkable”. The so-called “expanding circle” of foreign language speakers was said to include more than 750 million EFL speakers in 1997, compared to 375 million first-language speakers and 375 million second language speakers. A critical point of no return has been reached in that the number of English users is developing at a faster rate as a language of international communication than as a language of intra-national communication. The extent to which intra-cultural use has been surpassed by intercultural use is difficult to estimate exactly (See Crystal, 2004, pp.7-10, 1997, pp.53-63 and Graddol, 1999, pp.58-68) on the methods and difficulties of interpreting global statistics. A more recent IATEFL publication even suggests that communication between non-native speakers now represents 80% of global English use. (Finster, in Pulverness 2004, p.9).

Although Crystal (1997) and Graddol (1999) have often been cited on the global dimensions of English, both insist that available statistics represent no more than estimates and that figures alone do not provide a full or clear picture. Melchers and Shaw (2003, pp.8-9) point out that “the EFL category is particularly difficult to pinpoint: it really depends on what level of proficiency a person should have to qualify as a speaker of English”.

It is nonetheless important to have some picture of the dimensions in terms of quantity. The U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Data Base <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html> estimated the world population at around six billion. (5,844, 270,952 in 1997, to match Crystal’s English language estimates, 6,445,576,554 in the year 2005.) They estimate growth to around nine billion by the year 2050. Crystal (1997, p. 60) estimates that “well over a third” of the world population (2,025 million in 1997) were “routinely exposed to English”. Crystal warns that “only a proportion of these people actually have some command of English.” Identifying only two broad categories, “native or native-like command” and “reasonable competence”, he advises caution in estimating ‘competence’.

If we are cautious by temperament, we will add these statistics together by choosing the lowest estimates in each category: in this way we shall end up with a grand total of 670 million people with a native or native-like command of English. If we go to the opposite extreme, and use a criterion of ‘reasonable competence’ rather than ‘native-like fluency’, we shall end up with a grand total of 1,800 million. A ‘middle-of-the-road’ estimate would be 1,200 — 1,500 million ...” (Crystal 1997, p. 61)

This ‘middle-of-the road’ estimate, means that about 20-25% of the world’s population possess ‘reasonable competence’. However, ‘competence’ here is only a vague, sub-theoretical construct with no clear definition. Crystal, for example, assumes “a reasonable level of attainment” (1997, p.55) in countries where English has official status and where it is taught in schools, for all those who have completed secondary or further education and are over the age of 25. Crystal’s more recent publications do not radically change these figures. Crystal (2003, p.9) for example, estimates that about a quarter of the

world's population (1,400 million, including "600 million or so who use it as a foreign language") have at least 'reasonable' competence in conversation, adding that "no other language is used so extensively - either numerically, or with such geographical reach".

The outcome of both Crystal and Graddol's discussions is that Kachru's three-way classification of inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle countries can only be a starting point in considerations of competence. Although linguists tend to favour acceptance of the notion of competence in relation to varieties of English, of world "Englishes" that extend far beyond an 'inner circle', competence cannot easily be related to linguistic demographics. Within the "outer" circle, there are a wide variety of situations, in which competence is difficult to estimate. Even the amount of English used within multilingual settings is difficult to pin down. In India, for example, a Malayaleem speaker from the south may not speak the official Hindi tongue so may use English as a *lingua franca* with speakers of one of the other sixteen Indian languages. A colonial past may provide hostility towards the language of the former colonialists, but pragmatism often prevails, with English being the most useful tool as a kind of *lingua franca* (see Gupta, 2005). There are huge variations in the role of English and the number of competent speakers between the fifty or so countries that are classified for convenience in this category.

Most significant for this discussion is the third group of the so-called "expanding circle" of countries, in which English is a *foreign* language, but with a difference. In many such countries, it is unrealistic to consider that international communication can be conducted only in the national language. Some of these countries have come to accept just one foreign language, English, as the most convenient means of international communication. Crystal (1997, p. 56) points out that Kachru's three concentric circles, while representing a breakthrough in our conception of global English use, can mask some important realities if the notion of competence is invoked. Northern European countries, such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries are classified as expanding circle countries. "There is much more use of English nowadays in some countries of the expanding circle, where it is 'only' a foreign language ..., than in some of the countries where it has traditionally held a special place". Nunan (in Robertson et. al. 2005, p. 8) suggests that in an Asian context too, it makes more sense to refer simply to "learning English" than to EFL or ESL.

Crystal (1997, p.55) was careful to point out the dangers of "hidden assumptions" and underlines the difficulty of drawing firm conclusions from the diverse statistical estimates available. How do compilers of linguistic demographics consider the notion of "competence"? For outer circle countries where English has an official status, we have noted that Crystal considers that those who have completed secondary education will have "a reasonable level of attainment". While useful as a starting point for global estimates, it is still necessary to underline the fact that competence is not rigorously defined in estimates of global English use. Crystal repeatedly affirms (see for example p. 61) the difficulty of acquiring accurate estimates. Careful use of modality is of the essence: "Even a small percentage increase in the number of speakers *thought to have* a reasonable (rather than a fluent) command of English would considerably expand the L2

grand total. A figure of 350 million is in fact *widely cited as a likely total* for this category”. As Crystal (1997, p.5) points out, “why a language becomes a global language has little to do with the number of people who speak it. It is much more to do with who those speakers are.” If all English speakers were located on one continent or in only one geographical area for example, this would reduce the importance of the figures. Only French and English are spoken as native languages on five continents.

As stated above, the main factor in according a ‘global’ status to English is also highly significant for the notion of competence. This is the fact that non-native use of English appears to be rivalling if not overtaking native use in terms of quantity. Again the statistical evidence needs to be considered with caution. It is not possible to estimate accurately the quantity of English spoken by any particular group of speakers or between any particular groups. Another factor not taken into account is the proportion of non-native English that speakers are routinely exposed to in terms of listening and reading. Here we must consider films, television, books, newspapers and other media sources.

Much is made of the number of non-natives using English surpassing the number of native users, but this masks another reality which is rarely expressed because, while it could be seen as a professional duty to expose local realities as a basis for meaningful curriculum development, it is not considered politically correct to do so. Many nationals of many expanding circle countries still do not possess competence or confidence to communicate in English and are unlikely ever to do so. For the majority, global communication is a potential that is never realized.

There is little that can be done to confront global estimates critically without resorting to anecdotal local experience. However inadequate anecdotal or incomplete local experiential ‘evidence’ might be, it does help put global figures in perspective. While ‘completing high school’ is not a criterion for even basic estimates of competence in expanding circle countries, we might expect that a large proportion of those high school students who gain acceptance to university would all have “reasonable” competence in economically developed countries such as Japan. However, a placement test at the author’s own university given to all new entrants to assess their ability to take part in a basic conversation (see Baker’s (2000, p.78) category of BICS, cited above) indicates that around 30% of such students can demonstrate no ability to participate in a simple small-group conversation on everyday topics and only around 25% possess usable competence at lower intermediate level or above.

Summary of 2003 University Placement Test Results According to Level

	Semester 1		Semester 2		Total	
Upper intermediate	29	(6%)	5	(1%)	34	(4%)
Lower Intermediate	141	(28%)	64	(14%)	205	(21%)
Post elementary	207	(41%)	221	(48%)	428	(45%)
False beginners	122	(24%)	168	(37%)	290	(30%)
Total	499		458		957	

(Based on performance rating scales described in Nunn and Lingley, 2004)

While wider scale investigation is needed and we can in no way generalize such findings to the population of the world's expanding circle countries, it is hard to imagine that the figures are unique to one situation to the extent that all other Japanese high school graduates possess basic communication ability in English.

The implications of English as an International Language are extremely varied and have only just started to be seriously considered un-polemically. The emerging reality is that English 'no longer belongs to its natives'. It is not so much that natives are suddenly being dispossessed, but more that non-natives are increasingly becoming 'possessed'. (See Phan Le Han, 2005 for a fuller discussion.) No language *per se* belongs exclusively to anyone unless political restrictions are imposed on who may use it. A language is part of the identity of anyone who is able to use it and competence also reflects the degree to which we "possess" a language. It still belongs in an essential way to its natives and they belong to it, to the extent that it is their main and inescapable means of communication and a deep and basic part of their cultural identity. However, as Graddol (1999, p. 68) emphasizes, "native" use of English is declining statistically and norms of use can no longer be codified as independent mono-cultural or mono-linguistic units.

Bewildering diversity inevitably leads towards a consideration of what constitutes a teachable standard. McArthur (in an interview reported in Graddol et al., 1999, p.4) underlines the dilemma stating, "we all use it in different ways; we all approximate to something which isn't there, but which we idealise about, negotiate and compromise." McArthur (pp. 4-5) identifies East Asia as an example of an area where "the entire middle class seems to want English for their children as an international vehicle which they can use with the rest of the world – it's not a British or an American thing." Crystal (p.137) puts forward the notion of a "World Standard Spoken English (WSSE)" which is still so much in "its infancy", conceding that it is impossible to predict how or even if a standard will develop or whether fragmentation will become the norm. McArthur suggests that a move towards "hybridisation" represents a normal process of world languages. For McArthur hybridisation is "infinitely varied" but "the idea of hybrids is stable" in the sense that it is a normal and verifiable phenomenon.

McArthur (p.8) implies that native norms may still dominate but they will also internationalize and blend with the varieties of new Englishes. Crystal argues (p.130) that no "regional social movement, such as the purist societies which try to prevent language change or restore a past period of imagined linguistic excellence, can influence the global outcome." Crystal (p. 137) suggests that competence needs to be considered on different levels. Local varieties "full of casual pronunciation, colloquial grammar and local turn of phrase", which are opposed to formal varieties for wider intelligibility, "full of careful pronunciation, conventional grammar, and standard vocabulary". He refers (p. 135) to a continuing presence of standard written English, in the form of newspapers, textbooks, and other printed materials," suggesting that these show "very little variation in the different English-speaking countries".

To avoid polemics between native and non-native perspectives, Melchers and Shaw (2003, p.39) suggest that we need to consider a user's "scope of proficiency" as an alternative to inclusive or exclusive notions such as "native" or "non-native". (See also Modiano, 1999.) They distinguish four levels.

Internationally Effective	Able to use communication strategies and a linguistic variety that is comprehensible to interlocutors from a wide range of national and cultural backgrounds
Nationally effective	What a South African would need to communicate with other South Africans
Local Proficiency	The proficiency someone needs to deal with people in his or her area
Ineffective	The level of the language learner who knows some English but cannot communicate in it

Such categories are an invaluable first step in that they allow a speaker of any background access to the highest level. However, they would need considerable refining to be made operational for teachers interested in assessing competence.

### **Competence and Corpora**

The question for EIL teachers still arises as to what exactly should be learnt in terms of bodies of linguistic knowledge for use. Graddol (p.68) suggests there is a growing demand for "authoritative norms of usage" and for teachers, dictionaries and grammars to provide reliable sources of linguistic knowledge. The wish for fixed, codified norms of a standard world English reflects an understandable desire for stability, but is it a desire that can or should ever be fulfilled?

At the same time that English is being rather vaguely defined as 'international', some progress is being made in providing more reliable descriptions of linguistic knowledge drawing on large samples of actual use. The "Bank of English" is an ever-expanding data-base that draws on "contemporary British, American, and international sources: newspapers, magazines, books, TV, radio, and real conversations – the language as it is written and spoken today". At first site, corpora, such as "the Bank of English", seem to provide an excellent opportunity to draw up norms of international use based on the codification of the output of educated users of English. However, a closer scrutiny of the sources used indicates a very broad range of sources, but non-British and American sources are not strongly represented. (See Sinclair, 2002, xii – xiv)

It is difficult to see at this stage how or when an equivalent corpus with a sufficient level of authority could be collected from a wider variety of international sources, although the challenge to do so has already been taken up. One example, the "International Corpus of English" (ICE) is described by Kennedy (1999, p.54) as "the

most ambitious project for the comparative study of English worldwide.” Compilers of such corpora feel the need to protect the quality of their product by selecting the informants. A full website is available outlining the ICE project. (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/ice/>) The corpus includes countries in which English is a second language such as India, Nigeria and Singapore, but does not include competent speakers from ‘expanding circle’ countries. The corpus design page of the website outlines the criteria for inclusion in a particular sample. “The authors and speakers of the texts are aged 18 or over, were educated through the medium of English, and were either born in the country in whose corpus they are included, or moved there at an early age and received their education through the medium of English in the country concerned.” We might characterize these users as monolingual or bilingual, native or near-native educated users of the language. The aim is to compile 20 national corpora of a million words to enable comparative studies. Kennedy points out, however, that the samples will be too small for detailed analysis of any but the most frequently occurring lexis and that larger mega-corpora are not likely to be available in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, extensive grammars and exercises are already available using the extensive, if less international, Bank of English.

There is also a growing consensus that some kind of corpus will be needed that highlights language use between members of the “expanding” circle speakers of English. One such corpus, VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) for ELF, English as a *Lingua Franca*, aims at codifying the language use of competent users of the “expanding circle”. Seidlhofer (2003, p.17) states that, “Its focus is on unscripted, largely face-to-face communication among fairly fluent speakers from a wide range of first language backgrounds whose primary and secondary education and socialization did not take place in English.” Inevitably, compilers of such a corpus have to give serious consideration to the notion of competence: the expression, “fairly fluent speakers”, raises questions as to how speakers might qualify for inclusion in the corpus in relation to competence. Seidlhofer (2003, p.23) concludes that we should relinquish “the elusive goal of native-speaker competence” and embrace “the emergent realistic goal of intercultural competence achieved through a plurilingualism that integrates rather than ostracizes EIL”. She (2003, p.16) draws on Jenkins’ notion of a “*Lingua Franca Core*”. Jenkins (2000, in Seidlhofer, p.18) designates “th-sounds and the ‘dark l’ as “non-core”. So-called ‘errors’ in the area of syntax that occupy a great deal of teaching time, often to little effect such as “‘dropping’ the third person present tense –s” are also considered unproblematic for *lingua franca* communication.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to raise some of the key issues in relation to competence and the emerging field of EIL as a stimulus for further debate in the pages of this journal. Proposing what to include rather than what to exclude might prove to be the most helpful approach for promoting the potentially invaluable insights that corpora can provide. Otherwise, a notion of competence that emphasizes “less” rather than “more” might filter down into the world’s classrooms as a justification that “anything goes” providing that it ‘communicates’: a position that has frequently been described to misrepresent communicative teaching in the past.

In spite of concerns about standards that such notions of a reduced “core” might appear to embody, projects that aim at gathering corpora of ELF among expanding circle speakers have an enormous long-term potential for providing invaluable data in several areas. They can enhance our knowledge of intercultural communication by allowing us to examine the operation of intercultural communication in a real-life situation of linguistic equality between participants. They can also provide invaluable linguistic knowledge to draw on for syllabus designers. The problem for most syllabus designers is not what to *exclude*, but what to *include* and it is by emphasizing what we can most usefully *include* that such corpora are likely to provide the most long-term benefits. It has taken many years for now established corpora such as the Bank of English to produce tangible pedagogical results in the form of user-friendly materials designed at improving competence in real language use based on the notion of native-like competence. English used for International Communication involves multiple competences, “more” rather than “less”, and English as a *Lingua Franca* is a reality that is as yet under-researched and merits increased attention in a supportive and non-polemic atmosphere.

At the same time, it is becoming increasingly urgent to consider in more depth what exactly we mean when we refer to competence in relation to EIL education. The long debate over the last thirty years about the role of linguistic competence in so-called communicative teaching has often concluded that *linguistic* competence has been neglected. This paper has contended that there is an increased potential for neglecting *linguistic competence* to an even greater extent in the field of EIL.

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## **The Kinds of Forms Learners Attend to During Focus on Form Instruction: A Description of an Advanced ESL Writing Class**

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**Keywords:** Focus on form instruction, grammar instruction, group work, English as a second language, English as a foreign language, vocabulary learning

### **Abstract**

*Many studies have attempted to exam the efficacy of focus on form instruction. However, few studies have described focus on form instruction as defined by Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998). Such a description is necessary in order for EFL/ESL instructors and curriculum designers to discover whether or not focus on form instruction can address the types of forms their students need to learn. Thus, the purpose of the following study was to describe the types of forms that learners attend to when focus on form instruction is used. Participants were 19 international students studying in an advanced ESL writing class in a large United States university. The majority of forms they attended to were lexical in nature, of which most involved the meanings of words. A discussion of the efficacy of focus on form instruction concludes that focus on form instruction may not be valuable for L2 grammatical growth, yet offers opportunities for lexical growth, especially with advanced learners.*

### **Focus on Form Instruction**

#### **Theoretical and Practical Bases**

In terms of how to teach grammar, the world of foreign/second language teaching methodology has often found itself endorsing extreme positions. On the one hand, form-centered approaches such as Grammar-Translation and the Audiolingual Method were strictly adhered to until the 1970s. On the other hand, the highly communicative framework seen in instructional innovations such as the Natural Approach (Terrell and Krashen, 1983) dominated textbooks for most of the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, an alternative to both extremes arose in the shape of *focus on form instruction* (Long, 1991; Long and Robinson, 1998). Long (1991) originally coined focus on form instruction as a term referring to the intermittent, temporary, and explicit oral concentration by teachers and students on problematic grammatical—as well as lexical— items during communicative interaction. The term was later advanced by Long and Robinson (1998) to comprise more specific concepts such as ‘focal attentional resources’ and ‘linguistic

code features': "Focus on form refers to how focal attentional resources are allocated...Focus on form consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features—by the teacher and/or more students—triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23). In focus on form instruction, the syllabus remains communicative, with no preplanned L2 forms to be learned in any specific lesson or in any special order. However, when a form is perceived to be problematic, the teacher and/or other learners may address it explicitly in a variety of ways, such as through direct error correction, rule explanation, modeling, and drilling, to name a few. An example of such a mode of instruction would involve group work by advanced ESL students in a university writing class. While collectively writing a small group essay, one student makes an error with the third-person singular while explaining a concept and/or idea. His/her peer(s) elects to directly correct the error and reminds her of the rule governing subject-verb agreement. The learner who originally made the error may then elect to correctly repeat the recasted form, which is known as *uptake*, (Lyster and Ranta, 1997) or negotiate the form's meaning and/or use with their interlocutor(s). Alternatively, a teacher may be asking students general comprehension questions to the whole classroom. A student misuses a vocabulary term, and the teacher decides to immediately correct the error, explain why the student made the error, and model its correct usage.

This instructional development--focus on form instruction--has arisen for two principle reasons, as noted by Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001). First of all, there was a need to balance the rote, form-centered, and generally non-communicative type of instruction seen in traditional methods with communicative approaches. While focus on form instruction leans more towards the latter due to its core emphasis on authentic communication, it validates the occasional incorporation of non-communicative elements during instruction due to the fact that teachers' experiences have revealed that repetition, drilling, and error correction can aid in learning. A second reason why focus on form arose is due to Swain's (1995) contention that while receiving 'comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1985) is beneficial to L2 acquisition, learners also need to use forms correctly—difficult ones, in particular—in order to acquire them. According to Swain (1995), when output is forced, learners must explicitly analyze forms, which will not only expose their errors that others may correct, but will also help them automatize particularly difficult forms. Focus on form instruction encourages students to use language not only in order to practice and automatize structures, but also so that the teacher, as well as other learners, may be able to identify learners' errors and form-based difficulties in order to help learners overcome them.

### **Conceptual and Classroom Difficulties**

While focus on form instruction has been a much discussed instructional innovation (DeKeyser, 1998; Doughty and Verela, 1998; Ellis, 2001; Lightbown, 1998), it contains several conceptual and practical constraints (see Sheen 2000, 2003 for more extensive reviews of constraints associated with focus on form instruction). Perhaps the greatest drawback of focus on form instruction is that while it has been extensively studied in experimental and quasi-experimental research, little research has been done in order to describe how learners focus on form using Long (1991) and Long and Robinson's (1998) original conception of the term—i.e., form should be attended to on a need-to-know basis

in a spontaneous manner, forms to focus on should not be pre-planned and sequentially presented, and forms should be attended to within meaning-driven situations. As previously noted (Poole, 2004, 2005), curriculum designers and teachers cannot reasonably estimate whether or not focus on form instruction will help their students' L2 grammatical and lexical development without such a description. Williams' (1999) study of focus on form instruction in group work stands out among the few that have attempted to describe Long (1991) and Long and Robinson's (1998) conception of focus on form instruction.

Among other things, Williams' study (1999) illustrated the types of forms to which learners attended. The participants, who were eight ESL students studying at an English language institute housed in a large North American university, were put into one of four pairs depending on their proficiency level, which ranged from upper-level beginners to those almost ready for regular undergraduate academic coursework. Williams (1999) tape-recorded students for 45-minute intervals for an eight-week period during which they engaged in a variety of communicative activities.

Focus on form instruction was conceptualized by Williams (1999) through Swain's (1998) and Swain and Lapkin's (1995) notion of language-related episodes (LREs). Specifically, LREs involve "...discourse in which the learners talk or ask about language, or question, explicitly or implicitly, their own language use or that of others. Language use might include the meaning, spelling, or pronunciation of a word, the choice of grammatical inflection, word order, and so on" (Williams, 1999, p. 595). According to Williams, the emergence of an LRE indicated that learners had focused on form.

Williams (1999) identified five kinds of LREs discovered in learners' discourse: learner-initiated requests to other learners; learner-initiated requests to the teacher; metatalk; negotiation; and other correction. The first, learner-initiated requests to other learners, are direct questions from one learner to another. Learner-initiated questions to the teacher are similar to learner-initiated requests to other learners, yet differ in that questions are directed to teachers instead of peers. The next type of LRE, metatalk, concerns two or more learners focusing on a particular form in order to arrive at a shared understanding of some concept larger than the actual form itself. Negotiation differs from metatalk precisely in that discussion is aimed at clarifying communicative difficulties caused by the misunderstanding of a grammatical or lexical form. Lastly, other correction is a process by which another learner or the teacher perceives an error and proceeds to correct it, yet does so without solicitation from the learner who committed the error.

The results showed that most LREs were concerned with vocabulary (80%) rather than with grammar (20%). Since most LREs were lexically based, most of the content of LREs had to do with the meanings and forms of words. In the advanced group, definitions (62%), pronunciation (26%), word form (8%), and preposition choice (4%) were the foci of lexically based LREs. In grammatically-based LREs, the advanced group most frequently focused on tense choice (37.5%), followed by word order (15.5%), articles (15.5%), tense form (10.5%), agreement (10.5%), and other (10.5%). Similar results choices were seen in the other proficiency levels.

As stated by Poole (2004), Williams' (1999) study offers insight into the content of the forms learners attend to, yet it is limited by the small number of participants in each proficiency level, which prohibits forming general pictures of how focus on form instruction functions at a certain proficiency level. Another limitation is that the study took place in an intensive English language institute in the United States. Such a setting is problematic for two reasons. First, the focus of English language institutes is language. Thus, it is highly doubtful that all activities deemed to be communicative were communicative in the respect that they did not aim to have students focus on particular forms. Williams even concedes that the program contained an element of explicit grammar teaching. In addition, ESL/EFL materials, while claiming to be "communicative" or even "highly communicative," are very frequently designed around the learning of grammatical items, even if such items are contextualized. Such activities, by definition, are not communicative in the spontaneous way that Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) deem that they need to be in order for focus on form instruction to be carried out. If teachers and curriculum designers in both ESL and EFL settings are to endorse and incorporate focus on form instruction into their pedagogical agendas, they should be aware of how it functions as stipulated by Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998), even if the circumstances under which it is described are currently dissimilar to their own.

Thus, the purpose of the study reported here, which was part of a more extensive investigation of focus on form instruction (Poole, 2003, 2004), was to expand on Williams' (1999) original study, yet using learners from one general proficiency level who were engaged in communicative activities. More specifically, the aim of the study was to describe the content of the forms that learners attend to, and by doing so, help ESL/EFL teachers and curriculum designers better determine whether or not focus on form instruction is likely to address their students' form-based needs. The specific question used to investigate this study was as follows:

### **What do the forms learners attend to consist of in terms of their content?**

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Setting**

The setting was an advanced college ESL writing class at a large university in the Midwestern United States. The focus of the class was on six major writing assignments. Thus, most instruction was devoted to developing areas such as thesis statements, body paragraphs, topic sentences, conclusions, unity, and coherence. In addition to writing, the class was also designed to foster vocabulary development, improve reading skills, and familiarize students with cultures other than their own. These goals were met in part by requiring students to engage in group work, which is discussed below.

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of 19 ESL learners (7 females, 12 males) between the ages of 18 and 33 who had studied English between 1 and 10 years or more, the average being 21.7

years. Most participants were from South and East Asian countries, and had only studied in the United States for less than 1 year, although one had been studying in the United States for 5 years at the time of the study. Participants spoke a large variety of first languages including: Japanese (3), Taiwanese (1), Turkish (1), Korean (3), Nepali (3), Urdu (2), Indian English (1), Mandarin Chinese (1), Hindi (2), Malay (1), and Arabic (1). A questionnaire given out at the beginning of the study revealed that very few learners had experienced communicative teaching during previous English instruction, most of which had been at the high school level. In contrast, most learners reported having learned English through traditional methods such as teacher-led lectures, memorization, and repetition. Thus, the focus on form instruction that they were exposed to in the following study was something they had not experienced, at least during the bulk of their instruction.

Learners were divided into five groups consisting of four members each, the exception being one group that consisted of three participants (See Table 1). The teacher in this class—who held advanced degrees in teaching ESL and several years of teaching experience— put participants into groups of four and three in order to ensure that they would not disperse into smaller groups within groups. In his experience, groups with five or more participants had broken into subgroups because of the difficulty in being heard in large groups. At the same time, he felt that groups consisting of dyads could have resulted in one group member doing most of the work, thus discouraging active participation by all students. Additionally, groups were formed to be linguistically diverse in order to prevent learners from using their first language, instead of English, when encountering form-based difficulties. Finally, the classroom teacher's role was that of moderator and organizer, and thus he only intervened when he noticed problems concerning directions. However, he helped students with grammatical and lexical forms when requested, although this only happened once. Therefore, focus on form instruction here was largely student-generated.

**Table 1**

Description of Learners

Name	Group	Country	Age	Major	Yrs Study	Yr US
Barb	1	China	33	Accounting	6	5
Yumi	1	Japan	18	Engineering	5	1
Vipul	1	India	25	Computer Science	10	3
Rashid	1	Oman	24	Computer Science	5	1
Yung	2	Korea	25	MIS	8	2
Will	2	Cameron	22	Computer Science	10	1
Alp	2	Turkey	21	Engineering	4	1
Shashi	2	Nepal	19	Engineering	10	1
Yasu	3	Japan	19	Aviation	1	1
Risa	3	Japan	19	Undecided	7	1

Askar	3	Pakistan	19	Computer Science	10	1
Pooya	3	Nepal	19	Biology	10	1
Bruce	4	Taiwan	26	Engineering	3	1
Kim	4	Korea	18	Undecided	6	1.5
Asit	4	Nepal	19	Computer Science	6	1
Adeel	4	India	18	Finance	10	1
Park	5	Korea	26	Aviation	10	1
Daniel	5	Malaysia	23	Computer Science	1	1
Neru	5	Zambia	19	Engineering	10	1

### Materials

The group activities that students engaged in primarily revolved around questions and small essays based on readings from *Applying Cultural Anthropology: An Introductory Reader* (Podolefsky and Brown, 2001), which was the required text. The text is for introductory anthropology courses and is not specifically intended for English language learners. In addition, students constructed short essays based on supplementary materials. Students engaged in a total of eight group activities (See Appendix A for a sample activity).

Students received credit for participation in activities, yet were not specifically graded on their grammatical and lexical performance within them. In fact, no materials were used that were designed to focus on specific L2 grammatical and lexical forms; instead, such forms were to be addressed by learners and their peers when difficulties became apparent, as focus on form instruction calls for (Long, 1991; Long and Robinson, 1998). However, an explicit aim of the group activities was to prepare students for their individual essays by giving them the schematic knowledge necessary for writing them. For example: In activity five (see Appendix A), learners were required to read essays about ritualistic behavior in the United States and China, answer comprehension questions about them, and describe another type of ritualistic behavior they had witnessed in the United States. Students later wrote individual essays describing a ritualistic behavior in their native cultures.

### Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of 10 weeks. Students typically engaged in group activities on a weekly basis, although there were no activities during weeks five and eight because of other class requirements. In total, 9 hours of data were collected from twelve 45-minute sessions, during which time students were tape-recorded.

### Data Treatment and Analysis

Tapes of student interaction were analyzed for LRE categories and content by two readers. In transcribing the LREs, Swain (1998) and Swain and Lapkin's (1995) conception of the term was used to guide the study. More specifically, the five LREs categories established by Williams were used to identify how students attended to form: (1) learner-initiated requests to other learners (2) learner-initiated questions to the



teacher; (3) negotiation; (4) metatalk; (5) and other correction. “Content” refers to the specific lexical and grammatical types of LREs. More specifically, lexically-based LREs concerned the meaning, usage, spelling, and pronunciation of individual words. Grammatically-based LREs, on the other hand, involved items whose focus was morphological or syntactical in nature.

In order to identify Williams’ (1999) LRE categories, the first reader listened to the tapes and transcribed those sections in which he thought that they had appeared. Students were regarded as participating in an LRE when they overtly exchanged information with one or more interlocutors about an English grammatical or lexical form. LREs were considered to be finished when either the content of specific items were explicitly agreed upon or when the participants ceased to verbally address them. In the example below, Neru is talking to Park about the meaning of the word *ecosystem*; at first, the latter does not understand the term, and thus negotiates with the former. Park signals his comprehension of the term by the use of the word *okay*, and the pair ceases to discuss it.

Neru: Where’s the part on the *ecosystem*?

Park: *Ecosystem*?

Neru: Ya, you know what the *ecosystem* is?

Park: No.

Neru: *Ecosystem*. *Ecosystem* is like you know ah, big fish eating small fish, small fish, eating plant, like that, *ecosystem*.

Park: Like plant.

Neru: Ya, for example: When it’s hot, then water evaporates from oceans, then clouds are created. That is like an *ecosystem*, okay, where everything is stabilized. The same in water, ocean is an *ecosystem* with big fish, big fish eat small fish, small fish eat plant okay?

Park: Okay.

The tapes were not transcribed from beginning to end; rather, individual LREs were recorded verbatim. Then, two to three days later, the first reader would return to the transcription to confirm that he had correctly identified the categories and content for that particular day. This was done in order to make sure that rater fatigue and lapses in attention did not cause incorrect data analyses, and not because of any fundamental problems in identifying LRE categories and content. If the first reader had incorrectly identified an LRE category the first time, he would try to correctly identify it and then return to it two to three days later. If the identity of the LRE category was still ambiguous, it was eliminated from the data set, yet this happened with less than 5% of the original set of LREs. The content of all LREs was correctly classified during initial identification, and thus subsequent re-identification was not necessary.

After the first reader completed the item-identification, a second reader trained to identify LREs analyzed the first reader’s identifications. Those LREs that the second reader deemed to be erroneously identified were debated until agreement about their make-up could be achieved. All disagreements revolved around LRE categories and not their content. There were no LREs that were removed from the data pool because of identification disagreements. Other data that were excluded involved those potential

LREs that were marginally intelligible due to excessive background noise, student pronunciation, or recording problems. Frequencies were tallied for LRE categories and content. Since the purpose of this paper is to discuss the content of the forms learners attended to, the categories of LREs they initiated will not be reported here. Those results can be found in Poole (2004).

## Results

### What do the forms learners attend to consist of in terms of their content?

The results indicated that out of 108 individual forms, 97 (89.8%) involved vocabulary, while 11 (10.2%) involved morphosyntax (see Table 2). While there was some variation among groups, the range of the proportion of vocabulary to morphosyntax in groups ranged from 83.3%/16.7% (Group 2) to 94.7%/5.3% (Group 5). Thus, all groups disproportionately focused on vocabulary instead of grammar. Out of 108 individual forms, 64 (59.2%) were concerned with meaning, followed by pronunciation (19-17.6%), spelling (12-11.1%), tense (4-3.7%), noun-plural (3-2.8%), word choice (2-1.9%), adjective form (2-1.9%), agreement (1-.9%), and voice (1-.9%). More specifically, of the 11 LREs that involved grammar, 4 (3.7%) dealt with tense, 3 (2.8%) with plural nouns, 2 (2.8%) with adjective form, 1 (.9%) with subject-verb agreement, and 1 (.9%) with voice. Of those LREs that dealt with vocabulary, 64 (59.2%) dealt with meaning, followed by pronunciation (19-17.6%), spelling (12-11.1%), and word choice (2-1.9%) (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

**Types of Forms**

Group	Grammar	Vocabulary	Total
1	4 10%	36 90%	40 100%
2	2 16.7%	10 83.3%	12 100%
3	2 14.3%	12 85.7%	14 100%
4	2 8.7%	21 91.3%	23 100%
5	1 5.3%	18 94.7%	19 100%
Total	11 10.2%	97 89.8%	108 100%

**Table 3**

**Content of Forms**

Content	Frequency	Percent
Meaning (V)	64	59.2
Pronunciation (V)	19	17.6
Spelling (V)	12	11.1
Tense (G)	4	3.7
Plural Nouns (G)	3	2.8
Adjective Form (V)	2	1.9
Word Choice (V)	2	1.9
Subject-Verb Agreement (G)	1	.9
Voice (G)	1	.9
Total	108	100

Key: V=Vocabulary; G=Grammar

As seen in Table 4, at least 45% of the LREs in each group were concerned with meaning. For all groups, no individual grammar-focused LRE was attended to more than any one lexically-oriented LRE.

Table 4  
**Content of Forms within Groups**

Group	M	T	P	PN	S	WC	A	V	AF	TO
1	26	2	7	1	3	0	1	0	0	40

% in group	65	5	17.5	2.5	7.5	0	2.5	0	0	100
2	7	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	12
% in group	58.4	8.3	16.7	8.3	0	8.3	0	0	0	100
3	8	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	14
% in group	57.3	0	21.4	7.1	7.1	0	0	0	7.1	100
4	11	0	4	0	5	1	0	1	1	23
% in group	48	0	17.4	0	21.7	4.3	0	4.3	4.3	100
5	12	1	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	19
% in group	63.1	5.3	15.8	0	15.8	0	0	0	0	100
Total	64	4	19	3	12	2	1	1	2	108
% of total	59.2	3.7	17.6	2.8	11.1	1.9	.9	.9	1.9	100

Key: M=Meaning; T=Tense; P=Pronunciation; PN=Plural Nouns; S=Spelling; WC=Word Choice; A=Subject-Verb Agreement; V=Voice; AF=Adjective Form; TO=Total

### Discussion

While there were some differences between this study and that of Williams (1999) in terms of design and results, both were very similar in that the vast majority of forms learners attended to was lexical in nature. While such a finding is interesting in and of itself, the more important issue regards whether or not focus on form instruction sufficiently exposes students to the forms they need to learn. Even though such determinations should be made by curriculum designers, teachers, and learners themselves, the results in this study suggest that focus on form instruction has the possibility for being most beneficial for learning vocabulary. Grammar, on the other hand, was infrequently focused on, relatively speaking, not only in this study, but also in Williams' (1999). This fact implies that learners are either unable and/or unwilling to explicitly focus on grammar, thereby supporting Sheen's (2003) contention that *focus on forms instruction* (Long and Robinson, 1998), or the intentional and preplanned emphasis on certain forms within a communicative context, offers a better hope for addressing advanced English language learners' grammatical needs in a contextualized fashion than does *focus on form instruction*. Such a conclusion is further warranted by taking into consideration the context in which this study took place. More specifically, the class was relatively small, the teacher was a highly trained ESL practitioner fluent in English, and the students were multilingual and experienced English language learners. In many US-based university ESL classes—e.g., instructional settings in which English is the primary language of the local population and regularly used in all facets of communication (Anderson, 2003)—such characteristics, while by no means universal, are quite common, and are thus, in theory, more likely to provide frequent opportunities for peer/peer-teacher interaction and opportunities for learners to spontaneously attend to form. Moreover, they increase the likelihood that focus on form instruction will be correctly implemented, and diminish occasions for students to use their L1 while encountering

communicative difficulties, since many will not share the same one. However, as witnessed in the present study, students rarely attended to L2 grammatical forms.

However, before wide-reaching conclusions about focus on form instruction can be made, more of such studies need to be done using learners across proficiency levels and in multiple instructional settings. In addition, future studies should investigate the cultural, affective, and proficiency-related factors that contribute to learners' decision to focus or not to focus on form. By doing so, researchers and teachers may be better able to foster conditions under which learners will focus more frequently on form. Lastly, researchers should investigate whether or not more focus on form leads to more acquisition of L2 grammar and vocabulary. This last issue is most critical, for no matter how often it exposes students to forms, the true value of focus on form instruction lies in its ability to increase the quantity and quality of second language acquisition.

Finally, many ESL teachers from the West still stereotype Asian students, regardless of country of origin, as docile, passive, and dependent on the teacher (Kennedy, 2002), and thus may feel that such learners are not capable of using highly communicative approaches such as focus on form instruction. However, in this study, students proved to be comfortable working in groups and reaching out to their peers with their lexical and, to a lesser degree, grammatical concerns. Such results should discourage current and future teachers from withholding focus on form instruction and other innovative techniques because of their supposed cultural incompatibility. Instead, they should serve as evidence that Asian students have the potential to be highly autonomous learners.

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## Appendix A

English 1123  
Question: Ch 10, 37

Instructor:

Task I: Briefly answer the following comprehension questions. As usual, one person should record all answers.

1. What food is the centerpiece of Chinese meals?
2. Is eating alone in Hong Kong good or bad? Explain.
3. How many deaths are annually caused in the United States by postoperative infections?
4. Name two elaborate rituals that take place in the operating room.

Task II: Give a brief answer to the following statement: Eating and surgery are two areas of life that are very ritualistic. Name one American ritual or routine you have observed. Describe it. As usual, another person should record this task.

## **Does an Open Forum Promote Learning Among Students? A Collaborative-Learning Approach**

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### **Biography:**

Dr. Anson Yang is Head of the Department of English and Chair of Language Development Committee at Pui Ching Middle School, Hong Kong. He has taught literature and TESL courses at universities in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States. His research interests also lie in classroom cultures and student learning profiles. Alex Chan, Nick Ho, and Bonnie Tam are teaching in the newly-established Department of Integrated Humanities. They are qualified teachers in Business Writing, Mass Communication, and English in Hong Kong.

### **Abstract**

*This paper investigates how students responded to each other in an e-Community learning situation. Forty students, at two levels, were invited to respond to five questions regarding the Legislative Council election 2004 posted on the school forum. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to see if students enjoyed the discussion with peers and casual browsers. It has been concluded that students find the forum discussion useful toward their formal curriculum. However, there have been concerns regarding the objectivity of casual browsers. Students need to be on the alert when receiving information through the Internet and other media, and understand that not everything printed or broadcast is official, factual, and accurate.*

### **1. Introduction**

The education reforms in Hong Kong in the last decade have seen drastic changes. The government has been promoting a greater use of information technologies. The general public is now taught to use E-mail; computer stations are seen in all public and government facilities to encourage electronic communications and transactions. All these are done in addition to the formal education teenagers receive at school. Another major curriculum is the talk of perhaps reducing the secondary education to six years. This means classes will have to be re-grouped. A new subject is in preparation: integrated humanities, a course which in some ways resembles liberal studies, includes lessons of Hong Kong society, development of modern China, and personal development. All these modules aim at training students to be more aware of their immediate environment and get to understand themselves more. The course is being piloted in a handful of schools; it will become a major required component in secondary curriculum in a few years' time.



The new Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations (HKCEE, a public examination at Grade 11) course was implemented in September 2003; ten secondary schools in Hong Kong opted for this course, nine of which conduct the course in Chinese, one in English. Because of the critical thinking/world knowledge-based nature of the course, some schools allow only the more able students to take the course. In addition to reading and discussion for classes, students are expected to show interest in major world and local issues. Students are also encouraged to do research on their own. The research includes reading extensively, writing to the newspaper, and discussing curriculum-related issues in an e-Community.

This paper investigates how students responded to each other in the e-Community. It aims at finding how useful students consider discussing and communicating subject-related issues with classmates and other occasional browsers electronically. Thirty-nine students, at two levels, were invited to respond to five questions in English regarding the Legislative Council (Legco) election 2004 posted on the school forum. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to see if students enjoyed the discussion with peers and casual browsers. It is expected that students find the forum discussion useful toward their formal curriculum. However, there have been concerns regarding the objectivity of casual browsers. Students need to be on the alert when receiving information through the Internet and other media, and understand that not everything printed or broadcast is official, factual, and accurate.

## **2. Literature review**

Students learn more effectively when they learn through their own initiatives. When their learning styles are matched with appropriate approaches in teaching, then their motivation, performances, and achievements will increase and be enhanced (Brown, 1994). In various situations, teachers employ different strategies and instruments in class. Although these instruments differ, they share the goal of identifying the nature of human differences in learning and improving the effectiveness of teaching/learning by providing criteria for individualizing instruction (Ketchum, 1987).

Kinsella (1996) argued that students who have stronger verbal/analytical faculties may only have access to the traditional teaching model - listening to lectures, reading textbooks, and completing writing assignments. But they are not necessarily developing the right-brain strengths that are crucial for problem solving and creativity. Therefore, it has been pointed out that lessons may be presented both visually and verbally, and reinforced through various motivating language activities such as reflective reading and writing. In this way, students can learn in ways that best suit their styles and develop their modality strengths (Kroonenberg, 1995).

Research has also shown that matching learning styles have a positive impact on students' achievements, interests, and motivation (Smith and Renzulli, 1984). Dunn et al. (1979), Wesche (1981), and Sein and Robey (1991) found that the potential interaction between learning styles and teaching approaches indicate that students' performances can be enhanced by adapting the instructional methods to individual differences in learning styles.

It is evident that people learn differently and at different paces because of their biological and psychological differences (Reiff, 1992). Clearly, learning styles include not only the cognitive domain, but also the affective and physiological domains (Oxford et al, 1992). But even one learning style is multidimensional (Kinsella, 1996), and a particular learning style may be founded on assumption. Assumption research on learning styles is based on the assumption that learners receive information through their senses, and prefer some senses to others in specific situations (O'Brien, 1989; Oxford and Ehrman, 1993; Kroonenberg, 1995).

Oxford (1990) posited that while presenting materials, teachers should provide colorful and motivating activities, personalized self-reflection tasks, some form of cooperative learning, and powerful learning strategies to encourage self-direction in learning. However, it is generally agreed that it is difficult for teachers to keep all the learners actively engaged in the learning process and learning at the same pace (Wrigley and Guth, 1992). With these findings in mind, this project aims at finding how useful students consider discussing and communicating subject-related issues with classmates and occasional browsers electronically.

### **3. Procedures**

The research was conducted in September and October 2004 among 39 Form 4 and 5 (Grades 10-11) English elite students whose mother tongue is Cantonese, a Chinese dialect commonly used in Hong Kong. The school is considered one of the best Chinese-medium-of-instruction middle schools, that is, all subjects are taught in students' mother tongue, except the English lessons, and the newly implemented integrated humanities course. Students receive seven 40-minute English lessons per cycle, translated as approximately 250 minutes of classroom contact time every week. The integrated humanities class meets for three 40-minute lessons per cycle. Both courses at the same level are conducted by the same teachers through the team-teaching mode. These teachers have a diverse education background; they received their first degree in Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Taiwan, in fields such as Journalism, Economics, Speech and Communication, and English. Students have been assigned to the elite class because their English grades were at the top rung in the final examination in the previous academic year.

One topic in the core module is on the legislative system in Hong Kong. In mid-September 2004, a large scale Legislative Council election for office for the years 2004-2008 was conducted. Naturally, the election campaigns and the election-related issues became lecture and discussion materials. In particular, students were lectured on (a) channels of political participation in Hong Kong, (b) equal opportunities in political participation, (c) one country, two systems, and (d) effectiveness of the government (CDI, 2004).

Students did extensive reading and discussion in every lesson; they wrote a 400-word essay every other cycle. In addition, the teachers posted five course-related discussion topics on the school forum for members of the e-Community to respond to. Students in the course were asked to post and respond to messages there. Class discussion sessions

were mostly done in small groups after the teacher's initial instructions and lectures. Sessions for each module were well spread out over two months in order to accommodate other areas of the regular curriculum, and to allow time for student writing.

Evaluations were done through four instruments. Upon completion, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire (Appendix 1) with 20 items on a modified Likert-scale (1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree) on the activity, what they had learnt, their learning attitudes, and how the activity promoted collaborative learning. Students were also asked to respond freely to other aspects not addressed in the questionnaire. They were invited randomly to attend comment sessions where open-ended questions were asked regarding the activity and their language attitudes. Teachers' observation contributed to the qualitative input of the writing up of this paper.

#### 4. Analysis and discussion

The five questions posted on the forum received very enthusiastic responses from Integrated Humanities students, schoolmates, and casual browsers. The last entry was made on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2004:

No.	Question	Responses	Hits
1	How can election campaigns be more environmentally friendly?	85	1090
2	Why should voters dutifully participate in the Legco election?	78	867
3	Does personal conduct of a Legco member reflect his/her quality of work and integrity?	68	788
4	Should there be universal suffrage for the Legco election?	72	783
5	How can understanding political issues help teenagers become responsible citizens?	72	796

Table 1: Numeric data of questions and responses

Table 1 shows the questions posted on the forum, the total number of responses as of 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2004, and the number of hits. The number of responses includes the actual questions, and two to five encouraging statements from the teachers, inviting more students to present their opinions. The number of hits indicates the number that the questions have been browsed.

Thirty-six students completed the questionnaires:

Item	Mean	R
20. I will try my best to offer objective comments to forum responses.	3.25	1
13. The activities allowed more time for critical thinking.	3.22	2
17. Teachers allowed us more freedom in voicing our opinions online.	3.03	3
1. I have learnt more about our government in this activity.	3.00	4.5
11. I have learnt some new language items in this series of activities.	3.00	4.5

8. I will continue to read English newspapers on a regular basis.	2.94	6.5
9. In these activities, I learnt to provide comments objectively.	2.94	6.5
6. In these activities, I found that reading forum messages is educational.	2.92	8
12. I hope there will be more activities of this kind in English lessons.	2.89	9
4. The series of online activities is an authentic learning experience.	2.81	10
5. I like this series of activities better than the textbook lessons.	2.78	11
18. I value others' comments in these activities.	2.75	12.5
19. I am ready to discuss political issues openly with my peers in future.	2.75	12.5
7. I will continue to write on the forum for issues I care about.	2.72	14
15. This series of online activities improves my language proficiency.	2.64	15
2. I am happy to comment on the responses posted.	2.61	16
3. The responses really concern most members in the society.	2.58	17
10. I feel that writers of messages really care about the issues posted.	2.56	18
14. I have always enjoyed reading social issue articles.	2.50	19
16. Classmates' messages are more useful than strangers'.	2.06	20

Table 2: Questionnaire responses ranked (R)

Table 2 shows the means of the 20-statement questionnaires and the ranking. The first five items show that students supported the idea of sharing opinions electronically. All 36 students agreed that they would continue to try their best to offer objective comments to forum responses (item 20, ranked 1). Although the questions posted were open-ended, they were related to the course materials; thus, they required students to do some researching, reading and thinking before responding. In many cases, classroom discussion fails to allow time, and room, for students to consider proper responses. Browsing on the forum, students were allowed time needed to provide a response most representative (item 13, ranked 2). In addition, students not only provide a response, but also read others' before they comment. These comments were the basis of collaborative learning in and outside of the classroom.

Since most students responded on their own time, that is, outside of the classroom setting, teachers' supervision was minimal. In a way, students understood they could reply in any fashion they wanted responsibly. In some cases, even if their responses deviated from the main discussion, they would not be sneered at because of the nature of the forum (item 17, ranked 3). Thus, a more critical thinking faculty was promoted, and more sub-discussions were allowed to provide for further use. These kinds of replies would not be possible in a day-to-day classroom environment. Not only were students exposed to this new mode of learning, but they also learned more about course-related government issues (item 1, ranked 4.5). Although students could have learnt most issues from class materials, the responses they obtained from senior form students or casual browsers were invaluable. The latter ones provide insights absent from the textbooks; these insights could very well be first time experience with government policies. This also explains why students thought that classmates' messages are not necessarily more useful than strangers' (item 16, ranked 20). This could be an example of collaborative learning.

Subjects in this school are among the very few who received the integrated humanities class in English, despite its Chinese middle school status. The principal of the school, on various occasions, had emphasized the importance for students to improve their English. In fact, the two courses, English and integrated humanities, complemented each other. Therefore, it is little surprise that students ranked the language input high (items 11 and 8, ranked 4.5 and 6); they agreed that they learnt new language items. In addition, they realized the importance of reading English newspapers. It seems that they would continue to read it regularly.

The last five items in Table 2 provided equally interesting discussion for this paper. These 36 students “had to” take the course because they were considered the *crème de la crème* of the school. No doubt, they thought they were coerced into studying, going online, or even responding to the questionnaires. In which case, they expressed a certain dissatisfaction of commenting online (item 2, ranked 16). They did not see immediate need in participating in government policies, although they might have to learn the content for HKCEE. In other words, they did not feel that the issues posted concerned most members in society (item 3, ranked 17). In some way, that the very nature of browsing and writing responses on the forum might help students study in the course creates explicit reason for them: they might not really care about the issues, but they had to, for various reasons (items 10, 14, ranked 18, 19). However, it is worth noting that none of the responses falls out of a 2.00 mean. This perhaps indicates favorable comments on the students’ part toward the series of activities.

Despite the compulsory nature of the course, students still found it favorable to do the series of activities. In many ways, Chinese students have been branded as submissive and passive. The compulsory nature of the course may enhance collaborative learning, despite the absence of group project work in this course. Students were asked to pull their knowledge together, pick each other’s brains, provide insights, and form their own opinions. To this end, the forum activities seemed to serve these purposes. The forum allows students to learn from each other and to consider others’ comments. These may be done in a classroom setting, but the e-Community provides a boundary-free environment regarding time and space. Students can learn from peers, even when peers are not immediately available.

Thirty students provided free responses in the questionnaires. In spite of the compulsory nature of the course, 26 of them commented positively while four of them indicated their discontent of the compulsory nature of the course, and a waste of time of reading irrelevant online replies. Among the positive ones, some of them commented on the ownership and the sharing in a public forum. Although writing on the forum resembled submitting homework to teachers, the passages were read by peers who may or may not be students of the same school. Students commented that they were more careful in responding lest they might invite verbal attacks from casual browsers. Others commented that responding on the forum on their own time offered them a “stress-free” experience: first, they could join in a discussion anytime they wanted and there was not a deadline; second, they could revise or delete their opinion for the discussion which would always be online open to public without a time limitation, whereas a face-to-face

discussion would inevitably end and revision of comments would not be possible; third, students might use stronger language which they would not normally use or be acceptable in a face-to-face discussion (for example, *I could not believe people would offer such a crazy idea*), students could also compliment each other for offering sensible and similar opinions (for example, *I think your comments are nicely put, glad to see such creative ideas and support for the government*). The varieties of learning styles and affective needs were seen on online forum. Some of the free responses were listed below:

- *The activity [has been] interesting, but I don't like the course to be compulsory.*
- *Learning issues is good, and reading newspaper is good, too. But I can do it on my own time.*
- *I learn some language items from reading the replies.*
- *I [didn't] realize that I could learn from students other than classmates. The Forum has provided me [with] a new way to study.*
- *There are many replies, not all are useful. I learn to think critically on what has been put online.*

The interviews and teachers' observations confirmed some of the remarks made above. In particular, students considered class discussion quick and personal, while discussion on the e-Community could be more comprehensive. Students agreed that they spent more time reading others' replies; in a way, that was input which would not normally be obtained in a classroom setting. They were glad to see others having their same opinions; that confirmed positively on what they had been studying. In the interviews, three students discussed the differences between critical thinking and having a different opinion. They commented that even though they might have the same ideas as others, as long as they exercised their own judgments and weighed strengths and weaknesses of the worthy replies, their consideration of the issue became more comprehensive. A student commented that this experience was a lot different from the top-down lecture given by teachers in which little thinking was required; he only needed to regurgitate teachers' notes in the exam. However, students also said that they were always lured to browse through other subject forums after working on the one at hand; that also took up a lot of their leisure time.

Teachers' classroom observation and online monitoring corresponded to each other well. Students' in-class discussion showed that they had been participating on the forum activities; some in-class comments were based on the forum discussion. The online monitoring posted a bit of a problem. First of all, teachers had to log on frequently and that would mean tapping up the number of hits. Secondly, it was not possible to comment online frequently because the teachers could not distinguish their students from casual browsers. Factually wrong comments might be pointed out easily, but mere opinions were left alone. However, teachers agreed that the forum discussion prepared students to work together in class; it laid the groundwork for a higher order of intellectual interaction and collaborative learning. Teachers believed that this was important for changing the teachers' role from facilitating to lecturing. Students should learn to work together in a professional and civilized manner both face-to-face or while partners are not immediately available.

However, some of them worried about the credibility of some responses. They believed that although all responses seemed to be sincere, some might be factually wrong or biased. The teachers also provided similar observations, but they were more optimistic. They believed that even when responses were flawed, replies were just data for students to generate their own opinions. Students should never recite raw data neither online nor in the classroom. To this end, the teachers considered collaborative learning possible online, within a targeted community.

## **5. Conclusions**

There are two limitations in this project. First of all, the small number of the elite class of students may not present the outcome in its most objective fashion. There was also some concern that the training of the integrated humanities class teachers may directly affect the knowledge students might gain. However, the primary aim of this action research is to see if the e-Community could help students learn collaboratively and if it could stir the learning interest of students. The training of the teachers may not be highly relevant in this case, either, because the course is relatively new, and the four teachers with diverse education backgrounds complimented each other in preparation for the course. They were also informed that there was no one right approach in conducting the course.

Questionnaire findings reflect the usefulness of forum discussion. In particular, students found it equally important when it comes to contents (political issues) and language (English). This made it evident that languages are vehicles and tools for different tasks. Students enjoyed sharing each other's comments. Although some might just write on the forum without reading too many responses, the sharing spirit in the collaborative learning approach was clear: some give and some take, some internalize and some regurgitate. They found that it is important that they form their opinions when reading forum messages; they should consider responses objectively. However, a handful of students found it difficult to consume responses posted by casual browsers who might not have proper background knowledge of the lessons and focus of discussion, and did not express points objectively. Teachers should forewarn students that whatever literature students read, they should always question it with an open mind. Reciting raw data is never a proper way to learning, not in this course, not in any course. Collaborative learning, to this end, seems to be successful in this project.

The forum used is a platform for users to exchange ideas. If it is used sincerely, however far-fetched some comments or responses may be, browsers will be able to receive input through reading the threads. However, if the platform is abused, for example, to express radical opinions and use coarse language, and the site monitors fail to nip the problem in the bud, the problem may snowball. Another area which educators should consider is the language used online. Messages of subjects in liberal arts areas are easier to convey than science subjects; some topics can easily yield responses better than others. That means the platform may not be used to the fullest for teaching purposes in all subjects, given the nature of some courses of which discussion may not be necessary at all. It is therefore suggested that schools should plan well on which resources and platforms should be used. For example, when laboratories are exclusive for science students, forum discussion may not be needed to be opened to all subjects.

This project was conducted with 36 students in one school only. However, the implication is rich: textbooks and lectures no longer satisfy students' need for knowledge when electronic information, be it voluntary or involuntary, abounds. It is time the school authority consider the importance of incorporating more external materials in the public platform and advise students on how these materials should be used collaboratively and individually. More important, students should be taught to screen the conventional and unconventional materials for their study, thereby strengthening their critical thinking skills.

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## 7. Appendix 1

### Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims at collecting your opinions on the collaborative learning activity. It intends to find out how you feel about the learning process, particularly how you have responded to comments posted. Please respond to the following items by putting a tick in the appropriate boxes (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree) representing your comments. Your comments are very valuable to the future activities conducted by teachers of the Department of Integrated Humanities and the Department of English in this school. Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.

Item	1	2	3	4
1. I have learnt more about our government in this activity.				
2. I am happy to comment on responses posted.				
3. The responses really concern most members in the society.				
4. The series of online activities is an authentic learning experience.				
5. I like this series of activities better than the textbook lessons.				
6. In these activities, I found that reading forum messages is educational.				
7. I will continue to write on the forum for issues I care about.				
8. I will continue to read English newspapers on a regular basis.				
9. In these activities, I learnt to provide comments objectively.				
10. I feel that writers of messages really care about the issues posted.				
11. I have learnt some new language items in this series of activities.				
12. I hope there will be more activities of this kind in English lessons.				
13. The activities allowed more time for critical thinking.				
14. I have always enjoyed reading social issue articles.				
15. This series of online activities improves my language proficiency.				
16. Classmates' messages are more useful than strangers'.				
17. Teachers allowed us more freedom in voicing our opinions online.				
18. I value others' comments in these activities.				
19. I am ready to discuss political issues openly with my peers in future.				
20. I will try my best to offer objective comments to forum responses.				

Reflections and comments:

**An Ideological Discussion of the Impact of the NNESTs' English Language  
Knowledge on  
ESL Policy Implementation  
'A Special Reference to the Omani Context'**

**Dr. Ali S.M. Al-Issa**

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**Abstract**

*Knowledge of English to the non-native speaker English teachers (NNSET) is crucial and fundamental, and its importance has been highlighted by various writers over the past few decades. This research paper, therefore, examines from an ideological perspective the importance of English language knowledge to the NNEST and the implications it has for English as a second language (ESL) education design, teacher education and policy implementation in the Sultanate of Oman. The paper triangulates data from the Philosophy and Guidelines for the Omani English Language School Curriculum document, which I will herewith refer to as the National English Language Policy/Plan (NELP) (Nunan, Tyacke & Walton, 1987), some other relevant policy texts, semi-structured interviews conducted with different agents involved in the Omani language education system and the pertinent literature. The paper draws conclusions about the powerful impact of the linguistically incompetent English teacher, as produced by the ESL education system and teacher education, on the ESL policy implementation.*

**Narrative**

In 1989-90 the first cohort of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) final year ELT student teachers were at my school for their practicum. SQU is the only state-owned university in the Sultanate that produces over 100 male and female Omani ELT teachers annually. I was the Head of the ELT Department staff at the oldest and largest secondary school in Muscat Region – the capital – then. As a Head of Department, I was asked to arrange the timetable for the student teachers and to ask my colleagues in the Department to cooperate with the SQU practicum supervisor. This involved attending classes taught by those student teachers and providing them with necessary support and feedback. The Omani education system did not have an official mentoring system then.

I observed those student teachers and gave the required help and guidance when and where necessary. My colleagues and I were worried about the linguistic abilities of

these student teachers. They made all sorts of language mistakes. I asked myself: After spending four years at university, how could these student teachers perform so poorly?

Four years later and after I returned from England, having successfully completed my Master of Arts degree program in Education at the University of London, I was appointed as a seconded ELT inspector for Muscat Region for four months. This was until my papers were ready and I was transferred to the Intermediate Teacher Training College to become an initial teacher trainer. During that period I visited a good number of schools to inspect different Omani and expatriate English teachers. In many of those schools SQU ELT student teachers were appointed as fresh graduate teachers and others were affiliated for their practicum. My curiosity was aroused once again. The old memories about the first ELT SQU cohort were revived. What concerned me most was the need to find out how different the subsequent university batches were from the first one. There appeared to be hardly any differences or change.

### **English in Oman**

English in Oman has “institutionalized domains” like business, the media and education (Al-Busaidi, 1995). English is taught in its general form in public schools from Grade Four, while it is taught from Kindergarten One in the private schools. English is also the medium of instruction in all the private and public higher education/post secondary institutions throughout the Sultanate.

English is an effective tool for ‘modernization’. It receives political, economic and legislative power and substantial attention from the government, which determines its place on the social hierarchy (Al-Issa, 2002). English is considered as a resource for “national development” (Wiley, 1996) and its choice has been based upon “transition” purposes (Fishman, 1969). English is considered as a fundamental tool that facilitates ‘Omanization’ (Al-Issa, 2002) – a gradual and systematic process through which the expatriate labor force is replaced by a qualified Omani one. It is a prerequisite for finding a white-collar job (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2002). English is, hence, central to Oman’s “continued development” (NELP, p. 2) and is **“a resource for national development as the means for wider communication within the international community”** (NELP, p. 2) [emphasis in original].

Furthermore, *the Reform and Development of General Education* document prepared by the Ministry of Education (1995) states that:

The government recognises that facility in English is important in the new global economy. English is the most common language for international business and commerce and is the exclusive language in important sectors such as banking and aviation. The global language for Science and Technology is also English as are the rapidly expanding international computerised databases and telecommunications networks which are becoming an increasingly important part of the academic and business life (p. A5-1).

It has been found that students in Oman learn English for purposes like pursuing higher education inland or abroad, cultural analysis and understanding, acquiring science and technology, finding a white-collar job, communicating in English inland and abroad and traveling (Al-Issa, 2002).

### **ELT in Oman**

The authors of NELP thus describe language as a “complex, multifaceted, multifunctional entity” with various factors governing its development. They would, hence, like to see teachers in Oman teaching English communicatively. The three writers look at grammatical competence as very important and consider it a part of the overall communicative competence demonstrated by the language user. However, they do not see that it should be taught *per se*. Functional use of the language, according to the authors of NELP, is considered to include expressing attitudes, feelings, persuasion, imagination and social and informative language. These uses require complex language capacity from the teachers in fields other than ELT and education.

In addition to the important role of teachers in language development, Nunan et al. discuss the importance of education technology, as a means to provide “naturalistic samples” of contextualized language, and time allocated to English on the national curriculum. They compare Oman with the province of Ontario in Canada, where French is taught as a second language, and view the situation in Oman as far from realistic. “... The students need in excess of four thousand hours of French to reach the level of proficiency needed for university study through the medium of French” (p. 3). This is while the Omani students receive over the nine years as low as “500-600 hours” (p. 3) of formal English language instruction. Restricted contact with English is considered to result in poor chances for genuine communication and interaction.

Nunan et al. would like to see teachers as critical reflectors, needs analysts, competent language users and professionals, skilled and autonomous decision makers. In other words, they like to see teachers resorting to their epistemic repertoire and designing and selecting varied motivating and meaningful tasks for their students, which arouse their motivation and engage them in using the language interactively and analytically, as language learning and acquisition have multiple paths and means. Nunan et al. consider language as a “living entity” and not a fact-based school subject, which can be memorized for exam purposes, which is typical of the Omani education system. Teachers, therefore, need to be proficient and competent language users. They themselves need to be able to use the target language communicatively, prior to training their students to do so.

This paper, hence, examines from an ideological perspective the importance of English language knowledge to the NNEST and the implications it has for ELS education and policy implementation in the Sultanate of Oman.

Literature on ESL teacher education ‘theoretically’ discusses the importance of English language knowledge to the NNEST (Wilkins, 1974; Edge, 1988; Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989; Medgyes, 1992; Lafayette, 1993; Cullen, 1994; Murdoch, 1994; Skehan, 1996; Peyton, 1997; Liu, 1998; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1999), but falls short of offering any

‘ideological’ discussion of the importance of English language knowledge to the NNEST and its impact on ESL policy implementation.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A major source of data collection in this paper is the different agents involved in the Omani ELT system. Their various discourses about the importance of English language knowledge to NNESTs and its role in influencing second language policy implementation or otherwise reflect their diverse but direct and explicit systems of thought and conceptions of the world – ideologies.

However, other equally important and substantial sources of data are the literature and the official texts and documents, which represent the ELT policy/plan as inscribed by the Ministry of Education. These texts entail all sorts of information that form a rich and a fertile basis or source of data for this paper. All these texts and discourses – sources of data – which reveal knowledge, ideas, beliefs and experiences will be used to contribute to the construction of a theory about the importance of English language knowledge to NNEST and its role in influencing second language policy implementation.

Here, semantic and syntactic content analysis contributes to my general thinking and interpretation and the development of relevant hypothesis. There is a substantial amount of relevant information about the political, social and cultural forces influencing, driving and shaping the issue under investigation in this paper.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The following private school principal thinks that a good English teacher is the one whose English is “... correct, clear and free of pronunciation mistakes and errors”. She adds that “this is especially important in the early years of teaching. If the child picks the right pronunciation of letters and words ... he will do well”.

The mention of “pronunciation” is because most Arab and Asian teachers of English (Indians, Pakistanis and SriLankans) have an accent, which she considers affects their pronunciation. These teachers are found in large numbers in all the private schools throughout the Sultanate. The figures obtained from the database of the Ministry of Education indicate that there is a total of 186 non-native English teachers in the Omani private education schools who come from countries like Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Jordan, Syria, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Oman. In Oman teachers of English are expected to be models and infallible sources of the target language (Al-Issa, 2002).

However, Liu (1998) argues that an “excellent command of English does not mean native-like pronunciation, which few ESOL students ever achieve, and which is often not necessary in most EFL situations” (p. 7). The Teacher’s Guide for the Elementary Level (1997-98) stresses modeling pronunciation and intonation and expects the teacher to be a good language model.

Moreover, the same principal states that she had an Indian teacher of English whose "... language was perfect". She also states that "the kids were able in nine months ... to use very good English ... and were able to understand it properly". There are powerful ideologies here and above about the competence of the NNEST English teachers and the way they can influence the students' second language learning and acquisition.

The following English Language Curriculum Department (ELCD) Assistant Director – Ministry of Education, believes that a good English teacher is the one who has "... a good command of the language". She goes on to say: "I'm not saying you cannot make mistakes. You could make mistakes, but there are ways to overcome these mistakes". Similarly, the following ELT Sudanese inspector thinks that "a good English teacher should be good at English. He or she should in the first place sufficiently master the language".

Lafayette (1993) argues that language proficiency is the most important component of content knowledge to the foreign language teacher. Peyton (1997) writes that a good foreign language teacher needs "a high level of language proficiency in all of the modalities of the target language-speaking, listening, reading, and writing" (p. 2). Peyton further writes that a good foreign language teacher needs to possess "the ability to use the language in real-life contexts, for both social and professional purposes" (p. 2).

The following SQU Curriculum and Methodology Department ELT teacher trainer thinks more in line of the influence of the teacher's language on his/her students. He believes that a good English teacher has

... To have an excellent command of English. Unless they have that they couldn't possibly function as teachers. They wouldn't be confident. They'll make errors and the students will acquire those from them.

Being "confident" here refers to the ability to analyze the language, the materials at hand and meeting the students' needs and abilities through attending to their various inquiries about language.

Confidence in exhibiting good language knowledge and use is an integral part of the initial teacher education program for non-native speakers of English (Edge 1988; Medgyes 1992; Murdoch 1994). Cullen (1994) acknowledges that NNESTs are under pressure and are expected to use English naturally and spontaneously in the language classroom, especially in situations where "... English is not the medium of instruction but a compulsory foreign language on the school curriculum" (pp. 163-164), as it is the case in Oman and a large number of other countries round the world. Pressure and spontaneous use of the language are primarily related to both, the classroom situation and the outside environment. A poor command of English language can sometimes cause embarrassment for the teacher due to the unpredictable nature of the classroom situation (Wilkins, 1974). Lafayette (1993) argues that a sound command of the target language equips the teacher with a high degree of confidence and with the ability to meet their students' various demands through concentrating on what the students do not know, rather than what they know.

The following Omani English teacher, who is in her 30s and has obtained her First Degree from Jordan and has been teaching for over five years narrows her statement down to the teachers of English in Oman and uses herself as an example. She believes that teachers of English in Omani schools are linguistically unable to teach the language since their exposure to and practice of English is limited. She believes that their English is not proficient enough and does not qualify them to become English teachers. She thinks that it becomes embarrassing for the teacher to make language mistakes in front of his/her learners, especially if some of these learners are good enough to identify such mistakes.

Here in Oman we have English teachers, most of them they just didn't practice much language except at school and at universities. So, the amount of language, which they know, I don't think it allows them to be as English teachers. Myself I don't think I'm qualified of being English teacher, enough qualified. Okay, I can teach the syllabus which I have here, but in front of foreigners you find they're much better than us, because their background, the English they have ... you know, they have very good English and I feel the teacher should have really, really, really good English. The students we have nowadays they are so smart. They come from background, which they are pushed by their parents. Actually they come to us they know English. So, if you make any mistake it embarrasses you.

The new generation has better and more access to English, especially with the spread of satellite TV, which has become a necessity in Oman rather than a luxury. There are over 20 free-to-air satellite TV channels that broadcast various English-medium programs like pop songs, films, dramas, comedy serials, documentaries, soap operas, chat shows, quiz programs and the news almost on daily basis. There is also sophisticated technology as represented in the Internet and computer software, which are too a necessity in the Sultanate. Students today are exposed to more English than they used to a decade ago and understand that the uses and values of English are beyond what is offered in the Omani ELT classroom.

Curtain and Pesola (1994) and Tedick and Walker (1996) state that one of the factors that make the teaching of foreign languages especially challenging is the variety of reasons students have for learning foreign languages. They further state that the cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic and academic diversity typical in today's student population requires foreign language teachers to work with students whose needs and educational experiences are different.

Students, hence, have a powerful impact on the teacher's socialization (Doyle, 1979). Doyle stresses that pupils are significant socializing agents and that their influence "ranges from the general teaching methods and patterns of language that teachers use in classrooms to the type and frequency of teacher questions and feedback given to individual students" (p. 139).

Furthermore, the level of English required for Elementary classes is not like the level required for Secondary classes. In other words, there is more challenge involved in teaching the latter than the former. Therefore, the language used by the teacher becomes more complex.

The following Sudanese ELT inspector believes that the university SQU student teachers' language level is problematic and that they

... Need the language improvement component. Because the level they are supposed to teach at requires a slightly higher level of English than what they have actually ... but the majority need to improve their language to be able to teach proper things.

The ELT Inspectorate at the Ministry of Education thus organizes in-service training courses, which also entail a language improvement component. These courses are particularly designed for Omani teachers of English such as SQU graduates. They combine language improvement and methodology and aim at establishing a coherent framework for the professional development of the Omani teachers. These courses are RELIC (Regional English Language Improvement Courses), PICOT (Professional In-Service Course for Omani Teachers), SIC (Summer Intensive Courses), HOTDC (Higher Omani Teacher Development Course) and GARLIC (Graduate Advanced Regional Language Improvement Course).

The same Sudanese inspector then goes on to describe the student teachers

... The inspector expects the teacher to be able to handle higher Preparatory students and then from experience they know that many of those teachers are still having some difficulty in satisfying this purpose. And for that reason these courses are organized and planned to improve their English in the first place plus their teaching methodology, which is less problematic than their English usually.

There are powerful ideologies at work here about the role of the English teacher as someone who is in a position to demonstrate competence and skill in language use and teaching methods and techniques. This has its implications for the mixed-ability communicative classroom.

Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989) thus write that if the teacher does not have a practical command of the target language, lacks a sound knowledge of the English sound system, grammar and lexis, lacks knowledge and has difficulty in communicating fluently, s/he will fail to teach communicatively. In other words, teachers influence the implementation of a method that requires high communicative skills like communicative language teaching (CLT). Cullen (1994) argues that communicative teaching/learning materials and methodology "... demand the teacher a higher level of proficiency in English than in the past" (p. 165). Skehan (1996) and Babrakzai (2001) write that teacher's poor level of proficiency in language productive skills leaves the teacher no choice but to depend on the materials in the textbook, which can result in limiting the students' language input.

This has its implications for the training and preparation of these student teachers at SQU. In other words, it is considered the sole responsibility of the university program



to prepare linguistically and technically developed teachers, who can influence positive policy implementation.

Lafayette (1993) blames institutions of higher learning and university foreign language departments for giving little attention to helping the student teachers achieve sound levels of language proficiency. He argues that there is a tendency of laying more emphasis on the literature component at the expense of the courses that enhance the oral, written and structural abilities of the student teachers. Lafayette argues that a good level of knowledge of the latter type of courses reminds the student teachers of their needs to become foreign language teachers.

During their four-year eight-semester First Degree in Education program ELT student teachers at SQU have two compulsory and seven department elective literature modules as opposed to 14 compulsory courses related to language improvement, which deal with grammar, vocabulary, reading, speaking, listening and writing.

Similarly, the following Omani ELT inspector claims that the SQU student teachers are weak in English when they join the teaching force.

... Some of the students who finish Third Secondary [General Certificate of Secondary Education – GCSE] ... can't write a kind of paragraph or two or three sentences together without mistakes either grammar or spelling or arranging the right order of words.

The student teachers might have learned a great deal about the rules and the system of English. However, the scarce application of these rules in genuine interactive situations results in failure to use the language communicatively and purposefully. This is typical of contexts where ELT is characterized as textbook-based, teacher-centered, exam and memory-oriented, product and transmission-based and top-down (Al-Issa, 2002). The aim of the textbook in particular and the rigidly and strictly controlled and centralized education in Oman in general is to sabotage the world's first international language and use it mainly as a tool to present and emphasize "selective traditions" (Williams, 1989) and "interested knowledge" (Pennycook, 1989), which represents the interest of certain individuals and the dominant group(s) through exposure to certain authorized and prescribed texts (Luke, de Castell & Luke, 1989) and predefined and controlled modes of knowledge delivery. English is treated like any other fact-based subject on the curriculum where the students more or less fail to see its relevance. The mid-semester and end-of-semester exams, which are largely, if not entirely, based on the syllabus, drive and determine the students' motivation to a great extent in Oman. Such exam-based system makes language subservient to knowledge, while prevents teaching it per se. Education conducted in this manner is much more controllable and facilitates quantitative measurement of learning (Shor & Freire, 1987). Students in Omani schools are refrained from thinking critically and analytically, while they are merely spoon-fed by the prescribed "official knowledge" (Apple, 1993) found in the school textbook.

Furthermore, it has been found that time given to ELT on the school curriculum is insufficient (Al-Issa, 2002). Wilkins (1974) attributes the underlying the unsatisfactory command of English language shown by non-native English student teachers to two reasons: First, the limited and rare exposure to English. Lightbown (2000) writes that “the most important reason for incomplete acquisition in foreign language classroom setting is probably the lack of time available for contact with the language” (p. 449). In his research study, which included 82 teachers of English representing various nationalities in Oman, Al-Toubi (1998) found that 36 teachers agreed that time allocated to English in the curriculum was not sufficient. This is a problem mainly created by the ESL education system.

Second, the quality of instruction the student teachers receive at their early stages of education (Wilkins, 1974; Shublaq, 2000) can have a strong negative impact on the student teachers’ language capacity. Al-Toubi (1998) found that 74 teachers thought that teaching through the Audio-Lingual Method was ‘good’. Al-Toubi, hence, writes that “teachers emphasize form over meaning and accuracy over communication” (p. 65) in Omani ELT classrooms.

The same Omani inspector then goes on to give details about how much English these student teachers pick at SQU.

... When these people are at the university, they have four years of taking English, which I think are very intensive courses they have, but still when they come here we feel they don’t fit to go directly to Secondary Schools. Sometimes you have students at schools who are sometimes better than the teacher himself or herself.

The SQU program is viewed as responsible for preparing student teachers of ESL to become proficient language users. Literature on ESL teacher education believes that university courses are responsible for equipping the student teachers with a good language competence and suggests various ways for implementing this (Cullen, 1994; Murdoch, 1994).

Al-Toubi (1998) criticizes the SQU ESL teacher training program for being too ‘theoretical’ as it lays little emphasis on developing the student teachers’ communicative ability. Moreover, Babrakzai (2001) criticizes the drift between the language activities students carry out inside the teaching common at SQU and real life and attributes it to the considerable focus on declarative knowledge. He believes that this is counter to language internalization and acquisition. He also writes that the ELT courses and those in the credit programs at SQU, which specifically include all language skills, are taught with the target of preparing students for exams. He argues that “language according to such syllabi, is a divisible construct, which can be taught and tested in bits and pieces” (p. 22-23).

Babrakzai further criticizes the system at SQU and says that “... all tests at the credit level are summative in the sense that they only assess students’ knowledge” (p.

23). He argues that such tests do not have pedagogical values because, as language tools, they fail to develop and improve the students' language. Babrakzai states that such type of teaching does not produce autonomous learners with "critical appreciation of knowledge" (p. 24). He writes that SQU students rather memorize exam questions and English forms after translating them into Arabic. This is a situation that is largely similar to the one found in the local literacy in Omani schools where learners acquire study skills and strategies and retain them at the university level.

The same Omani inspector then goes on to describe SQU student teachers' level in English:

I think it is a little bit above Third Secondary [GCSE], but I can say not in all skills. When these people come into a class teaching, they know the methodology; they are very familiar with it. But the main problem is the language. I mean even if you have got methods you don't have language you are not a good teacher. I mean even if you have got the language and you don't have the methods it cannot go through the pupils very well ... they might be good in, let us say speaking, but they might not be good in writing.

Al-Toubi (1998) and Al-Issa (2002) found that the current national syllabus does not integrate the four skills, lacks a variety of authentic practice activities and materials, focuses heavily on the local culture and environment and gives usage an edge over use.

Similarly, another Omani ELT inspector believes that the SQU graduate student teachers' level in speaking is satisfactory, but overall accuracy is necessary and essential, but is missing. She says that the Inspectorate design language and methodology courses because the student teachers

... Come from SQU with the level of language average. So, we think that they need courses, because when we go to the schools and we observe the lessons the language sometimes, they make a lot of errors, especially in grammar. I don't see that we must be perfect, but at least the basic things we have to be good in using them.

She defines the word "average" by saying:

... That you can understand them when they communicate you can understand them, but grammar, most of the time grammar is unbalanced, it's not properly used. It's understandable but in schools we don't want only to communicate, we're learning here. For that reason we have to use accurate language, accuracy is important.

The use of "when they communicate you can understand them" signals the powerful role of English for functional and interactive purposes and the importance of proficiency in the target language for achieving multiple purposes.

Moreover, students in Oman occasionally ask teachers to explain grammatical terms. Arab students of English value the role of grammar and see it as the most important part of language. This is in fact the case in the Arabic language classes, where grammar is discussed, analyzed and taught explicitly.

There are also powerful ideologies about the role of the teacher as a language model. The 'traditional' methods look at the teacher as a language model and a main source for SLA since teachers in these classes are ultimate authority figures. This is of course counter to the progressive/humanist model forwarded by the authors of NELP about placing the students at the heart of learning-teaching process to help produce independent, intellectually dynamic and resourceful learners, who can contribute to the Sultanate's national development.

The following ELT inspector thus has worked for some time with some of the graduate student teachers. She administered tests in 1993 that indicated their language proficiency levels were inadequate.

In 1993 when I got the first GARLIC. I decided to give them a test and I gave them an Oxford Placement Test [OPT] and on the OPT the vast majority of them were in Upper Elementary – Lower Intermediate. I've been told that they were exiting the scores of 6.5 on the IELTS [International English Language Testing System]. There was an absolute dilemma at the Ministry. I gave a copy of those tests to the Head of the ELCD and it was a shock. At that time the people who had performed best on the OPT were those students who had gone to the ITTC [Intermediate Teacher Training College] and then transferred to SQU and they were best teachers by a long stretch.

It is noteworthy that the students who were enrolled in the ITTC on completion of GCSE to become ESL teachers had studied English language and methodology for two years only and graduated as Elementary school English teachers. In other words, the SQU student teachers receive more formal contact hours of English language instruction than their ITTC counterparts.

Moreover, the Chief Inspector at the ELCD thinks that while the student teachers' level of English varies, there are still very weak students teachers, who make lots of errors.

There's a spread there from pretty weak students to students who can communicate with me extremely well and can write a good piece of English. It's quite a wide range of level. Let's try and put it in IELTS terms. Probably maximum they would get 4.5 on the IELTS scale and the minimum would be probably 2.5 I think. It's quite low. The best graduates are good, there's no doubt about it. The weaker ones, they make grammatical errors, their writing is not very good, they can converse fairly fluently, but it's got lots of mistakes.

It is perhaps worth considering *The IELTS Handbook* (1998) where an interpretation of the score bands is provided. Those who score Band Two are described as intermittent users who have "no real communication ... except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs". They are also described as to have "... great difficulty understanding spoken and written English" (p. 18).

Those who score Band Three are described as “extremely limited users” who can convey and understand “... only general meaning in very familiar situations” and that they have “... frequent breakdowns in communication” (p. 18).

Those who score Band Four are described as “limited users” who possess “basic competence” which is “... limited to familiar situations”. They “have frequent problems in understanding and expression”. They are “... not able to use complex language”.

Those who score Band Five are described as “modest users” who have “... partial command of the language in most situations”, though they are “... likely to make many mistakes”. However, they “should be able to handle basic communication in own field” (p. 18).

It is interesting to see that students falling between Band Two and Band Five cannot initiate complex interaction or use language functionally. These are fundamental characteristics of the communicative competence forwarded by the authors of NELP, which teachers need to possess in order to help their students achieve.

I said above that one of the reasons students learn English in Oman is for science and technology acquisition, which encompasses complex knowledge. These two realms require complex language, which teachers require to have in order to be able to convey knowledge through to their students. The same is applicable to literature, which is a fundamental part of culture teaching and which has its own linguistic and knowledge structure that requires a particular degree of language competence.

Curtain and Pesola (1994) and Tedick and Walker (1996) stress that one of the factors that make the teaching of foreign languages especially challenging is the emphasis on thematic learning, which demands that teachers be skilled in the thematic areas explored, competent in the vocabulary related to these areas and responsive to student interests in the various topics.

The Chief Inspector justifies the inclusion of a language improvement component in the in-service courses designed for those student teachers by saying

The simple answer is that the English of the majority is not high enough, it's not bad and certainly improved over the years, but each of our intakes from university improves year on year. It was certainly felt during this decade, the 90s that the level of English was satisfactory, but really it needs to be improved in general. To be able to cope particularly with the secondary level, some of them were struggling.

The 1990s witnessed growth and expansion in the domains of English language in the Sultanate. Sophisticated technology like the Internet, computer software and satellite TV have become accessible to almost everyone. These technological items are a rich source of contact with interactive, natural and contextualized English. This appears to be impacting on motivation and perceptions about the role of English as an international means of communication and interaction. The writers of NELP view these sources as having a positive impact on the students' perceptions about English and encourage including them in the curriculum.

**Conclusion**

The discussion revealed some powerful ideologies about the importance of English language knowledge for the NNEST (SQU graduate teachers). These ideologies have linked language proficiency with self-confidence, competent teaching and impacting on curriculum innovation, which has been considered as a fundamental part of effective policy implementation.

These ideologies have looked at the competent language teacher as one who demonstrates competence in using all four skills equally professionally. Teachers in Oman have been considered as models and sources of SLA, which has its implications for their ESL education.

The ESL education system has been found responsible for producing linguistically retarded teachers, who in turn negatively impact their learners' second language learning and acquisition.

However, the degree of linguistic proficiency the SQU graduate teachers acquire from the University and continue developing can help prepare students for the present and future, local and global and economic and social challenges and demands.

Books and papers have been published, which stress teaching English communicatively and functionally and the important roles teachers can play in this respect so as to give ELT life and meaning and equip the learners with marketable skills necessary for tomorrow's competitive and shrinking world. This is bound to fail, if SQU graduate teachers demonstrate incompetence in ESL. As a very important higher education agency in the Sultanate, if not the most important, SQU is therefore, responsible for producing linguistically competent teachers of English, who can positively influence ESL policy implementation. Claims have been made by different key ESL practitioners about the role of SQU in failing to equip the prospective teachers with the necessary English language repertoire, which calls for an in-depth investigation and can form a basis for future empirical research.

To end, there seems to be a pressing need for SQU and the Ministry of Education to joint efforts and work closely. The focus of this work, or collaborative research, needs to be a thorough needs analysis and a detailed scrutiny of the students' problems and weaknesses in English, the presumably multiple reasons leading to their existence and ways of overcoming all the identified problems and weaknesses. The uses and values of English have evolved in accordance with the speedy political, economic and social events emerging on the world arena. Times have changed and so have the reasons and needs for learning and using English and the methods of learning it. Within this context, the success of the Omani higher education in delivering quality (language) education is largely, if not entirely based upon the efficiency of the school system. This has been a major finding of this paper.

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## On the Effect of Disciplinary Variation on Transitivity: The Case of Academic Book Reviews

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**Keywords:** academic book reviews, transitivity, disciplinary variation.

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was twofold. First, an attempt was made to systematically characterize Book Reviews (BRs) as an academic written genre in terms of the elements of transitivity system. Secondly, the effect of disciplinary variation on the lexico-grammatical features of this genre was explored. To this end, a corpus of 90 academic BRs from discipline-related professional journals (physics, sociology, and literature) were randomly selected and analyzed. Significant differences were observed in terms of both the type and frequency of processes and participants. This, it seems, points to a difference in the semantic configuration of BRs peculiar to each discipline, although they all seem to fulfill a similar communicative purpose—evaluating knowledge production in the academic milieu. To be more specific, the observed features indicate that BRs in physics journals, as compared to their counterparts in sociology and literature journals, appear to carry a higher percentage of passive construction, non-human concrete participants, and of relational and existential processes, together with a lower percentage of specific human participants; hence, leading to texts heavily laden with grammatical metaphor and impersonality.*

### **1. Introduction**

To date, (critical) discourse analysts have extensively studied the important role of the transitivity system in revealing and/or concealing ideological orientations and positions (see, e.g., Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Hodge & Kress, 1996, Stubbs, 1996). Transitivity has also been analyzed in scientific texts and academic settings (cf. Halliday & Martin, 1993; Eggins, Wignell & Martin, 1993; Martinez, 2001, Young & Nguyen, 2002). Fulfilling the communicative purpose of “evaluating knowledge production” (Motta-Roth, 1996) in academic settings, BR seems to be a clear instance of “evaluative” discourse that can act as a “sounding board” to make the interplay between the specific elements of the transitivity system more apparent.

BRs are, it seems, of great value to the academic community. Firstly because, if it is true that the function of BRs usually found on the last pages of a journal is to evaluate

knowledge production, it should then be very useful in the process of the acquisition of academic literacy. Secondly, familiarity with the lexico-grammatical features of this genre may enhance reading/writing ability of ESL/EFL users and can equip them with certain strategies to help them read/write BRs critically or give them certain critical insights into the very process of reading and writing BRs. Furthermore, learning more about the structure of BRs can also help scholars create more acceptable and accountable instances of BRs by developing sensitivity to and awareness of the subtle interplay between the elements generating this genre, i.e., discourse structures, linguistic encoding, etc.

Seen from a different angle, disciplinary variation, from the early days of ESP/EAP scholarship, has remained a controversy from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Some scholars (cf. Widdowson, 1979; Trimble, 1985) give credence to the subject- and language-independent or, in a word, the universal nature of scientific and/or academic discourse, still others (e.g., Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens, 1964; Halliday, 1988) believe in linguistic variations resulting from functional variations inherent in different disciplines. Besides, empirical data have not yet resolved the controversy, either. While some studies document variations in the discoursal and linguistic features of the same genre across disciplines (Holmes, 1997; Williams, 1999; Samraj, 2002; to name but a few), others provide evidence for the universality of academic discourse (e.g., Paltridge, 1993; Thompson, 1994). The existing controversy, therefore, warrants further investigation in this particular area.

In light of the above contentions, the express purpose of this study was (1) to identify prototypical generic textual features of BRs at the lexico-grammatical level within the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and (2) to investigate whether or not the lexico-grammatical features of BRs vary across disciplines. To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first study which systematically investigates the clusters of elements of the transitivity system in BRs.

That is to say, this study essentially utilizes the transitivity system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to identify the lexico-grammatical elements that are meaningfully selected by text producers to shape and realize the structure of this genre. An SFL-referenced analysis fundamentally uses lexico-grammar to characterize a genre by providing an explanation, not a mere description, of linguistic elements, their role and meaning in context and the relationship among them. As also pointed out by Halliday (1988, p. 163), one should attempt to find a “prototypical syndrome of features” that may characterize a genre. Besides, the features should be studied together as clusters rather than each in isolation. And, analysts should be prepared to explain and rationalize the observed configuration. Very much in line with these arguments, to venture on this slippery but much discussed area, the present study incorporated these micro-elements in its design in order to provide, to the extent possible, a richer and a more rationalized description of BRs. In what follows some background information on the SFL perspective is provided in order to put this study in its proper theoretical perspective and help clarify the points that will be discussed later in this paper.

## 2. The Transitivity System in SFL

The SFL approach to genre analysis is simply known as ‘systemic’ theory. As articulated by Halliday (1985, p. xiv),

systemic theory is a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options: ‘either this, or that, or the other’, and so on. [...] it means starting with the most general features and proceeding step by step so as to become ever more specific: ‘a message is either about doing, or about thinking, or about being; if it is about doing, this is either plain action or action on something; if acting on something it is either [...]

It is believed here that this type of grammar which is functional in its approach— “it is based on meaning” (ibid) — and semantic in its orientation, “with the grammatical categories as the realization of semantic patterns” (ibid), can provide useful insights into the meaning and effectiveness of a text and may nicely relate a text to the non-linguistic universe of its situational and cultural environment. In other words, SFL holds that the relation between the meaning and wording is not arbitrary and the form of the grammar relates naturally to the meanings that are being encoded.

‘Clause’ rather than ‘word’ or ‘sentence’ is the unit of analysis in SFL. And the function of a clause is analyzed in terms of: (a) Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct (SFPCA), (b) Theme and Rheme; (c) Given and New, and (d) Process and Participant or transitivity system. SFPCA captures syntactic niceties of the text. Theme-Rheme and Given-New indices deal with the way a text is packaged and the way information in a text is structured in a clause. However, a Process and Participant analysis of text reveals the way language users manipulate language to represent their perceptions of reality (cf. Bloor & Bloor, 1995, pp. 107-109).

In this theoretical model, it is, in fact, the transitivity system (Process, Participants and Circumstances) which “specifies the different types of processes that are recognized in the language, and the structures by which they are expressed” (Halliday, 1985, p. 101). By definition, the term ‘process’ refers to the ‘goings-on’ in reality: doing, happening, being, etc. The entities involved in every process are referred to as ‘participants’, and ‘circumstances’ refer to certain conditions associated with a process. Process, participant and circumstance are generally realized as Verb, Noun, and Adjunct, respectively (cf. Halliday, 1985; Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Thompson, 1996). And, the processes are of the following types: (1) material, (2) mental, (3) relational, (4) verbal, (5) existential, and (6) behavioral (Halliday, 1985; Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Thompson, 1996; Halliday & Martin, 1993; Halliday, 1994).

Material Process or the process of ‘doing’ involves some physical action and shows that something is going on in the external world. Mental Process, however, indicates that something goes on in the internal world of the mind. This process necessitates the involvement of a conscious participant, i.e., a human agent who will be

considered ‘Senser’ and another entity—‘Phenomenon’— which is to be sensed or experienced. Relational Process, on the other hand, does not involve an action or require some entity to act upon another. Essentially, it is a process of ‘being’ and it is concerned with the relationship set up between two things or concepts. Verbal Process indicates the process of ‘saying’ but as Halliday (1985) reminds us, “‘saying’ has to be interpreted in a rather broad sense; it covers any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning” (p. 129). Existential Process shows that something exists or happens. And finally Behavioral Process refers to the process of human physiological and psychological behavior. Table 1 below displays the possible configurations in SFL of these lexico-grammatical categories.

TABLE 1

Process Types, their Meanings, and their Relevant Participants in SFL

Process	Meaning	Participant
Material	Doing	Actor, Goal, Beneficiary
Mental	Sensing	Senser, Phenomenon
Relational	Being	Carrier, Attribute, Identified, Identifier
Verbal	Saying	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage
Existential	Existing	Existent
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver

The presence, absence or high/low frequency of these processes and/or participants may have different implications. In the following section, an array of studies utilizing an SFL model of analysis is presented.

### 3. Previous Studies

In an attempt to develop a systemic-functional description of the discourse of history and to investigate how language is used to represent and teach “the story of people”, Eggins, Wignell & Martin (1993) analyze high school history textbooks with an eye to the systemic linguistic realizations of grammatical metaphor. Specifically, they examine the following types of participants in the texts: (1) Human/specific; (2) Human/generic, (3) Non-human/time and place, (4) Non-human/metaphorical, and (5) Non-human/concrete. They find a high incidence of non-human metaphorical participants, e.g., nominalizations, and a scant presence of human participants, especially specific human actors. Their findings suggest that, far from being a dynamic account of people and events, when history gets written down, it is neither a story nor is it about people. Using grammatical metaphor, people are effaced, actions become things, and sequence in time is replaced by frozen setting in time. In short, the discourse of history seeks, it appears, to maximize the distance between what people actually did and how it gets written about.

Analyzing lexico-grammatical features of two geology textbooks, Love (1993) finds grammatical metaphor (cf. Halliday, 1985) a marked feature in the expression of geological information. Specifically, she finds a high incidence of relational and existential process verbs, with nominalized geological processes acting as their main participants, especially in the subject position of sentences, whereas material process

verbs that seem to be the most congruent verbs to describe geological processes as events in time are quite infrequent. She then argues that the use of grammatical metaphor by employing nominalizations of actions in relational and existential processes are tools of generalizations and classifications in scientific inquiry; hence, understanding this feature seems to be necessary for advanced geology studies.

Besides, from the same systemic-functional perspective, Gosden (1993) examines the choices of unmarked theme, i.e., Grammatical Subjects (GSs) in scientific Research Articles (RAs). Gosden (1993) allocates GSs to one of the following four domains: (1) Participant (e.g., I, we, or other persons), (2) Discourse (e.g., nominalized items and discourse processes such as argument, explanation, etc.), (3) Hypothesized and Objectivized (e.g., scientific naming and classifying that turn common-sense knowledge into scientific, organized knowledge such as 'solid waste' to include office paper, domestic waste, plastic sheeting, raw material packaging, etc. the terms that may not be transparent for non-technical readers), and (d) Real-World (e.g., real-world processes and entities such as beam, switch, vibration,...). These domains, it is reported, represent a horizontal continuum from where the writer is most visible (Participant domain) to where the writer is least visible and topic-based themes replace interactional themes (the Real-World domain). The results of the study reveal that 67.2% of sentences in scientific RAs contain unmarked theme which are distributed among the mentioned domains: Participant (9.2%), Discourse (6%), Hypothesized and Objectivized (7.6%), and Real-World (77.2%). The analysis also reveals how the changing discourse roles of subjects throughout scientific RAs, especially the overwhelming domination of Real-World themes, strongly characterize this genre.

Replicating Gosden's (1993) study, McKenna (1997) allocates GSs to the same four domains to investigate how engineering writers linguistically convert real-world entities and processes into non-real-world concepts. McKenna (1997) tracks authorial presence in three engineering reports. Results reveal that more than two thirds of sentences in engineering reports contain unmarked themes which are distributed among the mentioned domains: Participant (4.11%), Discourse (5.87%), Hypothesized and Objectivized (36.20%), and Real-World (53.82%). The findings lead McKenna (1997) to conclude that the difference between a layperson account and an engineer report is not just due to verbal sophistication but it is mostly the result of the linguistic reconstrual of natural phenomena into scientific concepts and principles.

Martinez (2001) reports on the ways in which impersonal constructions, encoded in the transitivity structure, are used in experimental research articles (RA), thus allowing writers to strategically distance themselves from the information they present. The study focuses on the features of the transitivity structure in the corpus of 21 experimental research articles in the fields of physical, biological and social sciences. The distribution of material, mental, verbal, relational and existential processes in different sections of the RA points to a relationship between the characteristic process types and the function of the sections. The analysis reveals a tension between the need to present findings objectively and the desire to persuade readers of their validity in an appropriate style.

Young and Nguyen (2002) compare two modes of presenting the same scientific topic: (1) in a physics textbook and (2) in an interactive teacher talk. They report that both the textbook and the teacher talk use verbs of action to represent scientific processes, but the teacher talk constructs the teacher and students as active participants in these processes, while the textbook constructs the readers as distant observers. The textbook contains, it is reported, more grammatical metaphors, which are *frequently* left unpacked, whereas in the teacher talk grammatical metaphors are *always* unpacked. Both the textbook and the teacher talk show similar thematic organization but while this is explicit in the textbook, in the teacher talk it is interactionally constructed. They conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the socialization of students to science discourse through different instructional modes.

#### **4. Data Collection Procedures and Methodology**

A random sample of 90 BRs published in professional English journals between the years 1998-1999 on (a) sociology (N=30), (b) physics (N=30), and (c) literature (N=30) served as the corpus of the study. To appreciate the rationale behind this sampling, the following points should be borne in mind.

Firstly, as there are multitudes of scientific, nonscientific, and interdisciplinary fields that form the totality of human knowledge, a selection seemed necessary to make. Therefore, a corpus of BRs in the fields of 'physics' and 'sociology' as two branches of the physical and social sciences respectively, and in the field of 'literature', as a branch of the fine arts (in contrast to the 'hard sciences') was taken to serve as data. These fields are assumed to be 'different' both epistemologically and intuitively. And, discursal and linguistic variations are expected to be more detectable in these fields than in presumably closer disciplines.

Secondly, a large pool of professional and academic journals related to the mentioned areas of inquiry, available at the time at the libraries of the universities in Tehran, was tracked down and inspected. Altogether, 336 book reviews [physics (N = 119), sociology (N = 108), and literature (N = 109)] were collected. Of this primary cluster, a secondary corpus of 90 BRs [physics (N = 30), sociology (N = 30), and literature (N = 30) with a purposeful air was randomly selected. For the number of cases in the sample to be representative of the characteristics of the population, 30 cases from each discipline were selected. Because, for 30 or more samples with 30 or more cases per sample, the sampling distribution will be normally distributed (cf. Hatch & Farhady, 1982, p. 98).

And, finally, in order to avoid the possible influence(s) of generational and diachronic changes in transmissional style of this genre, only BRs published over a span of two years (1998-1999) were included in the sample

##### **4.1 Methodological Framework for the Analysis of BR Texts**

To analyze the transitivity system and its linguistic manifestations in BRs, first, the BR texts were sectioned into clauses. Secondly, the frequencies and, in turn, the percentages

of categories in all 90 BR texts and then, separately, in each discipline-specific corpus (30 BRs) were calculated.

In this study, the classifications of processes and participants introduced by Halliday (1985) and Eggins et al. (1993) were used as the analytical frameworks for the study of BR texts. Specifically, employing Halliday's (1985) categorization of Processes, their definitions and instantiations (cf. Halliday, 1985, pp. 101-144), an attempt was made to locate the material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes in the corpus. And, the model for the analysis of Participant types was basically that of Eggins, Wignell and Martin (1993) consisting of: (1) Human/specific; (2) Human/generic, (3) Non-human/time and place, (4) Non-human/metaphorical, (5) Non-human/concrete. This model was, however, expanded to account for the subcategories of the first, second, and fifth categories as well:

(1) Human—specific

Human—specific: The author(s)

Human—specific: The reviewer

Human—specific: The other(s)

(2) Human—generic

Human—generic: The reader(s)

Human—generic: The other(s)

(3) Non-human—time/place

(4) Non-human—metaphorical

(5) Non-human—concrete

Non-human—concrete: The Book under review

Non-human—concrete: The other(s)

#### 4.2 Reliability of the Analyses

In order to vindicate the reliability of the analyses, of the already-available pool of data, 15 texts (five from each discipline) were randomly selected and two independent judges, who were trained beforehand in a joint training session, were asked to codify them unaided. Then, Kappa coefficient ( $k$ ) as an appropriate non-parametric measure to index the degree of agreement between the judges was used to calculate the inter-coder reliabilities. Application of Kappa procedure produced acceptable degrees of agreement (cf. Crookes, 1986) across the coders on process types ( $k = 0.95$ ) and on participant types ( $k = 0.92$ ).

#### 5. Results

The findings of this study are presented below under three separate subheadings for ease of reference.

### 5.1 Passive Voice Construction in BR Texts

The frequencies and percentages of passive voice constructions were computed (see Table 2 below). As it can be observed in Table 2, of the total number of clauses (8302) in 90 BR texts, 1214 (14.6%) employed passive constructions. It appeared that all discipline-specific BR texts carry almost similar percentages of this construction in their textures. However, physics BRs as compared to sociology and literature BRs tended to utilize rather more passive structures.

**TABLE 2**  
**Distribution of Passive Voice Construction in the Corpus**

	No. of clauses	Passive
Physics (N = 30)	2181	348 (15.9%)
Sociology (N = 30)	2659	386 (14.5%)
Literature (N = 30)	3462	480 (13.8%)
Total	8302	1214 (14.6%)

### 5.2 The Analysis of Process Types

The frequencies and percentages of different types of processes were also computed (see Table 3). In percentage terms, the processes appeared in the following order: Material (37.9%), Relational (24.8%), Verbal (17.4%), and Mental (17.3%). Besides, Existential and Behavioral types of processes in texts appeared quite inconspicuous. In fact, the percentage of Behavioral process was so low that it could be neglected in the final analysis. This is congruent with the results of Martinez' (2001) study of RAs. That is to say, it appears that academic writing does not use Behavioral process clauses frequently. In addition to this overall pattern, different discipline-specific texts showed differences in percentages of each process. Compared with literature and sociology BRs, physics BRs showed a greater tendency to employ Existential and Relational processes (cf. Table 3 below).

**TABLE 3**  
**The Distribution of Process Types in Discipline-Specific BRs**

	<b>Discipline</b>			
	Physics	Sociology	Literature	Total
Material	772 (35.4%)	1019 (38.3%)	1363 (39.4%)	3154 (37.9%)
Mental	358 (16.4%)	495 (18.6%)	585 (16.9%)	1438 (17.3%)
Relational	612 (28 %)	632 (23.8%)	818 (23.6%)	2062 (24.8%)
Verbal	369 (16.9%)	445 (16.8%)	631 (18.2%)	1445 (17.4%)



Existential	61 (2.8%)	42 (1.6%)	47 (1.3%)	150 (1.8%)
Behavioral	9 (0.4%)	26 (0.9%)	18 (0.5%)	53 (0.6%)
Total	2181	2659	3462	8302

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Further examination of this cross-disciplinary variation through Chi-square tests of significance revealed significant differences between physics BR and the other two disciplines in terms of the processes used to structure texts (cf. Table 4). However, the difference between literature BRs and sociology BRs did not appear to be significant.

**TABLE 4**  
**Results of Chi-Square Tests (Process by Discipline)**

	$\chi^2$	df
Physics vs. Sociology	28.316*	5
Physics vs. Literature	32.241*	5
Sociology vs. Literature	9.751	5

$p < .01$

### 5.3 The Analysis of Participant Types

A statistical 'participant' analysis was also revealing. As it can be seen in Tables 5 and 6, more than half of the main participants in three discipline-specific BR texts are *metaphorical*. And, *time* and *place* as the non-human categories of participants seem to be the main participants in only 1% of the observed cases. Regarding other types of participants, nevertheless, considerable marked differences were observed. Specifically, literature BRs seemed to accommodate more human-specific participants whereas sociology BRs carried more human-generic participants. Physics BRs were, however, laden with the non-human, concrete category of participants. Besides, application of the Chi-square tests of significance indicated that disciplinary variations are clearly significant. (see Table 7 below).

**TABLE 5**  
**The Distribution of Participants in Discipline-Specific BRs**

	Discipline			
	Physics	Sociology	Literature	Total
H-S	394 (11.7%)	544 (13%)	1200 (21.5%)	2138 (16.3%)
H-G	504 (15%)	733 (17.4%)	826 (14.8%)	2063 (15.7%)

NH-T/P28	(0.8%)	50	(1.2%)	60	(1%)	138	(1%)	
NH-M	1748	(52%)	2377	(56.5%)	2782	(49.9%)	6907	(52.5%)
NH-C	689	(20.5%)	506	(12%)	711	(12.7%)	1906	(14.5%)
Total	3363		4210		5579		13152	

Note. H-S = Human—Specific, H-G = Human—Generic, NH-T/P = Non-Human: Time/Place, NH-M = Non-Human: Metaphorical, NH-C = Non-Human—Concrete.

**TABLE 6**  
**The Distribution of Subtypes of Participants in Discipline-Specific BRs**

	Discipline			
	Physics	Sociology	Literature	Total
HS-A	241 (7.1%)	416 (9.8%)	606 (10.8%)	1263 (9.6%)
HS-R	99 (2.9%)	75 (1.7%)	52 (0.9%)	226 (1.7%)
HS-O	54 (1.6%)	53 (1.5%)	542 (9.7%)	649 (4.9%)
HG-R	54 (1.6%)	24 (0.5%)	62 (1.1%)	140 (1.1%)
HG-O	450 (13.3%)	709 (16.8%)	764 (13.6%)	1923 (14.6%)
NH-C-B	333 (9.9%)	360 (8.5%)	332 (5.9%)	1025 (7.8%)
NH-C-O	356 (10.5%)	146 (3.4%)	379 (6.7%)	881 (6.7%)
Total	3363	4210	5579	13152

Note. HS-A = Human—Specific: the Author, HS-R = Human—Specific: the Reviewer, HS-O = Human—Specific: the Other(s), HG-R = Human—Generic: the Reader(s), HG-O = Human—Generic: the Other(s), NH-C-B = Non-human—Concrete: the Book, NH-C-O = Non-human—Concrete: the Other(s).

**TABLE 7**  
**Results of Chi-Square Tests (Participant by Discipline)**

	$\chi^2$	df
Physics vs. Sociology	218.368 *	8
Physics vs. Literature	375.527 *	8
Sociology vs. Literature	414.104 *	8

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P<.01

On the basis of these findings, which point to a significant variation across disciplines in terms of the frequencies of process and participant, it can be concluded that different clusters of lexico-grammatical features may be used in different discipline-specific BR texts to account for the specific nature of discipline-specific BR texts.

### 6. Interpretation of the findings

Here, the findings of this study are discussed in light of two major lines of comparisons: (1) a contrast between the lexico-grammatical features of BR texts, regardless of discipline, and Research Articles (RAs) as a different academic genre and (2) a comparison between various distributions of these features across three disciplines (physics, sociology, and literature). At first sight, this kind of frequency-referenced comparisons may not seem to be rigorous as such. Nevertheless, they can provide us, it seems, with logically-sound explanations about the nature of the observed differences.

The transitivity system offers alternative resources for the representation of experience, allowing for authorial intervention or impersonal distancing. That is to say, text producers' choice of the voice and of the process and participant types moves the text along an interaction-distance continuum: The higher the percentages of passive voice constructions, the more impersonality and objectivity there are in texts. Comparison of BRs with RAs in terms of the percentages of passive voice and process types suggests more impersonality and objectivity in RAs than BRs (see Martinez, 2001). The reported difference in the percentages of passive voice in RAs (34%) vs. BRs (14.6%) (cf. Table 2) is important if one considers that by removing explicit agency, passive voice tacitly encodes objectivity and impersonality. Voice is, in fact, one of the efficient linguistic devices that is used to present the discourse in such a way, as if human agency were not part of the world of action leading to what Halliday and Martin (1993) call "the objectification of discourse".

Very much in line with this argument, the observed differences, in this study, in the distributions of process types in the two genres also support the above contention. That is to say, the percentages of different process types (cf. Table 3) in BRs [Material (37.9%), Relational (24.8%), Verbal (17.4%), Mental (17.3%), Existential (1.8%), and Behavioral (0.6%)] clearly appeared to be considerably different from those observed in RAs (see Martinez, 2001, p. 235): [Material (45%), Relational (35%), Verbal (7%), Mental (10%), Existential (3%), and Behavioral (0.2%)].

In general, Relational and Existential processes hide human agency and downgrade actions into nominalizations, whereas Verbal and Mental processes allow for the engagement of human participants in the processes (cf. Halliday, 1994, Martinez, 2001). Accordingly, the higher percentages of Relational and Existential processes in RAs (38%) vs. BRs (27%) along with the lower percentages of RAs' Verbal and Mental processes (17% vs. 35%) reduce the potential for interpersonal communication in RA texts. However, in a BR, the reviewer usually refers to human agency, especially the author, as he/she is supposed to be accountable for the content of the book.

Disciplinary variations, nonetheless, seem to influence this interactional feature of BRs. Specifically, by employing more passive voice constructions (cf. Table 2) and a higher percentage of Relational and Existential processes (cf. Table 3), physics BRs tend to move more towards the impersonality and objectivity end of interaction-distance continuum than sociology and literature. This particular difference between physics BRs and the sociology and literature BRs, in this study, turned out to be statistically significant (see Table 4).

As to the type of participants appearing in BR texts, the results of this study are congruent with those of Love's (1993) analysis of geology textbooks and Eggins et al.'s (1993) analysis of history textbooks. In this study, about 52% of the main participants in three disciplines were 'metaphorical', i.e., nominalizations and/or abstract nouns (see Table 5). In this respect, all three disciplines showed similarity. In fact, this is a major feature of academic writing which is often loaded with grammatical metaphor (cf. Love, 1993; Eggins, et al., 1993). Besides, *time* and *place* as the non-human categories of participants were the main participants in only 1% of observed cases.

Regarding other types of participants, nevertheless, considerable disciplinary differences were observed (cf. Tables 5 and 6). Specifically, literature BRs appeared to accommodate more human-specific participants (22% in literature vs. 13% in sociology and 12% in physics). This simply means that a higher percentage of participants in literature BRs were individuals—the author of the book, the reviewer, and other literary figures such as Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, Victor Hugo, etc. This finding is hardly surprising, because literature *is* about individuals and their literary works. Interestingly, sociology BRs appeared to carry more human-generic participants (17.5% in sociology vs. 15% in physics and 15% in literature) suggesting that *groups* of people such as readers of the book, feminists, sociologists, leaders, activists, middle-class mothers, etc. rather than specific individuals are often the main players in the actions that interest sociology. Physics BRs were, however, loaded with non-human, concrete category of participants (20.5% in physics vs. 12% in sociology and 13% in literature) signifying that inert, inanimate objects like the book, thermometer, pulse tube cooler, home computers, space crafts, etc. replace specific or generic human actors in texts.

On the whole, it can be concluded that book reviewers employ different lexicogrammatical devices to strike a balance between impersonality and interaction. That is, they attempt to appear impartial and disinterested by objective presentation of

information, on the one hand, and persuade readers and influence their attitude, on the other hand. However, it seems that reviewers in different disciplines influenced by the epistemological nature of the inquiry favor different devices to convey their messages. In fact, literature and physics BRs appear to be located on the two opposing ends of the impersonality continuum, with sociology somewhere in between with a little distance from literature. In all, the “prototypical syndrome of features” (cf. Halliday, 1988, p. 163) that can characterize physics BRs as more abstract and impersonal can be summarized as higher percentages of (a) passive construction, (b) relational processes, (c) existential processes, (e) concrete non-human participants, and (f) lower percentages of specific human participants in texts. In a word, it seems that the present study provides evidence for this SFL doctrine that the epistemological nature of the disciplines within which the BR writers operate influence their writing.

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**Errors In The Translation Of Topic-Comment Structures Of Vietnamese Into  
English**

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**Abstract**

Starting with the assumption that Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language and the basic structure of Vietnamese manifests a topic-comment relation rather than a subject-predicate relation (Thompson 1965, Dyvik 1984, Hao 1991, Rosen 1998, Anh 2000), the aim of the study is to investigate the extent to which the typological differences between Vietnamese and English influence the process of translating authentic Vietnamese sentences into English. This investigation uses preliminary findings drawn from an error analysis of the Vietnamese-English translations by Vietnamese EFL students. The analysis focuses on the errors made when translating the dropped subject and empty elements of Vietnamese. This is important given the fact that the grammatical subject is always required in English but not in Vietnamese sentences. The translators for this study were 95 students from English translation classes in their first, second, third, and fourth years of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The data was collected from the translation texts of these students using the same source text. This study should

help to pinpoint the potential problematic errors to which students are prone when translating the topic-comment structure of Vietnamese, and provide some practical guidelines to teachers so that they can prevent these errors from the learners in the teaching of Vietnamese-English translations.

**Key words:** translation error, error analysis, topic-comment structure, language learners

## **TRANSLATING OF TOPIC-COMMENT STRUCTURES OF VIETNAMESE INTO ENGLISH**

### **1. Introduction:**

Although many studies have been carried out in error analysis and contrastive analysis in second language learning, language teaching and materials development, there have been few studies using these types of analysis with Vietnamese university students as informants. Even fewer studies have been carried out to analyse Vietnamese students' errors in translation. To illustrate, in Spillner's (1991) comprehensive bibliography of the field of error analysis, out of 108 studies (2% of a total 5,398) focusing on translation, none examined the syntactic errors in Vietnamese-English translation. This present study aims to fill this gap in the field of error analysis in Vietnamese-English translation. The study's main hypothesis is that the Vietnamese topic-comment structure and its empty elements can cause some difficulties for the translation process. It is hoped that the present study will shed light on the common types of errors by Vietnamese students in translating the topic-comment structures and that it will have implications for translation pedagogy.

Although these errors may not be just translation errors, since the student informants were in the process of completing a four-year course specializing in translation, they may reveal the types of errors to be expected from students during the course of studying translation. Therefore, the problems found in this present study may help teachers and the material designers choose an appropriate pedagogical method. It needs to be stressed here that this study seeks more to aid teachers of translation rather than professional translators as such and that the informants for the research, while advanced second language learners, could be considered to be novice translators.



## 2. Research Questions:

- a. Do Vietnamese students have problems in translating Vietnamese sentence types in which the Topic in the Topic-Comment structure of the sentence does not coincide with the Subject? What sorts of errors do they make in translating this specific type of structure?
- b. What pedagogical implications for teachers can be drawn from the findings of this study to help students deal with such errors?

## 3. Definition of Topic-Comment

Originally, the term TOPIC is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the term THEME, which was coined by the Prague School of functional linguistics, following Mathesius (English translation: 1975), e.g. Firbas (1969), Danes (1974). Topic is often defined in terms of its linguistic structures, either syntactic or phonetic. It has been defined in terms of linear order – as the first expression of the sentence (e.g. Halliday, 1967), in grammatical terms – as the subject (Gundel 1974) and in intonational terms – as the non-stressed expression (Chomsky 1971). The shortcomings of these definitions lie in their inability to answer the question related to the discourse conditions under which a given expression would count as topic. According to Reinhart (1981: 57), since any parts of the same sentence can serve as a topic in different contexts of utterance, topic is a term that cannot be defined directly on the basis of syntactic structures or semantic relation. Rather, it is a pragmatic relation.

This paper adopts the definition of topic as put forward by Hockett (1958: 201): ‘the speaker announces a topic and then says something about it’. Hockett also discusses one point that this paper aims to illustrate: in English and familiar languages of Europe, topics are usually also subjects and comments are predicates (as in example 1 below); however, it is not always the case that the sentential topic (That new book by Thomas Guernsey) coincides with the grammatical subject (I), as shown in example 2.

(1) *John* / ran away

(2) *That new book by Thomas Guernsey*/ I haven't read yet.

These two examples demonstrate the typological difference between Vietnamese and English. While in English, subject is an obligatory constituent and occupies the initial position of a sentence, it may be dropped in Vietnamese. Vietnamese sentence often starts with a topic which can be taken over by any part of speech. This leads to two phenomena: (1) the subject is often dropped in Vietnamese sentence and (2) the position of a topic in Vietnamese can be occupied by a grammatical subject, an adverb, an object or indirect object or simply a word semantically relating to the comment discussed in the topic.

#### 4. Rosen (1998)'s categorization and examples from Elicitation Task:

This paper is based on the claim that Rosen (1998) has proved in her PhD thesis, that topic-comment constructions and empty elements are basic constructions in the Vietnamese language. According to Rosen's (1998) classification, there are five types of relations that may exist between a Noun Phrase topic and the comment in Vietnamese, which will be listed below. The examples illustrating these five types are quoted directly from the text used as Elicitation Task for the present study. In case there is no sentence of such type in the Elicitation Task, Rosen's examples from her PhD thesis are quoted. Words in italics and brackets are used to refer to dropped subject or null topic (i.e. topic of the sentence which is dropped). Where there are three capitalized lines, the first line is the analysis of Topic-Comment structure of the whole sentence, the second line is the analysis of Topic-Comment of each embedded clause. The last capitalized line is the analysis of Subject-Predicate structure of each sentence, using structuralist approach. The last line is the suggested translation, while the order of the sentence in the source text will appear at the end of the translation (see Appendix A and B for numbered sentences in the Test and the analysis of topic-comment constructions and empty pronouns of 18 sentences) (TM: Topic Marker)

(1) The topic may be understood as filling a gap in the comment.

Toài	thì	( <i>toài</i> )	khoâng	ngủ	ñõõïc.
I	TM		not	sleep	manage
<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>TM</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>			

As for me, (I) couldn't sleep.

(2) The topic may be coreferential with a noun phrase or pronoun in the comment.

Tam,	caây ñaøn nguyeät beá taéc	tuyeät vôøi maø	tôùi mõiuc	tuyeät voĩng,	u uaån,
Tam	moon-shaped guitar deadlock but	excellent	to degree	disappointed	hidden

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>	
	TOPIC 1	COMMENT 1

SUBJECT 1	APPOSITION	PREDICATE 1
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\_ nghóa khí,  
\_ noble

**Tam, a player of the moon-shaped guitar, is so excellent that he appears desperate and mysterious, frustrated but still giving.**

cõu chæ	thaät chính xaüc	võùi taâm traĩng.
gesture	very accurate	with state of mind.

TOPIC 2	COMMENT 2
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SUBJECT 2	PREDICATE 2
-----------	-------------

**his gestures reflect his mood precisely. (sentence 17)**

3) The topic may be semantically related to any specific constituent in the comment, its referent is simply what the comment is about.

Caũnh thaũ	ñeøn trõøi	(ngõõøi ta)	tõõung nhõ	chæ cou
ma				
thuaät mõiui				
scene drop light sky	(people)	seem	only	magic
in order to				

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>	
OBJECT OF VERB 2	NULL SUBJECT 1	VERB 1
VERB 2		SUBJECT 2

OF THE CLAUSAL  
COMMENT

\_ laøm noãi  
\_ do

**The scene of dropping the lantern that we/ one may think can only happen by magic. (sentence 5)**

(4) The topic may not be related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment.

Caũnh quay	naøo	(ngõõøi ta/ngõõøi xem)	cuõng thaáy
moà			
hoãi.			

Scene any (people/audience) also see sweat  
**TOPIC COMMENT**  
 TOPICALISED ADVERB  
 OF CLAUSAL COMMENT NULL SUBJECT VERB  
 OBJECT OF VERB

**You/we/one can see the sweat behind every scene. (sentence 6)**

(5) The topic may be a verb phrase, a clause or an embedded topic-comment construction.

Ñi Saõi Goøn, thì toái ñi moãi tuaàn ba laàn  
*Go Saigon TM I go each week three time.*  
**TOPIC TM COMMENT**

**As for going to Sai Gon, I go three times every week.**

Regarding the empty pronoun, Emeneau (1951:114) has mentioned tacitly this characteristic of Vietnamese in the following extract: ‘When the subject, however, would be an anaphoric pronoun or a pronoun denoting the speaker or the hearer, lack of occurrence is very frequently the option chosen. This holds also for the other constructions in which such pronoun may occur, e.g., as object of a verb or as an attribute following a noun. It may be a general rule that pronouns are omissible when no ambiguity could arise through the omission’. Rosen (1998:144) remarks that the Vietnamese system for pronominal reference is quite complicated. However, her most consistent generalization is that empty pronouns are possible for subjects, direct objects and indirect objects, but never for objects of prepositions. In English, the deletion of anaphoric pronoun is also possible, in the case when the special effect is targeted or when the pronoun in the first clause has been located, for example ‘I like fish, but not cat’. However, In Vietnamese, the empty pronoun is allowed even at the first clause of the first sentence, when referring to the speaker. Rosen (1998) listed four types of empty pronouns in Vietnamese, which will be discussed below with examples from the Elicitation Task.

(6) Empty pronouns in simple sentences.

Tröôùc héat laø (toái) meâ maån vôi nhöõng  
 hình aính ‘raết  
 First of all (I) be charmed with classifier images  
 typical  
**FRAME TOPIC NULL TOPIC COMMENT**

NULL SUBJECT      PREDICATE

- ngôn ngữ      ñieän aûnh'.  
 - language      movie industry

**Firstly, I am fascinated by the images [which are] entirely typical of film language.**  
**(sentence 1)**

(7) Empty pronouns in embedded clauses.

giaù (ngöôøi ta/ñaïo dieän)      chæ      ñaët teän      phim      laø      *Meä Thaùo*  
 thoài  
 if (people/film director) only      name      film      to be      Me Thao      only  
**TOPIC**  
 NULL TOPIC 1      COMMENT 1  
 NULL SUBJECT 1      PREDICATE 1

**supposing the film had been named simply *Meä Thaùo*,**

thi      (boä phim)      nghe      giaûn dò      hôn      vaø      'ñaõ'  
 hôn.]  
 topic marker (film)      hear      simple      more      and      exciting  
 more  
**TM**      **COMMENT**  
 NULL TOPIC 2      COMMENT 2  
 NULL SUBJECT 2      PREDICATE 2

**it would have been pleasant to the ears. (sentence 1)**

(8) Empty Pronouns in consecutive clauses.

Trong nhieàu      nhaân vaät      phuï      thaønh coâng,      oâng      boõ  
 giaø      raát      sinh ñoäng  
 In      many      character      secondary      successful      man      servant      old      very  
 lively  
**FRAME TOPIC**      **TOPIC**  
**COMMENT 1**  
 SUBJECT      PREDICATE 1

- vaø      caûm ñoäng  
 - and      touching

**Among the many successful supporting characters, [that of] the old servant is very vivid and touching**

(oâng) xöùng ñaùng      ñöôïc baàu      laø vai      phuï      xuaát  
 saéc nhaát  
 (he)      deserving      be/get      nominate      be      character      secondary      excellent  
 best  
**NULL TOPIC 2**      **COMMENT 2**  
 NULL SUBJECT      PREDICATE 2

**and worthy to be nominated for most successful supporting actor. (sentence 14)**

## (9) Empty Pronouns with Indefinite Reference

(.....) Ăn quả, (.....) nhớ kẻ trồng cây.

(.....) Eat fruit (.....) remember person plant tree

**When you eat fruit, remember the person who planted the tree.**

Sentence 17 consists of two comments. The first comment is an embedded topic-comment structure (or ‘double-subject construction’<sup>1</sup>), in which the NP topic is coreferential with the main topic, as stated in (2). The second comment of sentence 17 is an embedded topic-comment structure, the topic of which is semantically related to the main topic of the sentence, as shown in (3) above. Sentence 5 is an example of a sentence where the topic is semantically related to a specific constituent in the comment, as shown in (3) above (i.e. the topic is the object of the verb mentioned in the comment). Sentence 18 also has two comments: the first comment is an embedded topic-comment structure, the second comment is also an embedded one, but there is a gap within this second comment filled by the main topic of the sentence, as shown in (3) above. Sentence 6 is an example of the topic not being related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment (i.e. the topic is the adverb of the comment) as shown in (4) above. Sentence 2 and 13 are examples of empty pronouns in simple sentences, as shown in (6) above. Sentence 1 has the empty pronoun in embedded clauses, shown in (7) above. The explanatory sentence at the end of Sentence 1 (inside the bracket), and sentence 14, 15, 16 are examples of empty pronouns in consecutive clauses as shown in (8) above. Sentence 7, 8, 9, 10 are elliptical sentences.

**5. Subjects:**

Four groups of 95 students from the Department of English Languages and Literature of University of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ho Chi Minh City were chosen as the informants for this study. Most of the students had studied English for nine years at high school. At the time of the test, the students of Year 1 had not attended the obligatory course in Vietnamese-English translation, the students from Year 2 had taken

<sup>1</sup> Constructions have the basic form [NP1, [NP2 PREDICATE]]. NP1 has topic-like function with respect to NP2 and both noun phrases have some claim to being subjects.

one module (60 periods = 45 hours in total), the students of Year 3 had completed three modules while those in Year 4 had completed five modules in Vietnamese-English translation.

## **6. Data Collection and the Test:**

The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of University of Western Sydney, Australia. All participants were informed about the purpose, the nature and the author of the study and were asked to sign into consent forms if they were willing to attend the study. The subjects were asked to translate a 250-word text from Vietnamese into English in 180 minutes without being told which structure was tested.

The Vietnamese text is an extract from an article named '*Meâ Thaûo-thôøi vang boùng*' (Me Thao - the golden age) of *Tuoài Treû* (The Youth), a fairly well-known newspaper in Vietnam. The text was chosen because of its richness in sentence types: many different types of 'authentic' Vietnamese sentences could be found in the text, including minor sentences, i.e. elliptical sentences, sentences without either Topic or Comment, sentences in which the Topic is identical with the Subject, sentences in which the Topic is not identical with the Subject, sentences in which the Topic or Comment itself is another Topic-Comment structure. With such a variety in sentence types, the text promised to be a good tool for discovering the most problematic structures for the students when translating from Vietnamese to English. The text was also chosen because it contained traces of the topic-prominence of Vietnamese languages, which was hypothesized in this study as posing a number of translation problems for students. The present author analysed the sentence to see whether students tended to make more errors where the Topic does not coincide with the grammatical subject or where both the topic and the subject are dropped.

## **7. Data Analysis**

The errors in the students' translations were firstly detected by an American academic highly competent in Vietnamese. His background is in teaching Vietnamese history in the Vietnamese language at the National University of Singapore. He also has five years' experience teaching English as a second language at Vietnamese National

Universities). After the first marking, the author and two other Vietnamese ESL teachers rechecked the error correction of the native speaker to ensure that his error correction is appropriate. Only the errors relating to the task of handling the subject and the empty elements was focused as they are directly related to the research questions. The analysis counted the number of errors to find their representativeness. The examples of each kind of error are discussed below.

## 8. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the translations produced by 95 students shows the five types of errors in the specific task of locating and translating the sentence's subject. These are: Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verbs.

**Table 1. Distribution of errors relating to the translation of subjects**

<b>Types of errors</b>	<b>YEAR 1</b>	<b>YEAR 2</b>	<b>YEAR 3</b>	<b>YEAR 4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Omission Of Subject	2	10	21	1	34
Repetition Of Subject	1	5	10	1	17
Inappropriate Choice Of Subject	1	5	1	0	7
No Logical Connection Between Subject And Predicate	3	5	7	2	17
Inappropriate Connection Between Subject And Passive Verb		5	1		6

Table 1 shows the distribution of errors relating to the translation of subjects in four years. As there were more participants in Year 3 (36 students) than participants in Year 1 (15 students), 2 (27 students), and 4 (17 students), the number of errors in Year 3 is accordingly bigger than those of other years.

As Table 1 shows, omitting the subject is the most frequent type of error among all types of errors relating to the sentence subject. Although most Vietnamese can understand (or have the impression that they understand) the empty pronoun or dropped subject when they read a text, they do not always correctly identify the referent of the missing subject when they need to transfer these sentences into English. The omission of



the subjects may be traced to two reasons: firstly, the students may not be able to identify the referent of the missing subject or, secondly, they do not know that it is necessary to find the missing subject for it to be rendered into a correct English sentence. Besides these types of errors, students also make inappropriate choice of subjects, repeat the subject, or write sentences in which the subjects do not semantically match the predicate of the sentences, nor the passive verbs. The distribution of errors across 18 sentences is discussed in details below.

**Table 2. Frequency of errors relating to translating subjects in 18 sentences**

Sentence Number from the Source Text	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Omission Of Subject	11	6											13	1			7	1
Repetition Of Subject			5	1							1				3		4	3
Inappropriate Choice Of Subject		5		1										1				
No Logical Connection Between Subject And Predicate					16	1												
Inappropriate Connection Between Subject And Passive Verb	1																	5

Sentence 1 and 13 show the highest percentage of subject omission. In these two sentences, the subject is completely dropped and the translators had to refer to the context to identify the subject, which, in this case, is 'I' referring to the narrator/writer of the source text. Errors where subject is repeated are observed in sentence 3, 15, 17 and 18. These sentences have complex structures with embedded topic-comment constructions, requiring the skill of manipulating the subject and the sentence structure. Therefore students who persist with the literal meaning of the text and the surface structure of the source text are more likely to make this type of errors. Five students

made the wrong choice of subject in Sentence 2, which shows they did not make a very careful analysis of the text before they began their translating. The dropped subject of sentence 2 is 'I'; however, these students erroneously chose 'Tröôùüc heát' (Firstly) as the subject of the sentence, which is actually a transitional adverb. 16 cases of errors happen when the subjects do not match the predicate in sentence 5. In this sentence, the topic 'Caûnh thaû ñeøn trôøi' (scene of dropping lanterns) does not coincide with the grammatical subject of the main verb: it is the object of the verb 'laøm' (make/carry out) in the comment. The actual subject is 'ngöôøi ta' or 'ngöôøi xem', which is dropped. To translate this sentence, students are required to identify the referent of the empty pronoun 'ngöôøi ta' or 'ngöôøi xem'. However, many of them choose the wrong subject when they select the topic of the sentence 'Caûnh thaû ñeøn trôøi' (scene of dropping lanterns), an inanimate referent, as the subject of the verb 'töôung nhö' in their translation. This leads to numerous errors appearing in the translations of this sentence. The last type of error which can be attributed to the poor handling of the subject is the mismatch in meaning between the subject and the passive verb, which occur most often in sentence 18.

## 9. Examples of Errors and Discussion:

The following tables (8.1- 8.5) display sample sentences for the five error types mentioned above, with the distribution of errors by student Year group.

**Table 8.1: Sample Sentences of the Error Type 'Omission of Subject'**

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	✓ Being fascinated by named and nameless characters again.	2
2	Also, ✓ being fascinated by the named characters and	10
3	nameless ones.	21
4	✓ Still fascinated by named and anonymous characters. Supposed (supposing) that it was (were) named MT, ✓ sounds (it would sound) candid and more unique.	1

**Table 8.2: Sample Sentences of the Error Type 'Repetition of Subject'**

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
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1	Almost each topic, it's permeated with the soul of Vietnamese	1
2	To, the singer is dramatic, wandered (wandering) but dignified, amorous but loyal, both seductive and serious, petite but ✓	5
3	unimportant ....	10
4	The scene of burning furniture, the explosive sound of furnishings, the scene of a gunshot firing at the doll, all of them make ✓ viewer's blood run cold. Tam, a player of the moon shaped guitar was so wonderful that he was desperate, frustrated but giving, the gesture (gestures) totally suited the mood.	1

**Table 8.3: Sample Sentences of the Error Type 'Inappropriate Choice of Subject'**

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	First, <b>it</b> is the being fascinated by images 'full of film's	1
2	language'	5
3	Among successful supporting characters, the old servant is so vivid and moving and <b>that (he)</b> is worthy to be nominated as the best supporting character	1
	The first is fascinated by all language of motion picture images.	

**Table 8.4: Sample Sentences of the Error Type 'No Logical Connection between Subject and Predicate'**

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	The scene of dropping ✓ outside lantern is made (can happen)	3
2	only by charm.	5
3	The sight of dropping lanterns is considered that can be only	7
4	carried out by magic. The sight of dropping lanterns seems that only magic could make it. The scene of dropping lantern is believed that only magic can do it.	2

**Table 8.5: Sample Sentences of the Error Type 'Inappropriate Connection Between Subject And Passive Verb'**

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
2	Miss To, who is beautiful but miserable, vagabond but dignified, amorous but loyal, both seductive and serious, petite but not important is played the role best by no one except Thuy Nga	5

The errors under the category of ‘Omission of Subjects’ can be classified into two types: Omission of subject within a clause and Omission of subject within a sentence.

**Omission of subject within a clause** There are 17 cases of subjects being omitted within a clause. Most of them take place in sentence 1 (11/17), sentence 17 (5/17) and sentence 14 (1/17).

- 1) If only ✓ name the film MT, it will be more simple and more satiable.
- 2) if only the film ✓ named MT, ✓ is more simple and better to hear.
- 3) supposed (supposing) that it was (were) named MT, ✓ sounds (it would sound) candid and more unique.

In sentence 1, the explanatory sentence inside the bracket shows two instances of dropped subject: the subject ‘ngöðøi ta’ is omitted in the first clause and ‘boä phim’ is omitted in the second. This reflects a very common feature of Vietnamese grammar, in which empty pronouns exist in most sentences in every context, formal or informal. As Rosen mentioned (1998:144)

‘Not allowing any missing elements at any levels of the grammar to represent empty pronouns would, however, mean abandoning any kind of subcategorization for Vietnamese verbs. .... It would make it impossible to use any of the current grammatical frameworks for analyzing Vietnamese ... In the second place, it would be difficult to account for native speaker reactions to sentences with empty pronouns. If such sentences are presented out of context, they will often be considered unacceptable; the informants will ‘ask for’ the missing argument. If the missing argument is provided by an appropriate context the informant will accept the sentence. This shows that there is nothing wrong with the sentence, but that each argument of the verb must be provided either in the sentence itself or in the context’.

That is to say, a Vietnamese student with enough general knowledge of Vietnamese and using their common sense should have the necessary intuition to identify the empty pronoun or the dropped subject in a sentence.

In sentence 1, the dropped subject of the first clause can be understood as ‘the film makers, the director or the one who has the right to name the film’. However, the author’s decision to drop the subject may not be explained completely by the Vietnamese’s practice of using empty pronouns. It could also be caused by the author’s emphasis of the event of changing the film’s name rather than on the person who has the right to name the film. With this sentence, there are two approaches students can choose

to assist their translation: to use passive voice to avoid identifying the subject, or to identify the subject and render them into English. However, up to 11 over 95 students translated this sentence without a subject or appropriate passive voice.

In the second clause, the only interpretation of the dropped subject is ‘the film’. However, four of 95 students ignore this dropped subject and do not locate the subject; they simply begin the second clause without any subject.

Sentence 17 reveals five instances of errors, mostly because the students fail to put the subject into the second clause in the structure *so/such+adjective+that*. This error may have resulted from the nature of the source text, as the subject is not revealed in the original.

4) Tam, the player of the moon shaped guitar was so wonderful to such an extent that □ was desperate, mysterious, frustrated but giving, gesture (gestures) was really appropriate for □ mood.

In short, the total of 22 cases of omission of subjects within a clause is not enough to conclude that Vietnamese student cannot locate the subject in their translation. Rather, these errors seem to arise from a lack of care towards and concentration on the translation task by some students.

**Omission of subject within a sentence.** There are 17 cases of subjects being omitted in a sentence, mostly in sentence 2, 13 and 18.

- 1) First, ✓ fascinated by ‘the real film language images’.
- 2) ✓ Being fascinated by named and nameless characters again.
- 3) ✓ hard to find someone else to play the role better than Thuy Nga
- 4) If ✓ naming the film Me Thao, it’s simple and more wonderful.

Clearly, the influence of the source text and the source language, as well as an insufficient knowledge of English syntax seems to result in students ignoring the need to locate and translate the subjects in these three sentences. In the sentence 2, the subject is completely omitted, but students can deduce from the context that it is the author who is fascinated by the authentic language of movie industry. However, either because the students remain faithful to the original on purpose, or because they forget the necessity of not dropping the subject from sentences in English, they tend to begin their translated

sentences with ‘fascinated’ for the subject and main verb. Five students make this error in translating this sentence.

In the same way, the subject in sentence 13 is also dropped, showing the popular trend in Vietnamese to omit the subject. Although it is also possible in English to drop the subject, this form of omission cannot always be applied and sometimes the dropping of the subject makes the sentence sound odd. To illustrate, this example is not acceptable in English, but is quite acceptable in Vietnamese:

A: Who does this book belong to?

B: It belongs to me

To me.

Me.

(?) Belongs to me.

According to Rosen (1998:146), in the case of independent sentences where the subject is dropped, several translations will be possible, for instance the subject could be ‘I/you/he/she/we/they’. It is the context that assists the translators/readers in deciphering the subject of the sentence. However, the erroneous translations of students in sentence 13 (example 2 above) shows that students may fail to realize the importance of translating the subject, although they may feel they understand the text on first impression. This supports Gile (1995)’s claim that some texts may be actually more difficult than translators realise on their first reading.

Example 3 shows another case of subject omission (sentence 18), arising not from the existence of empty pronoun in Vietnamese, but from the practice of word-by-word translation. As the original sentence does not show any subject of the action ‘find an actress’ the students need to use the expletive ‘It’ to render this sentence appropriate in translation. The appropriate translation should be ‘It would be hard to find someone who could play the role better than Thuy Nga’. However, since in Vietnamese the sentence starts with ‘khou’ (which is an adjective), some students may translate this into English as ‘hard to find someone else to play the role’. Fortunately, only one student made an error of this kind.

**Repetition of subject.** There are 17 instances of this error in the data, in sentence 3, 4, 11, 15, 17 and 18. In the following examples, the subject is repeated as either a coreferential pronoun, the indefinite pronoun ‘all’, or an appositive.

- 1) Almost **each topic, it’s** permeated with the soul of Vietnamese.
- 2) **All leading characters, everyone** to his look, are original and dramatic, how naturally and profoundly they are portrayed.
- 3) The scene of burning furniture, the explosive sound of furnishings, the scene of a gunshot firing at the doll, **all of them** make ✓ viewer’s blood run cold
- 4) **Tam, the player of the moon shaped guitar, he** is too wonderful to such an extent that he is desperate, mysterious, frustrated, whereas his giving and gesture exactly suit the mood
- 5) **To, a singer** ✓ is beautiful but ill fate, wandering but dignified, amorous but loyal, seductive and serious, petite but not insignificant.

It is very difficult to trace the reason for these errors to the context or the influence of the target language. The cause of these errors can only arise from the Vietnamese habit of mentioning both topic and subject in one sentence, in the so-called ‘double subject construction’. After mentioning the topic of the sentence, the students may feel it ‘natural’, from the habit of language use in Vietnamese, to repeat the topic in order to emphasize or clarify the sentence. These kinds of sentences are not very different from the Vietnamese sentence quoted by Rosen (1998:87). In this example, the topic ‘cow’ corresponds to the pronoun ‘it’ in the comment clause ‘it eats very little grass’.

**Con            boø   aáy,   noù   aên   ít        côu   laém.**  
 Classifier            cow   that   it        eat        few   grass   very  
 As for that cow, it eats very little grass.

Examples 1 and 2 are similar to Rosen’s example, showing the very clear effect of Vietnamese topic-comment structure on translation. ‘It’ is used to replace ‘each topic’ in example 1 and ‘everyone’ is used to replace ‘all leading characters’ in example 2. In example 3, the student commits two errors at the same time. Firstly, he misinterprets ‘the scene of burning furniture, the explosive sound of furnishings, the scene of a gunshot firing at the doll’ as three separate scenes of the film and treats them as a combination of

scenes. Then he uses the pronoun ‘all of them’ as a coreferential pronoun to refer to all of these scenes. Example 4 is very appealing, as the student repeats the pronoun ‘he’ not after the topic ‘To’ but after the appositive. This proves the error is not necessarily caused by the context.

As for example 5, it represents many cases in the corpus where the students simply start the sentence with ‘To’ or ‘Tam’ and then continue with ‘a singer is .....’ or ‘a moon-shaped guitar is...’. This error encompasses two problems. Firstly, students still rely heavily on the source text and employ its exact structure. Secondly, students seem to forget that in English only one subject is allowed with the main verb. If further explanation is required, the only two linguistic devices possible are appositives or relative clauses, and these students use neither.

#### **No logical connection between subject and predicate.**

Another type of syntactic errors in the process of handling the subject is presenting sentence without any semantic connection between the subject and predicate in English translation. There are 17 cases of this error. All of them are in sentence 5 ‘Caûnh thaû ñeøn trôøi töôûng nhö chæ cou ma thuaät môùi laøm noãi.’ The literal translation of this sentence should be ‘The scene of dropping the lantern that we/one may think can only happen by magic’. In this sentence, ‘Caûnh thaû ñeøn trôøi’ is the Topic - what the author is focusing on – but it also coincides with the subject of the sentence. Based on the context, the dropped subject can be understood in many ways, as ‘we’, ‘one’ or ‘audience’. The predicate ‘töôûng nhö chæ cou ma thuaät môùi laøm noãi’ [think can only happen in magic] goes well with the dropped subject ‘we’, ‘one’ or ‘audience’, but it does not semantically match the topic ‘the scene of dropping the lantern’ as the scene is not an animate object who can ‘think’. Therefore, the students who cannot identify the dropped subject and the relationship between the topic/subject/predicate end up choosing the topic ‘the scene of dropping lanterns’ as the subject to go with the predicate. The first consequence is the sentence may become a merging of words not obeying any syntactic rule, or a sentence without main verb or an incomplete sentence. In terms of semantic, there is no logical connection between the subject and predicate in the English sentence, as illustrated by the following examples.



- 1) The sight of dropping lanterns seems that only magic could make it.
- 2) The sight that lanterns were dropped, which imagined that magic could make out.
- 3) The sight of dropping lanterns is considered that can be only carried out by magic.

## **10. Summary:**

The five types of syntactic errors found to be prevalent in the data in the task of locating and rendering the subject into the target text include: Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verb. The data reveals that 'Omission of Subject' is the most frequent type of error, with the second most frequent type being 'Repetition of Subject' and 'No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate'. However, it is worth noting that these errors are not the most frequent of all kinds of syntactic errors. That is to say, although students did have errors because of this typological difference, they seem to have less difficulty with locating and translating subjects than with other fields, such as article, subject-verb agreement.

In short, in sentences in which the topic-comment structure is remarkably different from the subject-predicate structure, students did have problem in locating the subject and made the above-mentioned five types of errors. However, they seem to have more problems in the task of handling the relationship between the subject and the verb: they are puzzled to recognize the difference between verbal predicates (in the form of a verb) and substantival predicates (in the form of an adjective) in Vietnamese language and they often omit the verbs in the target text versions. This issue, nevertheless, is not the focus of the present paper. Students also have difficulty in handling the relative clause in sentences with two topic-comment structures and have problems in constructing the sentence in an appropriate way.

## **11. Some strategies for translating Topic-Comment Structures of Vietnamese**

### **a. Paying attention to the omission of pronoun in Vietnamese: (subject, object position)**

This feature has to be highlighted for students. They must be aware that in Vietnamese sentences the subject is often dropped, but not in English. Consequently, they



possessive case ‘Tam’s gestures’ or with a possessive adjective ‘his gestures’. The second way is to use the phrase ‘As for’ for the topic ‘Tam’, by which the subject of the embedded subject-predicate constructions ‘cõu chæ’ will be retained as the main subject in the English sentence. The third way is to choose ‘Tam’ as the subject of the sentence and express the possessor-possessive relationship through the verb ‘have’. In this way, the subject of the subject-predicate construction will become the object of the verb ‘have’. So there are three possible translations for sentence 5b.

1. Tam’s gestures precisely reflect his mood.
2. As for Tam, his gestures precisely reflect his mood.
3. Tam has gestures which exactly reflect his mood.

However, the relationship of the topic and the subject of the comment clause is not always possessor-possessee. According to Rosen (1998), the kind of relation between the topic and a noun phrase within the comment is not limited to double subject constructions. The referent of the topic can also be related in such a way to the referent of some other Noun Phrases in the comment, for instance, as the *direct object of the verb in the comment clause*. This type of relation is demonstrated by Rosen’s type 3. In the Elicitation Task, the example illustrating this type is sentence 5.

- (5) **Caûnh thaû ñeøn trõøi (... ) töõung nhö chæ coù ma**  
**thuaät môùi laøm noãi.**  
**Scene drop light sky (... ) think only magic new do**  
**manage**  
 → We/You/One may think that only magic could do such a scene of dropping lanterns.  
 → (The scene of dropping the lantern that we/one may think can only happen by magic)

We have two possibilities for this case. First, the subject of the comment clause is chosen to be the subject of the whole sentence and the topic ‘Caûnh thaû ñeøn trõøi’ [scene of dropping lanterns] is located into the position of an object. Alternatively, the topic may be separated out in a phrase and located at the sentence beginning ‘As for the scene of dropping the sky lanterns, the viewers may think only magic could do that’.

Some similar examples with sentence 5 that can be found in Vietnamese are:

1. **Nhaø naøy chæ cou ngöôøi giaøu mua.**  
**House this only have person rich buy**  
 → Only the rich want to buy this house.  
 → As for this house, only the rich want to buy it.
2. **Saùch naøy toài ñaõ ñoïc roài.**  
**Book this I tense marker read already**  
 → I already read this book.  
 → As for this book, I already read it.

However, in the sentences where the topic is the object of the verb in the comment clause but the main verb refers to perception process such as ‘look’, ‘seem’, ‘sound’, ‘taste’, there is no need to locate a new subject for the sentence and block the topic with ‘As for’. Since English syntax allows such structures as ‘The scene seems to be done by magic’ or ‘The scene looks as if it can only be done by magic’, ‘The food tastes good’, the topic can be retained to be the subject of the sentence with these verbs as predicate. To illustrate, as the main verb of example 5 is ‘seem’, the topic ‘Caùnh thaû ñeøn trôøi’ can be retained as the subject in the English translation. These are the possible ways of translating this type of topic-comment structure in sentence 5:

1. We/You/One may think that only magic could do such a scene of dropping lanterns.
2. The scene of dropping the lantern that we/one may think can only happen by magic.
3. The scene seems to be done only by magic.
4. As for the scene of dropping the sky lanterns, the viewers may think only magic could do that.

The topic can also be the *adverb* or *adverbial clause* to modify the verb in the comment clause. This is type 4 in Rosen’s categorisation where the topic may not be related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment. The example from the Elicitation Task is sentence 6, with the topic functioning as the adverbial clause of place of the verb in the comment clause.

- (6) **Caùnh quay naøo ( ... ) cuõng thaáy moà hoài.**  
**Scene any ( ... ) also see sweat**  
 You/we/one can see the sweat behind every scene

In this case, the subject of the comment clause has to be identified and located into the position of the subject in the English sentence. And the topic will become the adverb phrase which we can put at the beginning or the end of the sentence depending on what the translator wishes to be the focus of attention. To illustrate, the students need to recognise that the dropped subject of the comment clause in sentence 5 can have an indefinite reference as ‘you’, ‘we’, ‘one’, or it can refer to ‘people’ or ‘viewers’. Then the suitable translation could be:

1. In every scene, you/we/one/people/viewers can see the ‘sweat’ of hard work.
2. You/we/one/people/viewers can see the ‘sweat’ of hard work behind every scene.

As there are many kinds of adverbs in English, the semantic role of the noun phrase functioning as topic is varied. They can be adverb of time, manner, place, etc. Some similar examples with this sentence that can be found in Vietnamese are:

1. **Chìa khoá này** **không** **ai** **đều** **không** **đóng** **được**.  
**Key** **this** **shelf** **any** cannot open manage  
 Any shelf can be opened with this key.
2. **Tiền này** **thì** (...) **mua** **tiên** **cuõng** **đóng** **được**.  
**Money** **this** **TM** (...) **buy** **fairy** **also** **manage**  
 With this amount of money, you can even buy a fairy with it.

The referent of the topic may also be *the indirect object of the verb in the clause*. There is no example of this kind in the Elicitation Task, so most of examples will be taken from Vietnamese language in general.

1. **Ngõõoi** **lại** **thì** **toài** **không** **biếu** **nhõng** **bãin** **thì** **toài** **taẽng**.  
**Strangers** **TM** **I** do not offer but friends  
 As for the strangers, I don’t give (it) to them for free but as for my friends, I will give (it) as a present.  
 [I give don’t give (it) to the strangers for free but I will give it as presents for my friends]
2. **Cha** **mẽi** **thì** **chõ** **gõui** **thieãp** **chũc** **teát**  
**Parents** **TM** **she** send postcards congratulate New Year  
  
**- cõn anh em** **thì** **chõ** **gõui** **email**.  
**- as for brothers** **TM** **she** send email

As for parents, she sends the postcards to them; as for her brothers, she sends emails.

[She sends the postcards to her parents but she sends emails to her brothers]

There are two suggested translation methods for this kind of sentence. First, the sentence can start with the phrase ‘As for’ with the topic and this phrase will appear at the beginning of the sentence (as we can observe in the above examples). Alternatively, we just put them back to the normal position of an indirect object in English sentence. However, in the normal position of an indirect object, the focus of the sentence may be changed. That is to say, when the topic appears at the beginning by the phrase ‘As for’ it attracts the emphasis and attention of the readers, but when it was located in the unmarked or normal position of an indirect object after the main verb, it lost its value of attracting readers’ attention.

**b2. Sentences without ‘double subject’ construction of Vietnamese, or the topic is identical with subject of the embedded subject-predicate construction:**

In sentence (5a), the topic of the sentence ‘Tam’ is semantically identical with the subject of the comment clause ‘*caây ñaøn nguyeät*’ (player of moon-shaped guitar), which is actually a noun phrase to illustrate the identity of the topic ‘Tam’. This is the sentence type 2 suggested by Rosen. There are many possible ways of translating this structure. Firstly, the topic can be located at the beginning with ‘As for’, then the subject of the sentence must be a pronoun to avoid the repetition. Secondly, the topic will be ‘Tam’ and the subject ‘*caây ñaøn nguyeät*’ will become the appositive phrase or a relative clause.

1. As for Tam, he is a great moon-shaped guitar player who is so excellent to the extent of desperation ...
2. Tam, the player of the moon shaped guitar, is so excellent to the extent of desperation.
3. Tam, who is the player of the moon shaped guitar, is so excellent to the extent of desperation.

When the topic of the sentence is exactly the same with the subject of the comment clause (as shown by Rosen’s type 1), we simply choose the topic to be the subject of the

sentence in English. Alternatively, ‘As for’ can be used to block the topic and the same pronoun will be repeated at the beginning of the sentence.

**Toài thì (toài) không ngủ được.**  
**I TM (I) not sleep manage**  
 → I couldn’t sleep  
 → As for me, (I) couldn’t sleep.

## 12. Conclusion:

The paper investigated two questions: a) whether the students have problem translating sentences in which the Topic of the topic-comment structure does not coincide with the Subject and b) what kinds of errors students made in translating this specific type of structure. The number of errors found in the data may not be large enough to substantiate the fact that Vietnamese EFL students always have a great deal of difficulty in handling the typological differences between Vietnamese and English. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that these errors still need to be identified and collected during Translation Training. The paper has identified some typical errors in the Vietnamese-English translation caused by the influence of the Vietnamese topic-comment structures. The most common errors in the translation of these structures include Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verbs. Some strategies were suggested that can be applied to prevent the possible problems arising from translating topic-prominent structures of Vietnamese into English.

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## Appendix A ELICITATION TEST

**Translate the following passages into English:**



(1) Laø keù töøng chaêm chuù doõi theo cuoäc ‘haønh trình thai saün’ cuûa boã phim, toãi meã maån vôùi Meã Thaùo (giaù chæ ñaët teân phim laø Meã Thaùo thoãi thì nghe giaün dò hôn vaø ‘ñaõ’ hôn). (2) Trööùuc heát laø meã maån vôùi nhöõng hình aünh ‘raët ngoân ngöõ ñieän aünh’. (3) Caünh ñoát baøn gheá, tieáng noã cuûa ñoà ñaïc vaø phaùt suùng baén vaøo con buùp beã khieán ngöõoï xem laïnh gaùy. (4) Caünh nong taèm ngo ngoe ñoõi aên vaø baøn chaân giaãm naüt nhöõng con taèm laøm ta sôün gai oác. (5) Caünh thaù ñeøn trôøi töðung nhö chæ coù ma thuaät möùi laøm noãi. (6) Caünh quay naøo cuõng thaáy moà hoãi. (7) Moà hoãi cuûa yù nghó. (8) Moà hoãi cuûa söi ñi tìm. (9) Moà hoãi daøn döïng. (10) Moà hoãi taáp luyeän vaø dieän xuaát. (11) Haàu nhö möõi ñoain phim ñeàu thaém ñoõim taâm hoàn Vieät. (12) Trong trí nhöu toãi, chõa coù möät phim naøo cuûa nöùc Vieät ta ñoõic thöïc hieän coäng phu vaø ñaët chuaån nhö vaãy.

(13) Laïi meã maån vôùi nhöõng nhaân vaät coù teân vaø khoâng teân. (14) Trong nhieàu nhaân vaät phuï thaønh coäng, oäng boã giaø raát sinh ñoäng vaø caüm ñoäng, xöùng ñaùng ñoõic baàu laø vai phuï xuaát saéc nhaát. (15) Nhaân vaät chính naøo cuõng möõi ngöõoï möät veù, ñoác ñaùo, ñaày thaân phaän, ñoõic dieän taù töi nhieän vaø saâu saéc laøm sao. (16) Nguyeän haøo hoa, haøo hieáp, laáp dò ra maët, roõ laø anh ñieän chuù baát ñaéc chí, khaät khuøng. (17) Tam, caây ñaøn nguyeät tuyeät vôøi töù möïc tuyeät voïng, u uaån, beá taéc maø nghóa khí, cõu chæ thaät chính xaùc vôùi taâm traïng. (18) Tô, coã ñaøo haüt hoàng nhan baïc phaän, phieäu daït maø cao sang, ña tình maø chung tình, vöøa quyeán ruõ vöøa nghieâm trang, nhuù noi maø khoâng heøn möin... khou coù ai nhaáp vai hay hôn Thuyù Nga (vôùi ‘gioïng ca vaøng’ Thanh Hoaøi vaø löøi baøi haüt chaàu vaên do nhaø thô Vaên Lêã vieát).

*Title: Töø Chuøa Ñaøn ñeän Meã Thaùo - thöøi vang böùng*

*Author: Nguyeän Duy*

*Source: Tuoãi Treù Chuù Nhaät (Sunday Youth)*

*Number 38-2002 Date 29-9-2002*

## **Appendix 2**

### **STRUCTURAL CONFIGURATION OF 18 SENTENCES IN THE ELICITATION TASK**



FRAME TOPIC            NULL TOPIC            COMMENT  
                                  NULL SUBJECT        PREDICATE

- ngoân ngöõ ñieän aûnh'.  
 - language        movie industry

**Firstly, I am fascinated by the images [which are] entirely typical of motion picture/film language.**

(3) Caûnh            ñoát    baøn gheá,    tieáng            noá    cuûa            ñoà  
 ñaïc    vaø    phaùt suùng baén vaøø            scene    burn    furniture        sound  
 explode of    furniture        and    the shoot        shoot    at

TOPIC

SUBJECT

- con buùp beá  
 - the doll

**The scene of burning furniture, exploding furnishings and the gunshot fired at the doll**

khieán            ngöõøi xem laïnh gaùy.  
 make audience        cold

COMMENT

PREDICATE

**makes the audience's blood run cold.**

(4) Caûnh            nong            taèm            ngo ngoe    ñoøi            aên  
 vaø    baøn chaân            Scene frying basket silkworms        wriggle  
 demand        eat    and    foot  
 - giaãm        naùt            nhöõng con taèm  
 - tread        crushed        silkworms

TOPIC

SUBJECT

**The sight of silkworms wriggling in the drying basket and the foot trampling upon the silkworms**

laøm ta            sôùn    gai oác.  
 make pronoun        creep    goose-flesh

COMMENT

PREDICATE

**makes the audience's flesh creep.**

(5) Caûnh            thaû    ñeøn    trôøi            (ngöõøi ta/ngöõøi xem)  
 töøùng nhö    chæ coù        ma thuaät            scene drop    light    sky  
 (people/audience)        seem        only    magic

TOPIC

OBJECT OF VERB 2

COMMENT

NULL SUBJECT 1  
 OF THE CLAUSAL

COMMENT VERB 1

SUBJECT 2

- mõi                      laøm noãi  
 - in order to    do  
 - VERB 2

**The scene of dropping the lantern that we/ one may think can only happen by magic.**

(6) Caũnh quay naø                      (*ngöðøi ta/ngöðøi xem*)                      cuõng  
 thaáy moà hoãi.  
 Scene            any                      (*people/audience*)                      also    see  
 sweat

**TOPIC**

**COMMENT**

TOPICALISED ADVERB  
 OF CLAUSAL COMMENT  
 OBJECT OF VERB

NULL SUBJECT

VERB

**You/we/one can see the sweat behind every scene.**

(7) Moà hoãi    cuũa    yù nghó.  
 Sweat            of            thought

**TOPIC (NO COMMENT)**

**The sweat of thought.**

(12) Trong trí nhòu                      toãi    chõa    còu    moät    phim    naø    cuũa  
 nõõuc Vieät    ta  
 In    memory    I    not yet have    one    film    any    of  
 Vietnam    pronoun

**FRAME TOPIC**

**TOPIC (EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE)**

**EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE (THERE)**

ñõõic thõic hieãn    công phu    vaø    ñãit    chuaãn                      nhõ  
 vaãy

be/get carry out    elaborate    and    obtain standard    like that.

**As far as I can remember, no Vietnamese film has ever been produced as elaborately and perfectly as elaborate and perfect a film as this one.**

(13) (*Toãi*)                      Laii    meã maãn    vòui    nhõõng                      nhaãn  
 vaät    còu    teãn    vaø                      (*I*)                      again    be charmed    with  
 plural marker character    have name and

**NULL TOPIC**

**COMMENT**

NULL SUBJECT    PREDICATE

- không    teãn.

- no            name.

**I was fascinated again with the named and anonymous/ nameless characters.**

- (14) Trong nhiều nhân vật phụ thành công, ông  
 boõ giaø raát sinh ñoäng  
 In many character secondary successful man servant old  
 very lively  
**FRAME TOPIC** **TOPIC**  
**COMMENT 1**  
 SUBJECT PREDICATE 1  
 - vaø caùm ñoäng  
 - and touching

**Among the many successful supporting characters, [that of] the old servant is very vivid and touching**

(oâng) xöùng ñaùng ñöôïc baàu laø vai phụ  
 xuaát saéc nhất  
 (he) deserving be/get nominate be character secondary  
 excellent best  
**NULL TOPIC 2** **COMMENT 2**  
 NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE 2

**and worthy to be nominated for most successful supporting actor.**

- (15) Nhân vật chính nào cũng mỗi người một vẻ,  
 ñoác ñào, ñày thân phẫ,  
 Character main any also each person one style original  
 full condition  
**TOPIC** **COMMENT**  
 TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1  
 SUBJECT PREDICATE 1

**Each of the leading characters/every leading character is authentic in his/her own role - original, dramatic,**

(hoi) ñöôïc dieãn taû töï nhiên vaø saâu saéc  
 laøm sao  
 (they) manage describe natural and deep how  
**COMMENT**  
 NULL TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2  
 PREDICATE 2

**and they are all portrayed very naturally and profoundly in the film.**

- (16) Nguyeãn haø hoa, haø hieáp, laép dò ra maët,  
 (anh) roõ laø anh ñieàn chuû Nguyen  
 chivalrous generous eccentric overtly (he) really  
 landowner  
**TOPIC** **COMMENT 1** **NULL TOPIC**  
**2** **COMMENT 2**

SUBJECT PREDICATE 1 NULL  
 SUBJECT PREDICATE 2 - baát ñaéc chí, khaät khuøng.  
 - frustrated silly  
**Nguyen - a chivalrous, generous, obviously peculiar man - proves to be a frustrated and silly landowner.**

(17) Tam, caây ñaøn nguyeät tuyeät vôøi tòi mòuc tuyeät  
 voing, u uaån, beá taéc Tam moon-shaped guitar  
 excellent to degree disappointed hidden deadlock  
**TOPIC COMMENT**  
 TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1

SUBJECT 1 APPOSITION PREDICATE 1  
 - maø nghóa khí,  
 - but noble

**Tam, a player of the moon-shaped guitar, is so excellent that he appears desperate and mysterious, frustrated but still giving.**

cõu chæ thaät chính xaùc vôøi taâm traing.  
 gesture very accurate with state of mind.

**TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2**  
 SUBJECT 2 PREDICATE 2

**His gestures reflect his mood precisely.**

(18) Tô, coá ñaøo haüt hoàng nhan baic phaån, phieâu daít maø  
 cao sang, ña tình  
 To, singer beautiful girl ill fate wandering but  
 dignified amorous  
**TOPIC COMMENT**  
 TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1

SUBJECT APPOSITION PREDICATE

- maø chung tình,  
 - but loyal

**To, a beautiful singer who has known many ups and downs in life, is a romantic libertine but still very dignified,**

võøa quyean ruõ võøa nghiêm trang, nõu noi maø  
 khoáng heøn mön  
 both attractive and serious petite but not lowly

**COMMENT (continued)**

**amorous but loyal, seductive but serious, petite but not insignificant/unimportant.**

khòu coù ai nhaäp vai hay hôn Thuyù  
 Nga

difficult have anyone play role good more Thuy Nga

**TOPIC (EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE) COMMENT**

**SUBJECT-RAISING CONSTRUCTION**

**It would be hard to find someone who could play the role better than Thúy**

**Nga**