Analysing the English communication needs and difficulties of Journalism

undergraduates in Hong Kong

by

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Abstract

This research investigates the English communication needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates in Hong Kong. Journalism students learn how to conduct interviews and write news stories in English on their degree courses, which shows their communication needs in English; however, extensive literature found no previous research studying the language needs of Journalism undergraduates.

The subjects of this research were 62 Year Two and Year Three Journalism students majoring in Journalism and Communication in a local college. Student questionnaires and in-depth individual interviews with students and instructors of a news writing and reporting course were conducted. Findings indicate limited vocabulary and poor grammar are the largest problems in interviewing and news writing in English. A prioritized list of items was also produced.

Conclusions are that English news writing and reporting teachers should increase the content of the two problem areas, in particular, in their course and syllabus design. More interview practice and practical news writing training should be provided. Journalism students should read English newspapers more often for acquiring commonly used vocabulary and news sense, and for getting themselves familiarized with English news writing style.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Much research has been done on needs analysis in the past few decades. Some focused on undergraduates in different disciplines, for example, science, medicine and business. A communication needs analysis was conducted for non-native English speakers in an undergraduate physics lab (Jacobson, 1986). An English needs analysis in a medical context for college students was done in Taiwan (Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive, 1999). In Hong Kong, Jackson (2005) did an inter-university, cross-disciplinary analysis for business faculty and Bhatia and Candlin (2001) wrote a report on teaching English to meet the needs of business education among five tertiary education institutes. However, no needs analysis seems to have been done for Journalism undergraduates anywhere: an extensive literature search found no previous research.

Currently, I am working as an assistant lecturer at X College, teaching a course called *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* in which Journalism undergraduates learn interviewing and reporting in English. These students have to learn how to ask interviewees questions in English and use the information collected to write news reports in English. After going through their assignments, I found many problems in their writing. They have difficulties in constructing grammatically correct sentences, using correct tenses, using participle phrases and relative clauses, and creating news headlines. They also lack a wide range of thematic vocabulary for different current issues.

As a teacher, I would like to investigate my Journalism students' real needs and difficulties when producing news stories in order to equip them in class with the necessary interviewing and writing skills in English for their future career in the real world. I want to study their needs and to determine their difficulties in interviewing and writing in English for

news stories and use the information to improve my curriculum design and teaching. Most importantly, my research can help to draw up a portfolio – a written description – of the needs of Journalism undergraduates which will be a valuable addition to current ESP knowledge. The teaching aim of conducting this research is for helping not only local Hong Kong tertiary students but also other Journalism undergraduates elsewhere. The study could help the College and other places to develop better course materials for Journalism students, and also help course instructors to understand students' real needs and difficulties in interviewing and writing news reports in English more thoroughly in order to improve their teaching.

2. Literature Review

The usage of English language differs among different professionals, even though they are in the same field or discipline. Their language use differs in terms of text structures, lexico-grammatical features and word choices according to their occupation. Therefore, needs analysis is of paramount importance for course designers of English for specific purposes (ESP). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) describe needs analysis as "the corner stone of ESP" and the key stage in ESP (p. 122). It can lead to extremely focused and suitable ESP courses for students at work, and during their study. Drawing up a portfolio of what the learners need in English is the start of designing a good and tailor-made ESP course. University undergraduates start to learn the English skills they need for their professions before entering society. Needs and difficulties analysis plays a pivotal role for studying college students' needs. There are different means to conduct needs and difficulties analysis and various areas of language needs have been studied. To start this review, I will focus on a variety of needs analysis done for different types of working professionals.

2.1 Needs and Difficulties Analysis for Working Professionals

Li and Mead (2000) aimed to obtain a deeper understanding in the communication needs of the daily activities of fashion merchandisers with little experience in the textile and clothing industry. The subjects of their research were 360 graduates with at least one year experience working as merchandisers from two Hong Kong tertiary education institutes: KTTI and PolyU. The graduates were required to use different kinds of business communication skills in English when dealing with customers - from buyers to suppliers to manufacturers - because the customers were usually based in different countries (e.g. USA, UK and Italy). Questionnaires were sent to all 360 subjects and follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with 18 KTTI graduates and 15 workplace supervisors. Authentic

workplace texts were collected and visits were paid to a Hong Kong-based buying administrative office for half a day, and the company's large factory outside Shenzhen for two days. The survey results revealed that written English was of greater use to them than spoken English. While the graduates were concerned about grammatical accuracy, the supervisors focused more on correctness of content and the use of appropriate tone. Li and Mead (2000) concluded that the valuable results would help course designers and ESP practitioners to provide teaching and learning materials concentrated on the use of English in the workplace of textile and clothing merchandisers, or other areas for further study.

Chew (2005) focused on which English language skills were used more often by new bank entrants in Hong Kong. Four banks agreed to take part in the research, and 16 bank employees who were new entrants in the four banks were interviewed. The employees were also asked to complete a questionnaire. The research revealed that the main needs of the subjects were reading and writing. Their written communicative tasks are carried out in English while spoken communicative tasks are mainly in Cantonese, except when they have to contact English-speaking banking professionals. Regarding their sub-needs, their job duties are to translate information from Chinese into English and write business correspondence (e.g. memos, meeting minutes, reports, rules and regulations for bank customers, and opinion/complaint letters from customers). Chew (2005) concluded that financial content and language demand were the source of difficulty for the subjects. The employees showed much interest in short English speaking training courses. Chew (2005) suggested English language workplace training would be highly desirable, especially for bank employees using English as a second or foreign language.

Jasso-Aguilar (1999) aimed to compare different research methods, using multiple sources and triangulation to report findings during a study of the needs analysis of hotel

maids. The participants of the research worked in one of the hotels in Waikiki. Research data was collected through participant observations by tape-recording and note taking, unstructured interviews and questionnaires given to housekeepers and to co-workers. The sources of the data were from housekeepers, supervisors, human resources, task force meetings, morning briefings, housekeeping room and documents. Jasso-Aguilar (1999) says that participant observation is the most useful method because it allows the researcher to get first-hand information from the tasks, the language and situations in which a hotel maid is involved. It also gives the researcher a chance to confirm or disconfirm predictions made by outsiders. Jasso-Aguilar (1999) also indicates that unstructured interviews are better than questionnaires in both the amount and quality of information received because the researcher is allowed to build rapport with informants and develop trust. Jasso-Aguilar (1999) concluded that this research showed "the value of using multiple sources and methods for identifying learners needs, the reliability of insiders, and the frequent unreliability of outsiders" (p. 44).

Flowerdew and Wan (2006) focused on genre analysis of a relatively small corpus of letters from an accounting firm. The research aimed to explore how communicative purposes were achieved in accounting, through the analysis of tax computation letters in Hong Kong, using an ethnographic approach. The participants of this research worked at ABC International Ltd, located in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong. Research data was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews and macro- and micro-textual analysis of 25 authentic tax computation letters which "were written by tax accountants addressing a reader concerning about filing of tax returns and computations from this company". After the analysis, Flowerdew and Wan (2006) concluded that tax accountants did not seem too interested in the lexico-grammatical features and text structure used in the letters. In fact, the accountants were never taught formally how to write tax computation letters during their studies. They simply used previous texts as a template to produce their letters, which focus on

a similar situation. Flowerdew and Wan (2006), therefore, suggested that accountants should receive both pre- and in-service Specific Purpose language training.

Cowling (2007) described the needs analysis done for developing intensive English language course materials for a large Japanese company. Research data for needs analysis was collected through discussions with the client, semi-structured interviews with target teachers, interviews with target students, and open-ended questionnaires for students to complete with their senior employees. The needs analysis research was accepted by the client. When preparing the course materials, textbooks and teacher's manuals, Cowling (2007) emphasized authenticity and encouraged the teachers to incorporate cultural aspects in their manuals and lessons. Cowling (2007) says that the course was a success in meeting students' future needs because positive feedback, especially in the areas of course content and language focus, was received from the post course student and teacher questionnaires. Useful information from the questionnaires was also extracted for updating and/or retaining certain areas of the course. Cowling (2007) concluded that this need analysis process was extremely useful in assessing the target students' needs. It was possible to identify the future needs of the students. Cowling (2007) recommended that there should be careful planning and execution of needs analysis.

Crosling and Ward (2002) focused on the workplace oral communication needs and uses of business graduate employees. The participants of the research were employers of business graduates from Monash University, Australia. The research data was collected through a survey questionnaire which focused on frequency of oral communication and importance of particular forms of oral communication. 24 out of 96 relevant companies completed the survey. The respondents answered close-ended questions on a scale of 1-5 where 1 was the lowest rating, labelled "little use" or "not important at all" and 5 the highest rating, labelled

"lots of use" or "very important". The respondents also answered open-ended questions to give further comments on the graduates and oral communication. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data collected from the questionnaires. The results reflected that oral communication skills in the workplace were the most vital for business graduates. These skills were important for recruitment, job success, and promotion. The results also indicated the significance of oral communication skills within or outside the department. Crosling and Ward (2002) concluded that workplace oral communication was important and a frequent need for these business graduate employees. They suggested that workplace oral communication should be a top priority in university business/commerce education.

Holliday (1995) carried out an analysis of English language needs for an oil company (the Company) using an ethnographic approach in 1993. The objectives of the analysis were to analyse the language needs of national staff and make recommendations, to suggest a broad curriculum framework for language training courses, and to recommend implementation phases for course development and for the training of instructors. Research data was collected through interviews with management, supervisors and national employees, and examples of writing done by national staff provided by the Company. From the data, Holliday (1995) found that there was a communication breakdown because of the low English language standard of the national staff. The staff could not understand the instructions given by their supervisors. Due to their poor English, national technicians could not understand manuals in English, which might have led to dangers in the oil field sites. Also, national engineers could not write their own reports, which was one of their duties. Holliday (1995) concluded that English was the major language of oil technology, and it was essential for efficient communication between national and expatriate staff within the Company. Therefore, Holliday (1995) suggested that extensive training in technical and

non-technical English language communication skills should be introduced, and that training during morning office hours, on-site, in field locations, should be provided.

2.2 Needs and Difficulties Analysis at Tertiary Level

In higher education, students start to learn English for their specific discipline. Teachers help students to equip themselves for their future career. The demand for needs and difficulties analysis is relatively high because it can improve the design of curriculum and pedagogical methods at tertiary level. Since studying the needs of the students is a stepping stone, many research studies about English language needs and difficulties for different disciplines at the university level have been conducted in the past few decades.

In the 1990s, Zughoul and Hussein (1985) carried out an extensive English language needs analysis for faculties of Natural Sciences, Engineering, Medical Sciences, Economics and Administrative Sciences and Arts and Humanities at Yarmouk University, Jordan. To investigate the university students' English language needs, two separate questionnaires were prepared. One questionnaire was completed by 1,147 students and the other was completed by 130 faculty staff. Results indicated that other than class discussion and student questions in lectures, English was the most commonly used medium of instructions in various educational settings. Evidence showed that the opinions of the students and faculty members tended to diverge. Students tended to "overestimate their abilities in the different language skills, while a more realistic estimate was reflected in the responses of the faculty" (p. 133). Zughoul and Hussein (1985) advocated "a stronger orientation to ESP" in the university (p. 133).

Chia, Johnson, Chia and Olive (1999) investigated the perception of English language needs and problems that the students and faculty had in a medical college in Taiwan. The

respondents were 349 medical students in the Department of Medicine and 20 faculty members in the medical programme at Chung Shan Medical College in Taichung, Taiwan. Two separate questionnaires were developed for the students and the faculty members. Chia et al. (1999) found that students perceived that English was important for their academic studies and their future work. Both students and faculty agreed that reading was the most important skill needed for students' medical studies, and that students' major problems were limited vocabulary, and slow reading speed. They preferred three years of specific English courses in their four-year programme. Chia et al. (1999) suggested that elective English courses should concentrate on medical research studies in order to help students understand academic rhetoric and that "medical vocabulary should be taught in context" (p. 116).

Besides the analysis done within one university, some studies were carried out among several universities for a specific discipline. Bhatia and Candlin (2001) conducted a large-scale project to investigate communicative demands and difficulties of undergraduates of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) among five tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. Various types of methodological instruments and procedures were adopted, including questionnaires, focus group interviews with both students and teachers, classroom observation, and textual and generic analyses. The completed questionnaires [from 2684 students and 12 English department staff members] and focus group interviews [with 115 students and 45 Business faculty staff members] revealed problems that the students had in different English language skills, which justified the need for English language support courses which "deal with their specific language problems" (p. 104).

Similarly, Jackson (2005) conducted a research study on the linguistic and conceptual problems encountered by Chinese students from their business lecturers' perspective at five universities in Hong Kong. She illustrated the potential benefits ESP course designers and

practitioners could gain through a large-scale, multi-faceted, inter-university needs analysis. They could have a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the learning and teaching situation in multidisciplinary business education. Research data was collected through a survey and focus group discussions completed by students, interviews and group discussions with business lecturers, analysis of course syllabi and related materials, and students' writing samples as well as an interface between the academy and the business world. Jackson (2005) found that the students had language demands and difficulties in various areas in the sub-disciplines. The findings highlighted that the students' genuine needs should be "identified and addressed in well-designed, discipline-sensitive business communications programs" with the help from business faculty (p. 293). She suggested that "ESP course designers need to be aware of the increasing multidisciplinary and dynamic nature of business education as well as the unique disciplinary and discursive demands placed on students" (p. 304).

Needs and difficulties analysis is done for studying the needs of target students to help them better equip for their work or future career. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, much research has been conducted among working professionals. A wide range of research methods was adopted. They included questionnaires (Li & Mead, 2000; Chew, 2005; Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Cowling, 2007; Crosling & Ward, 2002), unstructured interviews (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999), semi-structured interviews with target teachers (Cowling, 2007), in-depth interviews with target learners (Flowerdew & Wan, 2006; Cowling, 2007), follow-up telephone interviews (Li & Mead, 2000), site visits (Li & Mead, 2000), participant observations (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Flowerdew & Wan, 2006), an ethnographic approach (Holliday, 1995) and discourse analysis of authentic texts (Li & Mead, 2000; Flowerdew & Wan, 2006).

Many cited studies were carried out for different disciplines for tertiary education (Zughoul & Hussein, 1985; Chia et al., 1999; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Jackson, 2005); however, an extensive literature search found no previous research in the discipline of Journalism undergraduates. The purpose of my research is to identify and describe the English language needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates that the students themselves and their course instructors perceive. Taking all the previously cited studies into account, using questionnaires to collect data for quantitative data analysis seems to be the most widespread in needs and difficulties analysis (Li & Mead, 2000; Chew, 2005; Jasso-Aguilar, 1999; Cowling, 2007; Crosling & Ward, 2002; Zughoul & Hussein, 1985; Chia et al., 1999; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001). Therefore, I used student questionnaires in my survey.

Holding in-depth interviews with Journalism students in my research is a must. Previous researchers interviewed students in their needs and difficulties analysis studies (e.g. Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Flowerdew & Wan, 2006; Cowling, 2007). "This enabled clarification and cross-checking of questionnaire findings" (Bhatia & Candlin, 2001, p.10). The researchers reviewed above interviewed more than one party for information collection (Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Jackson, 2005). I, therefore, interviewed the course instructors of the Journalism students. Considering the findings from Zughoul and Hussein's (1985) research, I suggest it is important to interview both students and course instructors since students may sometimes overestimate or underestimate their abilities in language skills. To get a clearer and more accurate picture of the students' needs and difficulties, conducting interviews with both parties seems necessary. In my research, I invited Journalism undergraduates to complete a questionnaire, and also interviewed them as well as their course instructors to gain more useful and in-depth information.

Another purpose of my research is to use the findings from my research to improve curriculum design and teaching. In the research reviewed above, the findings of linguistic needs and difficulties suggested that university students should take ESP courses for improving their language skills for a specific discipline (Zughoul & Hussein, 1985; Chia et al., 1999; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Jackson, 2005). The identified language needs should be included in the ESP curriculum to help students to overcome their difficulties (Chia et al., 1999; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Jackson, 2005). I hope my research could serve the same purposes and will help Journalism students to improve their English skills in interviewing and writing news stories, through an analysis of their language needs and difficulties.

Professionals and learners of different occupations have different needs. ESP course designers and practitioners are recommended to do thorough and multi-faceted needs analysis of their learners before they write a syllabus and course materials, and teach. Needs analysis in different fields should be on-going in order to keep ESP programmes current and effective (Jackson, 2005). The needs of professionals from different occupations vary, so the learners need a specific type of English language training for their study or work. If more research is conducted for different kinds of to-be-professionals or for those at work, ESP course designers and practitioners will have a much deeper understanding of what their learners need and will be able to prepare more suitable and tailor-made materials for their learners' immediate needs for study and work, and also for their future needs at work.

2.3 Justification for My Research

My research topic is an analysis of the needs and difficulties in English of Journalism undergraduates when conducting interviews and writing news reports. I suggest that it is important to study the needs and difficulties of the Journalism undergraduates because, through an extensive literature research, I could not find any evidence of any related research

in studying the needs of tertiary Journalism students, nor could I find any similar research conducted especially in Hong Kong. There is a need to study the needs and difficulties of these students because they need English for interviewing and writing news reports both in their studies and in their future work. Although some may argue that these students may not be English-language journalists, they will have chances to interview native English speakers and use interviewing skills in English. For those who are interested in English reporting and work for English media corporations, acquiring interviewing skills and news writing skills is crucial. Hence, Journalism undergraduates should be well equipped with English interviewing and news writing skills for their immediate study needs and future needs for the media industry.

As ESP teachers, we need to understand students' exact needs in English. Not just me, other teachers do not know their language needs as well. We do not know their exact needs, but we have to teach English to these students. Therefore, it is absolutely essential for teachers to find out the students' weaknesses and strengths in English in both interviewing and writing news reports, especially when we know that their English is not good enough. In that case, a needs and difficulties analysis in English of Journalism undergraduates when conducting interviews and writing news reports seems important and necessary. First, it can help to inform my teaching and teaching of others because it will allow me and other teachers to refine the news writing and reporting course syllabus and design. Second, it can give an insight into the English needs of similar students worldwide, and it can also be valuable for those who are interested in and would like to know their language needs.

3. Research Questions

In this research, I analysed the communication needs and difficulties in English of Journalism undergraduates when conducting interviews and writing news reports. My research questions are divided into two parts: *a) in interviewing* and *b) in writing*. My research questions are as follows:

a) *In Interviewing*

1. What are the language needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates when conducting interviews in English?
2. Why do the Journalism undergraduates have linguistic problems in conducting interviews in English?

b) *In Writing*

1. What are the language needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates when writing news reports in English?
2. Why do the Journalism undergraduates have linguistic problems in writing news reports in English?

4. Goals & Objectives

My objectives are to find out the linguistic needs and difficulties in English of Journalism undergraduates when they conduct interviews and write news articles in X College and why they have such needs and difficulties. My main objective and goal is to draw up a portfolio – a written description – of the needs of Journalism undergraduates. The portfolio can be used, for example, by the course instructors of *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* and others in Hong Kong and elsewhere for improving curriculum and developing tailor-made and well-designed news reporting and writing courses in the future for Journalism students.

5. Methodology

In my research, both quantitative and qualitative methods are adopted. The two methods are helpful for my needs and difficulties analysis. In my study, the quantitative method adopted is to collect data using questionnaires completed by Journalism students for quantitative data analysis. In addition, the qualitative method adopted is to carry out interviews, which is another very helpful way to find out what the interviewees think (Long, 2005a). I held in-depth individual face-to-face interviews with Journalism students and the course instructors of *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*. During the interviews, I collected more information from my interviewees for qualitative content analysis and was inspired by them so that I knew much more about the Journalism students' needs and difficulties in interviewing and writing news reports. More details are given under the following sub-headings:

5.1 Subjects and School

5.1.1 Subjects

5.1.1.1 Journalism Students

62 local Year 2 or Year 3 male and female Journalism undergraduates who have completed the course *"JCM 210A Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting I"*[1] at X College were invited to fill in a questionnaire. 36 were Year 2 students while 26, Year 3. 41 were female whereas 21, male. The majority was aged between 21 and 24. All of them are native Cantonese speakers, using English as a second language. They are currently studying in BA (Hons) in

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[1] *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* is a one-year core course which lasts for two semesters for all undergraduates taking BA (Hons) in Journalism & Communication Degree Programme at X College. In the fall semester, the course is called *"JCM 210A Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting I"*, while, in the spring semester, it is called *"JCM 210B Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting II"*. Both courses equip Journalism students with interviewing skills and news writing skills in English.

Journalism & Communication Degree Programme under the Department of Journalism and Communication. I have access to these particular students because I am now teaching them.

In addition to distributing a questionnaire among the students, I conducted in-depth individual interviews with six participants for more detailed information in order to take a more in-depth look into their needs and difficulties.

5.1.1.2 Course Instructors

I interviewed all of the course instructors who have taught or are teaching the course *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* in X College. There are three in total. They are all experienced lecturers or associate professors from the Department of Journalism and Communication in the College. Two of them have been teaching this course for more than five years and one, three years.

5.1.2   **School**

X College is a tertiary institution in Hong Kong, offering four-year bachelor's and three/two-year associate degrees. The Department of Journalism and Communication is under the Faculty of Arts. The total number of Journalism students is around 500. The student intake is around 130 each year.

5.2 Data-Collection Instruments

5.2.1 <u>Student Questionnaire</u>

A common needs analysis quantitative approach – questionnaire – was adopted in my research. Questionnaires have been widely used for communication needs and difficulties analysis research among various disciplines: e.g. in a medical context (Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive, 1999), a business context (Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Huh, 2006), an economics context (Taillefer, 2007), a legal context (Bhatia & Candlin, 1998), a science context (Tarantino, 1988; Dong, 1998; Cho, 2009), an engineering context (Jenkins, Jordan, & Weiland, 1993; Cho, 2009), a health-care context (Bosher & Smalkoski, 2002; Lepetit & Cichocki, 2002), a textile and clothing context (Li & Mead, 2000), and a non-science and non-engineering context such as arts and humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and education (Kim, 2006).

The main purpose of using a questionnaire is to obtain information from all the Journalism students at the same time about their actual linguistic needs and difficulties in English for producing news stories (Bhatia & Candlin, 1998). Three needs analysis questionnaires were referred to, adapted and modified for drafting the student questionnaire of this research. First, I modified the difficulty scale of Bhatia's and Candlin's questionnaire (2001). It is an undergraduate business studies questionnaire for communication needs in English in Hong Kong. Second, I referred to Bosher's and Smalkoski's questionnaire (2002), a survey of college students' needs in health-care communication, for the grammatical structure of constructing the difficulty items for both of my study in the interviewing and news writing sections. I adapted only the grammatical structures of theirs and came up

with suitable items related to my research topic on my own and from my experience for my questionnaire. Finally, I adapted and modified Bhatia's and Candlin's questionnaire (1998), a survey of the communication needs of legal professionals, for the third part of my questionnaire, which studies the students' desires regarding communication needs training. These questionnaires have been designed for the research studies on needs analysis of tertiary students, and are relevant to my research topic. Before finalizing the questionnaire, I discussed issues and difficulty items with my colleagues who teach *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* and Journalism students who have taken the course, in order to check and improve the questionnaire.

There are four parts in my Journalism student questionnaire (See Appendix 1). The first part is a survey on the communication needs and difficulties in interviewing in English. There are 12 items in total. A 5-point scale is used to measure the difficulty level of each item related to interviewing in English. The second part is a survey on the communication needs and difficulties in news writing in English. There are two sections in this part. The first half asks students to rank four criteria of the importance of news writing in English with the scale: *"1 = most important", "2 = second most important", "3 = third most important"* and *"4 = least important"*. The four criteria are *"Accuracy", "News Sense", "Grammar"* and *"Clarity"*. The second half measures the difficulty level of 15 items related to news writing in English using the same difficulty scale as in part 1. The third part is a survey on interviewing and news writing in English training needed in the College. Students are asked whether they want more training other than the compulsory one-year news writing and reporting course. Four options are provided in the questionnaire for students to choose from. They are "Regular Courses"

(Three choices with different duration of the courses are given: three semesters, two years, and five semesters or more), "Group Tutorials", "Individual Tutorials" and "Others". The last part of the questionnaire collects demographic information.

5.2.2   In-depth Individual Interviews with Journalism Students

In needs analysis, focusing on the target students through interviews is very helpful because the researchers can have better understanding of the learners' needs and difficulties (Long, 2005b). Words used in the interview were carefully chosen. In the draft questions, *"communication needs"* was used instead of *"communication difficulties/problems"*; however, when I asked my colleagues if they understand what *"communication needs"* was, they were confused. Since even my colleagues could not understand the phrase *"communication needs"*, my Journalism students must have difficulties in comprehending the phrase. To avoid any misunderstanding, *"communication difficulties/problems" or "language difficulties/problems"* was adopted in my finalized questions throughout all the in-depth individual interviews.

To investigate the Journalism students' needs and difficulties, I held in-depth individual interviews for my research and interviewed six Journalism students, asking them the following questions:

a) *In Interviewing*

Q1.   What **communication difficulties** do you encounter when conducting interviews in English and why?

Q2.   Please rank the **communication difficulties** of interviewing in English that you've mentioned. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.

Q3. In general, what do you think are the reasons for having the mentioned **communication problems** in English in conducting interviews?

b) *In Writing*

Q4. What **language difficulties** do you encounter when writing news reports in English and why?

Q5. Please rank the **language difficulties** of writing English news reports that you've mentioned. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.

Q6. In general, why do you think you have **language problems** in writing news reports in English?

c) *Training Needed in the College*

Q7. Do you think you need more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English? Which kind(s) (Refer to *"Appendix 1 Student Questionnaire - Section III: Training needed in the College"*) and why?

5.2.3   In-depth Individual Interviews with Course Instructors of *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*

During the *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* course, instructors have more direct contact with the Journalism students they teach. Hence, they have a better understanding of their students' needs and difficulties. Through in-depth individual face-to-face interviews with the course instructors, I could gather information about the needs and problems that the instructors had observed among their students (Jacobson, 1986). In my research, I held in-depth individual interviews with the course instructors and asked them the following questions:

a) __In Interviewing__

Q1.   What **communication difficulties** in English do your Journalism students encounter when conducting interviews? Please tell me all of them.

Q2.   Please rank the **communication difficulties** of interviewing in English that you've mentioned the students encounter. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.

Q3.   Why do Journalism students have **communication problems** in conducting interviews in English?

b) __In Writing__

Q4.   What **language difficulties** do Journalism undergraduates encounter when writing news reports in English?

Q5.   Please rank the **language difficulties** of writing English news reports that you've mentioned the students encounter. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.

Q6.   Why do the Journalism undergraduates have **language problems** in writing news reports in English?

Q7.   What are the important criteria in news writing?

5.3 *Data-Collection Procedure*

5.3.1   __Student Questionnaires__

In early February 2010, the fall semester, I administered my research questionnaire to 62 Journalism students who have completed the course *"JCM 210A Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting I"* in class at X College. I informed the students about the objectives of my survey and told them all of their

responses would remain anonymous. I then gave them sufficient time to respond to the entire questionnaire. I collected in all of the completed questionnaires at the same time.

5.3.2   In-depth individual Interviews with Journalism Students

Immediately after completing the questionnaire, I chose six Journalism students: two good, two average and two weaker students**.** They were selected for in-depth individual interviews. In early March 2010, the six selected students were interviewed by me for around 45 minutes to one hour one by one in the conference room next to my office on the ground floor in the College. During the in-depth individual interviews, I asked my interviewees the set questions in the Data-Collection Instruments Section 5.2.2 (see above).

At the beginning of the interviews, I started by giving the set questions to the students for piloting my questions. I gave them 10 minutes for preparation to get themselves familiarized with the questions, and jotted down their answers for each question. Since all of them are native Cantonese speakers, using English as a second language, it was necessary to give them some preparation time when answering questions in a second language. It gave them time to better organize and arrange their ideas in a more logical way. At first, they were asked to brainstorm their difficulties for the questions asking them to list difficulties they encounter during interviewing and news writing. This way, I could get further items than those I expected and were listed in my student questionnaire. When they ran out of ideas, I gave them the student questionnaire which they had completed in early February to help them recall some difficulty items that they might have chosen.

Since English is a second language for my local Journalism students, using English to answer my interview questionnaire may have hindered them from fully expressing themselves. For this reason, I asked them to tell me their ideas and answers in Cantonese, so I could elicit better data from them. I took notes when they were giving their answers, and then I translated those answers from Cantonese into English for my findings.

5.3.3 In-depth Individual Interviews with Course Instructors of *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*

In early and late February 2010, all course instructors of the course *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"* were interviewed by me one by one in Cantonese for around 45 minutes each in their offices of the Department of Journalism and Communication on the ground floor in the College. During the in-depth individual interviews, I asked them the set questions in the Data-Collection Instruments Section 5.2.3 (see above). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way. Semi-structured interviews are helpful in addition to questionnaires regarding the amount and quality of information received, because I could build rapport with my informants and develop trust (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999).

Open-ended questions were used to gather more in-depth information. The student questionnaire was not shown to the course instructors, lest the interviewees be led by set items. Interviewees were invited to brainstorm their students' difficulties in interviewing and news writing in English on their own. I took notes when they were giving their answers. Exact comments were noted down for

quotations and then I translated those answers from Cantonese into English for my findings.

5.4 Data Analysis

Since this is relatively small-scale research, data analysis was partly based on calculating percentages of the data collected from the questionnaires. I also looked for useful information and quotation extracts from face-to-face interviews with the students and course instructors.

6. Results

In this section I will present all of the results from student questionnaires and in-depth individual interviews with Journalism students and course instructors of *"JCM210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*. Discussion will be in another section, following this section.

6.1 Results from Questionnaires by Journalism Undergraduates

6.1.1 Part I: Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing in English

I will now present my results from questionnaires completed by 62 Journalism undergraduates. First, the results of *"Part I: Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing in English"* of the questionnaire are presented. There are 12 items. A 3-point scale is used for the presentation of measuring the difficulty level of each item. The left column is *"5= Very Difficult" or "4= Difficult"*; the middle column is *"3= Average"*; the right column is *"2= Not Difficult" or "1= Not at All Difficult"*. The results are shown below in Table 1:

Table 1 - Communication Needs and Difficulties in
INTERVIEWING IN ENGLISH: PERCENTAGES (N=62)

		Very Difficult or Difficult	Average	Not Difficult or Not at all Difficult
1.	Starting a conversation with your interviewee (Greeting)	18	42	40
2.	Introducing yourself to the interviewee	8	27	65
3.	Introducing the purpose of the interview to your interviewee	11	39	49
4.	Forming open-ended questions (e.g. what/how/why)	21	47	32
5.	Forming close-ended questions (e.g. is/are/have/has)	6	55	39
6.	Asking questions in a more polite way	26	40	34
7.	Asking follow-up questions for clarification	45	40	15
8.	Understanding the interviewee's answers	31	47	23
9.	Understanding jargon in the interviewee's answers	61	37	2
10.	Spelling when jotting down notes	45	34	21
11.	Pronunciation	27	48	24
12.	Translating interviewee's answers from Cantonese into English	39	47	15

We see in Table 1 that:

1. More than 60% of the respondents found understanding jargon in their interviewee's answers difficult or very difficult.

2. Nearly half of the students agreed that asking follow-up questions for clarification, and spelling when jotting down notes, were difficult or very difficult.

3. Over one-third of them said translating interviewee's answers from Cantonese into English was difficult or very difficult.

4. 65% of them did not have difficulties in introducing themselves to the interviewee.

5. Almost half of them did not find introducing the purpose of the interview to their interviewee difficult.

6.1.2 Part II: Communication Needs and Difficulties in News Writing in English

Next, I will present the results of "Part 2: Communication Needs and Difficulties in News Writing in English" of the questionnaire. There are two sections in this part. The first section is the ranking of four criteria according to their importance of news writing in English. (1 = most important, 2 = second most important, 3 = third most important, 4 = least important). The four criteria of the importance of news writing in English are "Accuracy", "News Sense", "Grammar" and "Clarity". The following table shows each criterion and its rank.

Table 2 – Ranking of the Four Criteria of the Importance of News Writing in English: PERCENTAGES (N=62)

Criteria	Rank
Accuracy	1
News Sense	2
Grammar	4
Clarity	3

The respondents ranked "Accuracy" as the most important; "News Sense" as the second most important, "Clarity" as the third most important, and "Grammar" as the least important.

Next, I will present the results of the second section in this part. There are 15 items related to news writing in English. A 3-point scale is used for the presentation of measuring the difficulty level of each item. The left column is *"5= Very Difficult" or "4= Difficult"*; the middle column is *"3= Average"*; the right column is *"2= Not Difficult" or "1= Not at All Difficult"*. The results are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3 - Communication Needs and Difficulties in
NEWS WRITING IN ENGLISH: PERCENTAGES (N=62)

		Very Difficult or Difficult	Average	Not Difficult or Not at all Difficult
13.	Using the correct tenses	34	48	18
14.	Using past tenses	8	45	47
15.	Using perfect tenses	38	39	23
16.	Using present tenses	3	40	56
17.	Using thematic vocabulary	82	16	2
18.	Using participle clauses (introduced by "-ing", "-ed" etc.)	39	44	18
19.	Using relative clauses (introduced by "who", "which" etc.)	8	50	42
20.	Using connectives indicating time (e.g. afterwards/meanwhile)	29	44	27
21.	Using connectives indicating cause and effect (e.g. therefore/because)	3	50	47
22.	Using reported speech	31	42	27
23.	Using passive voice	26	42	32
24.	Using quotation marks	11	50	39
25.	Forming hyphenated compound adjectives (e.g. 6-year-old)	21	45	34
26.	Expressing numbers and figures (e.g. plural/singular, "billion", "million")	31	48	21
27.	Paragraphing	21	37	42

We see in Table 3 that:

1. Over 80% of the Journalism undergraduates had difficulties in using thematic vocabulary in news writing.

2. Nearly 40% of them had problems in using perfect tenses and participle clauses.

3. 34% of them had trouble in using the correct tenses.

4. About one-third of them had difficulties in using reported speech and expressing numbers and figures in English.

5. More than half of the students did not think that they had any problems in using present tenses.

6.1.3 <u>Part III: Training Needed in the College</u>

This part is a survey of the students' needs in more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English. The results (the percentages in brackets) are presented in Table 4 as follows:

Table 4 - Training Needed in the College (N=62)

The results are in bold in brackets:

Questionnaire Question	*Do you think you need more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English?*			
Students' Responses	YES **(97%)**		NO **(3%)**	
Questionnaire Question	*If "**YES**", please select the following mode(s) of learning (you can select **more than one** item).*			
Students' Responses	☐ Regular courses **(60%)**			
	Duration? (Including the one-year course which lasts **TWO** semesters: *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*)	☐ Three semesters **(31%)**	☐ Two Years **(26%)**	☐ Five semesters or more **(0%)**
	☐ Group Tutorials **(65%)**			
	☐ Individual Tutorials **(31%)**			
	☐ Others **(3%)** **(Suggestions from Respondents:** **1. Outside practical training** **2. Showing some examples or giving individual opinion to us after having interview)**			

<u>*We see in Table 4 that:*</u>

1. Almost all of the Journalism undergraduates said they needed more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English in the College.

2. 60% of the respondents would like to take extra regular courses for learning interviewing

and news writing in English. In addition to the one-year course *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*, 31% of them preferred one extra semester course while 26% preferred two extra semester courses for learning the two skills in English.

3. 65% of them chose group tutorials whereas 31% chose individual tutorials.

6.2 Results from the In-depth Individual Interviews with Journalism Undergraduates

Here are the interview results from six Journalism students. The words of the subjects are copied here:

a) <u>In Interviewing</u>

Q1. *What **communication difficulties** do you encounter when conducting interviews in English and why?*

Q2. *Please rank the **communication difficulties** of interviewing in English that you've mentioned. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.*

Respondent 1

Rank	Difficulties
1	I may misunderstand the meaning of the interviewee's answers. If the interviewee is a native English speaker or speak good English, he/she will use more difficult terms.
2	The conversation may not be fluent because I may have difficulties in expressing myself and giving responses. Since I lack vocabulary, it is hard for me to think of accurate words for expressing myself which affects my fluency and leads to many pauses during my interview.
3	I have difficulties in controlling the atmosphere because I don't know how to keep the conversation going which leads to dead air. I am unfamiliar with maintaining a conversation, clarifying and giving responses in English.
4	Problems of pronunciation of nouns (people's names, company names, specific terms pronounced differently). People's names are the most difficult. Usually proper nouns, abbreviations and acronyms (e.g. NASA) are difficult for me.
5	I am not sure whether the term used is accurate or not. Interviewee may misunderstand my questions or the specific terms/jargon that I use. (e.g. terms mean differently in financial/business field and accounting field) I don't understand the meaning of phrases/idioms (e.g. "white elephant") which can lead to wrong usage, so I will double check the meaning in the dictionary during preparation before interviewing.
6	I'm not sure the polite way to ask questions or give responses. Sometimes I may make the interviewee angry.
7	Grammar problems. Spoken grammar is not important as long as the interviewee understands me.

Respondent 2

Rank	Difficulties
1	I couldn't get the clear meaning from my interviewee (fluent/native English speakers). He/She is talking too fast and I can't hear what he/she says. Also, I'm too nervous, so I can't hear or understand my interviewee's answers.
2	I don't know how to greet my interviewee politely because I'm not familiar with the cultural difference and English is my second language which I don't usually use. In a formal setting, I don't know how to express myself due to the lack of confidence. I think I lack vocabulary and my listening is not good enough. The words sometimes sound the same to me.
3	Problems in understanding the interviewee's answers. Comprehension problem. It is difficult to understand when they use slang/ jargon or phrasal verbs.
4	I couldn't use accurate words/vocabulary to express my views and ask questions. I don't have enough vocabulary and don't know the usage of phrasal verbs (e.g. come + preposition). Sometimes I'm confused when using passive voice, transitive/intransitive verbs.
5	Pronunciation of the interviewee sounds unclear when I get nervous because I don't use English too often and am lack of confidence.
6	It is difficult to keep the interviewee talking actively in the conversation. The conversation is not smooth, not fluent and not interactive. I am afraid of dead air and pauses. It is difficult to construct sentences immediately.

Respondent 3

Rank	Difficulties
1	Problems in forming questions, especially open-ended questions. I don't know how to ask questions. The grammar I used is odd because there are so many verbs. To truly express myself, I need to ask a very long question.
2	Difficulties in asking follow-up questions. I don't know what expressions to use for asking these kinds of questions.
3	It is hard to avoid asking questions that are offensive. I don't know how to paraphrase the words which can be offensive to the interviewee in the questions.
4	Difficulties in saying numbers. If there are many digits in a figure, it's easy for me to mix up. **OR** when the interviewee tells me a figure, even though I hear what he/she says, I don't know the exact number.

Respondent 4

Rank	Difficulties
1	I don't know how to ask follow-up questions for clarification.
2	Problems in understanding jargon in the interviewee's answers.
3	Problems in asking questions in a more polite way. I only know starting questions with "May I…/Can I…?" I'm afraid that the words I used are offensive.
4	I don't know which expression to use and don't know if the interviewee will be offended when giving responses or reminding the interviewee that he/she is talking about something unrelated. I lack vocabulary to give responses or to reply in a polite way.
5	I don't know how to keep the interviewee talking more. We need advanced interviewing skills to deal with passive interviewees because they talk little.
6	Problems in understanding the interviewee's answers. I don't understand slang and idioms.
7	Problems in translating interviewee's answers from Cantonese into English. Sometimes there are Chinese words that don't have a perfect translation in English. I can't find an English expression fully expresses the meaning in Chinese.
8	I don't know how to ask good questions to get useful information for reporting. I don't know what types of questions to ask.
9	I don't know how to ask questions with correct grammar. I will sometimes use wrong words because of a lack of vocabulary.
10	Pronunciation problems (Stress: e.g. "distribution", "distribute").

Respondent 5

Rank	Difficulties
1	Problems in how to form questions to get useful information. I know the background information but I don't know how to ask good questions by using the information. I don't know what vocabulary I should use to form questions.
2	Lack of vocabulary.
3	Problems in forming open-ended questions. Using wh- words to form questions is very difficult. It's pretty hard for me to form a question immediately during an interview.
4	Pronunciation problems.

Respondent 6

Rank	Difficulties
1	I can't listen to what the interviewee says because he/she talks too fast and the words he/she uses are too difficult. It seems that the interviewee will assume the reporter knows everything, including jargon.
2	Lack of vocabulary. I don't know what to say or how to keep asking questions, then I get stuck.
3	I feel nervous when I speak English because I don't have much oral training. It's hard to communicate in English because it is not my mother tongue.
4	My interviewee can't understand my questions. I don't know which are the correct words to use. If I use a wrong word to ask question, I get a wrong answer from him/her.
5	I don't understand the answers from my interviewee but I won't ask him/her again because I don't know the expression in asking for clarification.
6	Problems in asking follow-up questions. I don't know how to ask questions for more in-depth information.
7	I jot down main points slowly. I don't know how to use short forms. Sometimes the terms I jotted down are not what I am familiar with, so when I get back to them later I don't understand what I'd put down.
8	Problems in preparation before interviewing. It's hard for me to understand information in English. During the interview, my interviewee may think that I didn't get myself well-prepared, although I did.
9	I don't know how to end the interview in a polite manner within limited time. I don't know the expressions to end in a polite way.
10	Problems in translating Chinese into English. I don't have enough vocabulary and I use Chinglish very often.
11	Mispronounce the interviewee's name. His/her name may not be a common English name and sometimes in other languages. Too many different pronunciations.

Q3.   In general, what do you think are the reasons for having the mentioned

***communication problems** in English in conducting interviews?*

i)   Two students reported that they seldom used English to interview people. There weren't many opportunities.

ii)   My mother tongue is not English and I have a poor foundation in English.

iii)   I am lack of confidence. Since English is my second language, I don't want to use it because I'm not fluent.

iv) I have little experience, training and practice in interviewing in English and I rarely read newspapers.

v) I seldom use English to communicate.

vi) My English is not good enough and I don't know the native English expressions.

vii) I lack interviewing experience, so it affects my intelligibility during the interview. I can hardly respond in a short period of time. Since English is my second language, I have to translate what I want to ask from Chinese into English, so it takes time.

viii) I don't have much vocabulary and my pronunciation is poor, which makes it hard to express myself.

Summary of Section 6.2a) Interviewing

I will now summarize the results of Q1 to Q3.

Language Problems (from Q1 and Q2):

1. Four respondents said they had problems in understanding the meaning of the interviewees' answers and three of them ranked it as the most significant and common problem.

2. Four of them found it difficult to fully express themselves in English, so their conversation might not be fluent. They might have to use a lot of words or very long sentences to explain what they were trying to say.

3. Three students did not know how to keep the conversation with their interviewee going. There were dead air and many pauses during their interviews.

4. Five out of six students stated that pronunciation was a problem but its rank was the lowest in the difficulty list. Students had difficulties in pronouncing proper nouns, abbreviations, acronyms, correct stress, their interviewees' names and saying numbers.

5. Five students had problems in expressing themselves in a polite way. They were afraid that their interviewees might sometimes be offended and wanted to learn how to greet their interviewees, ask questions, give responses and end the interview in a polite manner.

6. Another common problem is jargon in interviewees' answers. Half of the students had troubles in understanding jargon.

7. Three respondents expressed that they had difficulties in asking follow-up questions.

8. One out of three students had difficulties in using correct grammar and correct words when asking questions, so their interviewees might misunderstand their questions.

9. One-third of the respondents had difficulties in translating interviewees' answers from Cantonese into English.

10. Two students had problems in asking good questions to get useful information.

11. Two respondents had troubles in forming open-ended questions.

Reasons (from Q3):

Journalism students find interviewing in English difficult. The reasons are summarized as follows:

12. The first reason is that students seldom use English to interview people. There are not many opportunities, and not much training or practice.

13. The second reason is the students' mother tongue is not English. They don't know the native English expressions and they have a relatively poor foundation in English, so they lack confidence when using the language.

14. The third reason is they have limited vocabulary which makes it difficult to express themselves.

b) *In Writing*

Q4.   What **language difficulties** do you encounter when writing news reports in English and why?

Q5.   Please rank the **language difficulties** of writing English news reports that you've mentioned. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.

Respondent 1

Rank	Difficulties
1	Difficulties in deciding the angle in writing. I have weak news sense and am not sure about which is the most impressive angle.
2	Difficulties in deciding what kind of information to be included in writing. Usually mix-up Chinese news writing and English news writing. Sometimes every piece of information seems equally important or equally unimportant, so I don't know what to write.
3	Tenses problems. It is a big problem. I don't know when to use past perfect tense. I don't know when to switch from one tense to another. I am not sure when I should use a certain tense.
4	Diction Problems. I have problems in using accurate terms/ idioms/vocabulary. Sometimes I find vocabulary in Chinese news and translate them into English. They may be wrong (e.g. "hijacker" vs. "terrorists").
5	Paragraphing problems. New journalism encourages "one paragraph one sentence", which is hard to master. I'm influenced by Chinese news writing, having a habit of putting information with cause and effect relationship together in one paragraph instead of separating them into two paragraphs.
6	Punctuation problems. (e.g. comma and quotation marks.) I often want to use 'exclamation mark' which is not commonly found in English hard news writing. Maybe I am influenced by Chinese news writing.
7	Problems in using active/passive voice. I use passive voice quite often. Switching from using passive voice to active voice is difficult (e.g. Using "police" as the subject/object or should it be omitted?).

Respondent 2

Rank	Difficulties
1	Run-on sentences. I write longer sentences to make my message clear because of too much information. (weak news sense)
2	Expression problems. I always write very long sentences but it only contains very simple meaning.
3	Lack of vocabulary. Many special words and vocabulary (jargon and idioms) are used in news writing.
4	Paragraphing problems. I don't know how to separate my information into paragraphs. When the two pieces of information are similar, I will put them together instead of in two paragraphs because I'm influenced by Chinese news writing.

Respondent 3

Rank	Difficulties
1	I don't know how to organize my articles. Paragraphing and coherence. How to connect sentence to sentence.
2	It is very difficult for me to use participle clauses (especially "-ed clauses"). I don't know how to use them.
3	Diction problems. Lack of jargon and thematic vocabulary. I rarely read newspapers. When I was in secondary school, I studied only one stream, either art or science. I only learnt vocabulary of one stream and nothing from the other. My secondary school is a CMI (Chinese as the Medium of Instructions) school. I didn't have many chances to learn English vocabulary.
4	I find it difficult to use "in which", "by which" and "for whom". I don't know when to use a certain preposition before "which" and "whom".
5	It is difficult to write a perfect lead meeting industry standards (short summary with clear information) due to lack of training. It is hard to use 5 Wh-elements to write a clear 30-40 word lead. No one corrects my work.
6	I don't know how to use some advanced sentence structures. Tone and style.
7	I don't know how to simplify clumsy sentences and how to write precise and concise sentences because I lack vocabulary and didn't learn it in secondary school. My secondary teacher didn't teach these advanced writing skills.
8	Forming hyphenated compound adjectives is difficult.

Respondent 4

Rank	Difficulties
1	I'm not sure which tone should be used and how to use neutral tone. I don't know which word is neutral, which word carries negative meaning or positive meaning.
2	Lack of thematic vocabulary.
3	Paragraphing problem.
4	Unable to select useful information from materials. (related to Item 6 weak news sense).
5	Difficulties in arranging priority of information. I don't know what is important. (related to Item 6 weak news sense)
6	Weak news sense. I don't know what "news sense" is. It's too abstract.
7	I don't know how to write leads meeting industry standards.
8	General grammar problems.
9	Tense problems. I don't know what tense I should use.

Respondent 5

Rank	Difficulties
1	Wrong tenses. I don't know when to use the correct tense. I have difficulties in using perfect tenses. The situation is quite serious.
2	Spelling and punctuation mistakes. I don't know how to spell. I make mistakes in spelling my interviewee's name.
3	Lack of vocabulary. I can only use a few words to express myself. If I don't know the exact word, I will write more to describe what I want to say.
4	I write down lots of useless information because I am not sure what I need or I don't need. Weak news sense.
5	Chinese-to-English translation problem. I write Chinglish.
6	Use too many conjunctions and connectives indicating cause and effect (e.g. "so", "therefore" (most often), "moreover", "because"). I think it's a bad habit from secondary school. I learnt this in Form 2 and 3. I think my English standard remains at junior secondary level.
7	I'm confused when I have to express time. I don't know how to express different periods of time.
8	Put down something wrong for readers. I mislead them because I don't know how to express myself.
9	Problems in expressing numbers in words. It takes me so much time to translate a figure into words (e.g. "thousand", "trillion"). When I come across a figure, I will first think in Chinese, then translate it into English. It takes up so much time.
10	Paragraphing problem. Sometimes I think every paragraph weighs the same according to its importance. I don't know which one to put first because I lack news sense.

Respondent 6

Rank	Difficulties
1	Tense problems. I always mix up when to use past tense and perfect tense.
2	Problems in writing complex sentences. I use compound sentences more often. Since no one has taught me how to write complex sentences, I don't know the usage and variety of different sentence structures.
3	Lack of vocabulary.
4	Redundant sentences. I have difficulties in expressing myself and have to use many sentences to say one thing, so my sentences are clumsy.
5	Punctuation problem. I don't know how to use semi-colons and commas for combining sentences.

Q6. *In general, why do you think you have **language problems** in writing news reports in English?*

  i) I have never learnt how to write English news reports in secondary school, not to mention trying to write any news reports.

  ii) I seldom read English newspapers and am unaware of how news reports are written.

  iii) I don't have enough training and don't have many chances to learn English vocabulary.

  iv) I don't read or write enough news reports. There isn't enough training and my English is not good enough.

  v) English foundation problem.

  vi) I'm not interested in learning English. I think it's hard to learn English.

  vii) My secondary teachers didn't teach much writing in English.

  viii) I rarely read newspapers and have no motivation to read them.

  ix) Learning vocabulary is very difficult.

Summary of Section 6.2b) News writing

I will now summarize the results of Q4 to Q6.

Language Problems (from Q4 and Q5):

1. Five respondents stated that they had difficulties in paragraphing.

2. Four students ranked lack of vocabulary as either top two or three.

3. Four out of six students told me that expressing themselves was difficult.

4. Four of them emphasized that they were confused with which tense to use in their writing.

5. Three out of six respondents said they did not know what information was useful to be put in their writing.

6. Half of them had difficulties in punctuation.

7. One-third of them had problems writing a perfect lead meeting industry standards.

8. Two had diction problems.

Reasons (from Q6):

Journalism students find English news writing difficult. The reasons are summarized as follows:

9. Students did not learn English news reports writing in their secondary schools.

10. They seldom read English newspapers.

11. They did not have enough English news writing training and chances to learn English vocabulary.

c) *Training Needed in the College*

Q7. *Do you think you need more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English? Which kind(s) and why?*

i) I need extra training for my future work. No matter whether I am a Chinese or English news reporter, I need English and it is for life.

ii) *Prefer two-year regular course:*

> ➤ I can have a stronger foundation.
> ➤ Four students agreed that the current one-year compulsory course was not enough.
> ➤ Since our English standard is poor, we need more training to improve ourselves and have better progress. If we can take the extra course in Year 3, we can remember what we have learnt more clearly and can use it immediately after graduation.
> ➤ Training in both skills requires more time.

iii) *Prefer group tutorials:*

> ➤ Two respondents preferred small group tutorials. Four people in a group is optimum.
> ➤ Five students wanted to share and know other students' mistakes during group tutorials.

- ➢ I can gain some confidence because I can practise my English speaking in front of others.
- ➢ I can identify my weaknesses and know my problems more clearly because I may not understand myself too well.

iv) ***Prefer individual tutorials:***

- ➢ Two students thought it was more intensive and they could know their mistakes more clearly.
- ➢ It is intensive because it is a one-to-one tutorial. It fits my needs and can focus on my problems. (tailor-made)
- ➢ I can know what is wrong in my writing sentence by sentence and I'll be brave to ask about my problems.

Now I will present the data from interviews with three course instructors of *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*.

6.3 Results from the In-depth Individual Interviews with Course Instructors of "JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"

Here are the interview results from three course instructors. The words of the subjects are copied here:

a) *In Interviewing*

*Q1. What **communication difficulties** in English do your Journalism students encounter when conducting interviews? Please tell me all of them.*

*Q2. Please rank the **communication difficulties** of interviewing in English that you've mentioned the students encounter. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and common.*

Respondent 1

Rank	Difficulties
1	Weak news sense. Students don't know what to ask and they don't care about current news.
2	Lack of vocabulary.
3	Can't frame questions. "Frame": construct questions in a more open way to welcome potential personal answers instead of official answers. Students should frame questions rather than ask simple questions to get more information. e.g. Students can start their questions with "There is a rumour saying that…" and end with "Could you comment on it?"
4	Expressing themselves (students) in a formal setting.
5	Hesitation: Lack of confidence in speaking English. Students are not familiar with speaking English in front of others.
6	Can't apply the use of open-ended and close-ended questions. Students understand what open-ended and close-ended questions are and have the ability to construct the two types of questions. However, they can't apply what they have learnt in real situation.

Respondent 2

Rank	Difficulties
1	Lack of confidence in speaking English. Students are afraid of failure (making mistakes when speaking English).
2	Problems in constructing open-ended and close-ended questions. Students can't construct sensible questions.
3	Lack of vocabulary.
4	Comprehension problem. They don't understand the answers from the interviewees.
5	Weak news sense. (not related to techniques because it's a matter of "software" and "hardware". News sense is "software". Students should develop it by themselves. Instructors can't be of help.)

Respondent 3

Rank	Difficulties
1	Lack of confidence in speaking English. Students' English speaking is not fluent.
2	Poor organization of sentence structures. Their questions sound awkward. There are differences between Chinese and English, and students are affected by Chinese.
3	Grammar problems. Students don't pay attention to grammar. Maybe they don't know it is wrong and have a very weak foundation in English. e.g. "I am a Hong Kong people."
4	Lack of vocabulary. Students don't know the usage.
5	Incorrect pronunciation
6	Don't understand answers

*Q3.   Why do Journalism students have **communication problems** in conducting*

interviews in English?

  i)   Two instructors thought that students were too narrow-minded. They
       didn't want to learn and didn't have enthusiasm in learning interviewing
       skills in English because many of them thought that they wouldn't be
       English reporters after graduation. They didn't think English was
       important.

 ii)   Students rarely read news, so their news vocabulary is weak. They are not familiar
       with common expressions used in news stories.

iii)   The communication problems are related to secondary school English
       teaching problems. Chomsky's theory is adopted in nowadays' secondary
       English teaching. Secondary teachers won't teach grammar. Students are
       encouraged to talk more in English but it doesn't mean that they know how
       to use English correctly.

 iv)   Students lack an English speaking environment and they rarely talk in
       English. They always watch Cantonese programmes because of the
       influence of other family members and lack of interests in learning English.
       (A matter of parental education: Parents use Chinese as the medium of
       instruction when teaching their children.)

  v)   The root of the problem is from primary to secondary education.

 vi)   Students think it is enough to show that they are capable of using English
       if they use single English word in Chinese conversation.

b) <u>In Writing</u>

*Q4.   What **language difficulties** do Journalism undergraduates encounter when*

writing news reports in English?

*Q5.   Please rank the **language difficulties** of writing English news reports that you've*

mentioned the students encounter. Rank them all, 1 being the most significant and

common.

Respondent 1 [Mainly grammar problems]

Rank	Difficulties
1	Weak news sense.
2	Tenses. All tenses are wrong, especially past and perfect tenses.
3	Lack of vocabulary.
4	Problems in using conjunctions and connectives (e.g. cause-and-effect, time).
5	Expressing numbers (e.g. plural & singular, figures, "billion" and "trillion"). Students have problem with expressing numbers. They don't know when to use plural nouns and their common problem is using large figures such as "billion" and "trillion". Wrong figures will lead to inaccuracy.
6	Punctuation problem. Students are sometimes careless when punctuating but it won't affect meaning seriously.
7	Problems in writing complex sentences. Students have difficulties in catching main points. They lack integrated and generalization skills. Suggestions: Ask students to avoid the use of complex sentences. Short sentences are preferred. The instructor won't force students to write one sentence paragraph for the lead in a news story.

Respondent 2 [Mainly grammar problems]

Rank	Difficulties
1	News structure (inverted pyramid).
2	Tenses (past tense, present tense and perfect tense). Students have difficulties in using the right tense and they are not aware of when to use them.
3	Participle clauses and relative clauses. They will mix up the two kinds of clauses and have difficulties in the sentence structures. One-third to two-thirds of students have difficulties in mastering complex sentences. After teaching, they will improve.
4	Verb (infinitive without "to"). Students don't study these by heart. e.g. make you to do sth/ let you to do sth
5	Lack of vocabulary.
6	Preposition.
7	Wrong use of semi-colon & quotation marks. Students mix up the use of punctuation in Chinese and English.
More advanced skills	Connotation. In regard to editorial standards in news, balance and diction are very important but students don't pay much attention to word choice and wrongly pick words with negative meaning in their news writing. e.g. "slim" vs. "skinny", "pale" vs. "white" Students will sometimes forget to be fair and endorse the opinion of one side or exaggerate an issue. e.g. "Filipino maid" (-ve meaning) vs. "house worker" (neutral)
More advanced skills	Figure of speech (rhetoric).

Respondent 3 [Mainly grammar problems]

Rank	Difficulties
1	Tenses (mix-up of tenses). I don't know why students like using "past perfect tense" in their writing.
2	General grammar problems.
3	Lack of vocabulary.
3	Spelling mistakes. Students are very careless and have no intention to spell correctly. Even though there is a spell checker in Microsoft Word which underlines wrong words in red, students wouldn't correct them.
4/5	Articles.
4/5	Prepositions (e.g. in/on/at).
6	Using connectives (lack of variety). e.g. Students use too many *moreover*'s and *furthermore*'s in their writing.
7	Punctuation problem. Students mix up the use of punctuation in Chinese and English.
8	Using complex sentences. When students use complex sentences, it is quite likely that they will make mistakes. Suggestions: Ask students to avoid the use of complex sentences. Simple sentences are encouraged.
9	Expressing numbers. Students don't understand the meaning of "billion" and "trillion". e.g. plural & singular, figures, "billion" and "trillion"

Q6. *Why do the Journalism undergraduates have **language problems** in writing news reports in English?*

i) All of the three instructors agreed that the language difficulties were related to secondary school English teaching problems.

ii) In secondary schools, students used textbooks and learnt word-to-word sentences. They lacked writing practice. When their written work was marked and corrected by their English teachers, they didn't read it.

iii) During secondary education, teachers didn't pay attention to students' grammar problems. They didn't teach grammar in class. Back to the 70s to 80s, Chomsky's theory was adopted in local English teaching. Instead of teaching grammar, secondary teachers encouraged students to be creative.

iv) Students are too lazy to read and write in English and they lack interests in learning the language.

Q7.   What are the important criteria in news writing?

Respondent 1

Rank	Criteria
1	Accuracy (in reporting and diction). In diction, students should use the most appropriate words in news writing. For example, the word "refuse" gives a bad feeling to the readers because it's a kind of rejection while the word "decline" is more neutral. It simply describes that the interviewee doesn't want to give an answer. The tone is different. Reporters should remain objective and fair for keeping impartiality but students don't know how to use tone. There are three reasons: 1) They don't know the difference among different words. 2) They don't pay attention to different tones among different words 3) They lack a wide range of vocabulary to choose from.
2	News sense.
3	Grammar.
4	Clarity: structure, short sentences & paragraphs, reader friendly and straight-forward.

Respondent 2

Rank	Criteria
1	Grammar. If grammar is wrong (especially tenses), others wouldn't understand what the writer means. If tenses are wrong, it is hard for the readers to understand what is happening and thus it affects accuracy.
2	Accuracy (in reporting and diction).
3	Impartiality.
4	Balance: equal weight of reporting for both sides.

Respondent 3

Rank	Criteria
1	News sense (including inverted pyramid news writing structure).
2	Accuracy (in reporting and diction). *In reporting:* e.g. death toll, figure, and where and when the event happened must be accurate. *In diction:* e.g. use of "prime minister" (communist) vs "president" (election)
3	Grammar. Accuracy and grammar are inter-related.

These are the findings from the 62 student questionnaires, in-depth individual interviews with 6 Journalism undergraduates and with 3 course instructors who teach *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*. I will now turn to the discussion section, followed by my conclusions.

7. Discussion

In this section, I will discuss my findings and their implications. In addition, I will answer my research questions at the end of this section. To begin with, I will discuss the results from Journalism student questionnaires.

7.1 *Discussion of the Results from Questionnaires by Journalism Undergraduates*

The findings from the student questionnaires were standardized answers from students, so I could describe the data in terms of number and could rank the difficulty of the items.

7.1.1 Part I: Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing in English

More than 60% of the Journalism students ranked "Item 9: Understanding jargon in the interviewee's answers" as *"very difficult or difficult"*. Only 2% of the students found it *"not difficult or not at all difficult"*. These are alarming figures and Item 9 is at the top of the difficulty list. It implies that Journalism students lack vocabulary and it is suggested that teachers should teach the students the meaning and the usage of jargon in order to get students familiar with it. Next, 45% of the respondents ranked "Item 7: Asking follow-up questions for clarification" and "Item 10: Spelling when jotting down notes" as *"very difficult or difficult"*. A possible explanation to these items can be related to a lack of vocabulary. Since the Journalism students tend not to have a wide range of vocabulary, it is difficult for them to construct more in-depth questions to ask their interviewees and to spell words right on the spot because they may not be able to identify the correct words to use during interviews. "Item 12: Translating interviewee's answers from Cantonese into English" was also ranked *"very difficult or difficult"* by 39% of the respondents. It is sometimes hard for them to find the perfect translation from Chinese

into English which fully expresses the interviewees' ideas. Maybe the students have never learnt translation. They are not used to translating Chinese into English on the spot. In fact, it is often a very difficult skill for them to acquire. It is recommended that teachers should point out the differences between the two languages and teach the students translation skills. Basic and advanced translation courses should also be offered to fulfil this purpose.

31% of the respondents ranked "Item 8: Understanding the interviewee's answers" as *"very difficult or difficult"*. The respondents are local non-native English speakers. If their interviewees are native English speakers, the interviewees may be talking at a native normal pace which is too fast for students to keep up. 27% Journalism students had problems in "Item 11: Pronunciation". The reason is that English is their second language. The differences of pronunciation between English and Cantonese create learning difficulties for students and, besides, owing to the fact that students lack vocabulary, they may not know the correct pronunciation of certain words. 26% of the respondents stated that "Item 6: Asking questions in a more polite way" were *"very difficult or difficult"* while 21% had difficulties in "Item 4: Forming open-ended questions". The number of students who think these items are difficult is relatively lower; hence, teachers may not need to expand their teaching in these areas.

Around or more than 40% of the Journalism students found the following items *"not difficult or not at all difficult"*: "Item 1: Starting a conversation with your interviewee (Greeting)", "Item 2: Introducing yourself to the interviewee", "Item 3: Introducing the purpose of the interview to your interviewee" and "Item 5: Forming close-ended questions", Item 2 being the least difficult as agreed by 65% of the respondents. One possible reason is that starting a conversation, introducing oneself or

interview purpose is quite formulated, so students may not find them difficult. Furthermore, close-ended questions can be formed easily if the standard sentence structures are learnt. The implication for teaching in these areas is that teachers do not have to put too much emphasis on them, compared to other items.

Although some items discussed may not be very difficult or difficult to Journalism students, it does not mean that we should ignore them. If we take a closer look at the middle column in which the difficulty level is "Average", we will discover that Item 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12 ranked as "Average" have a high percentage, ranging from 40% to 55%. These results imply that students find these items somewhat difficult and that teachers need to include all of them into the syllabus.

7.1.2 Part II: Communication Needs and Difficulties in News Writing in English

I will first discuss the ranking of the four criteria of the importance of news writing. Journalism students ranked "Accuracy" as the most important and "News Sense" as the second most important. Since all of the respondents were either Year 2 or 3 students, there is no doubt that they have learnt "Accuracy" and "News Sense" being the most important in news writing as a journalist throughout their Journalism and Communication degree programme. However, they neglected the importance of "Grammar". The survey reveals that the respondents ranked "Grammar" the least important. This implies that the Journalism students forget the relationship between grammar and accuracy. As one of the instructors described during the in-depth interview: "If grammar is wrong (especially tenses), others wouldn't understand what the writer means. If tenses are wrong, it is hard for the readers to understand what is happening and thus it affects accuracy."

Next, I will discuss the findings of difficulty items in news writing in English. Again, limited vocabulary remains the most difficult items for Journalism students; a striking number, 82% of the respondents, ranked "Item 17: Using thematic vocabulary" as *"very difficult or difficult"* whereas only 2% claimed that it was not *"not difficult or not at all difficult"*. This finding is similar to the survey results of Chia, Johnson, Chia and Olive (1999), and Bhatia and Candlin (2001).

More than one-third of the respondents had problems with "Item 13: Using the correct tenses", "Item 15: Using perfect tenses" and "Item 18: Using participle clauses". They may not be able to identify when the most appropriate time to use certain tense is and they have trouble in using more advanced sentence structures. It seems that separate grammar points and a wider range of variety of sentence structures should be taught in class. More than 30% of them had difficulties in "Item 22: Using reported speech" and "Item 26: Expressing numbers and figures". Since using reported speech requires change of tenses, if the students are not familiar with tenses, they may not be able to use reported speech. When expressing numbers and figures, students will first understand the numbers in their mother tongue - Chinese, since the numbering system of Chinese is different from that of English, Journalism students may have difficulties in counting the digits, translating the numbers/figures from Chinese into English and presenting them with correct English expressions, using words as "million", "billion" or "trillion". This item is especially important for those who would like to work as financial news reporters (who face and report numbers/figures every day), so it must be taught to prospective journalists in the news writing and reporting course.

My survey results show an interesting phenomenon. The middle column, "Average" difficulty level, has a high frequency of being chosen for a few items. Item 13,

14, and 18-26 were ranked as "Average", ranging from 42% to 50%, which reveals that students find these items averagely difficult and that they have to learn these items, so these should certainly be taught in the course.

7.1.3 <u>Part III: Training Needed in the College</u>

97% of the Journalism undergraduates stated that they wanted more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English, which implies that they do not have enough training in the two areas and need very much more practice. 60% of them would like to take extra regular courses in interviewing and news writing in English. 31% preferred three-semester courses while 26% wanted two-year courses, which is in other words "four-semester courses". During the in-depth interviews, the selected students mentioned that the current one-year course was not enough. Some wanted to build a stronger foundation of English for interviewing and news writing.

65% of the respondents chose group tutorials as the method, and 31% opted for individual tutorials. One of the possible explanations is that students want group and individual tutorials because they want to have more time to discuss their problems with their instructors and they need more face-to-face help from them for improvement in English usage. Two students put forward other suggestions. One wanted outside practical training. If students are trained to be reporters, they need a stimulating learning environment where they can practise interviewing and news writing in English. For example, students could be sent to a court and report a legal case. It is similar to what reporters do at work. Another student wanted to see some examples and receive comments on their work. These suggestions lead to other pedagogical methods. Other than learning outside the classroom, teachers should give many more opportunities to

students for practice, and should also give their students more prompt feedback for self-evaluation.

7.2 *Discussion of the Results from the In-depth Individual Interviews with Journalism Undergraduates*

Next, I will discuss the results from student interviews. There are three parts: a) needs and difficulties in interviewing, b) needs and difficulties in writing, and c) training needed in the College.

a) *Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing*

Four interviewed Journalism students had problems in comprehending the meaning of their interviewees' answers, and three of them ranked it as the most significant and common problem. The students stated that if their interviewees were native English speakers or those who speak good English, the interviewees would use more difficult words, slang and idioms which the students were not familiar with or the interviewees talked too fast, which hindered the students' understanding. Four of the respondents found it difficult to fully express themselves in English, so their conversation might not be fluent. They might have to use a lot of words or very long sentences to explain what they were trying to say. Since students have limited vocabulary, it is hard for them to find the most accurate words to express themselves. Many students do not know how to keep their interviewees talking, so there could be dead air and pauses during their interviews. Another issue is that students have troubles in understanding jargon which hinders their understanding of the interviewees' answers. It can be deduced that if the Journalism students do not have a wide range of vocabulary to use, it may hamper the smoothness of their conversation. Teachers should certainly prepare a vocabulary and

phrase list which includes common expressions for interviewing, and also jargon for different walks of life for teaching their students better.

Most students stated that they had pronunciation problems with proper nouns, abbreviations, acronyms, their interviewees' names and numbers, and in how to place the stress; however, the problem was ranked the lowest in the difficulty list, which suggests that students may neglect the importance of pronunciation. Teachers should stress the importance of correct pronunciation since mispronunciation may lead to misunderstandings. The majority of students had problems in expressing themselves in a polite way. They also had difficulties in greeting their interviewees, asking questions, giving responses and ending the interview in a polite manner. They were afraid that their interviewees might sometimes be offended. Cultural differences are likely to be the reason. Therefore, students may have used a wrong word or expression which is fine in a Chinese context but less correct in an English context. Instructors should mention the cultural differences between different languages in class. Half of the respondents had difficulties in asking follow-up questions because they ran out of words. Asking follow-up questions is quite crucial in interviews, so these items should certainly be taught more thoroughly.

b) *Communication Needs and Difficulties in Writing*

Many respondents had difficulties in paragraphing because they might be affected by the Chinese news writing style. In English news writing, "one paragraph one idea" is encouraged. However, in Chinese news writing the information with cause and effect relationship is always put together as one whole paragraph, which is completely different from the method in English. Since these Journalism students are native Cantonese speakers and can easily have access to Chinese newspapers, it can certainly

be presumed that they are easily influenced by the Chinese news writing style. Teachers should compare and contrast Chinese and English news writing in class.

Limited vocabulary is one of the most common writing problems (Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive, 1999; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001) and diction is another problem which prevents students from fully expressing themselves. As stated by one of the instructors, students did not show much awareness of word choice and connotations. For example, if students want to describe a lady with fair skin, they may pick a wrong word "pale", which has negative meaning. Hence, much effort should be put on teaching the connotations of word choice.

Poor grammar is another common language difficulty found in students' writing (Bhatia & Candlin, 2001). Students get confused about which tense to use in their writing. Maybe students are not familiar with the usage of different tenses or they may not notice the distinct usage differences between one or another. Teachers should explain the differences between the usages of tenses, and teach their students how to distinguish them. Students have problems with punctuation because punctuation marks are different in Chinese and English and are used differently. Teachers should teach their students how to use different punctuation marks.

Some students expressed their concern regarding deciding what information is useful and should be put in their writing. It implies that they lack a degree of news sense. Course instructors may analyse the purpose of different types of news reports being written in order to teach their students what news sense is. Students had problems in writing a perfect lead meeting industry standards. Since it is a more advanced skill, teachers should explain the elements and sentence structures used in the leads.

*c) **Training Needed in the College***

All six respondents would like to have extra training and help with interviewing and news writing in English. Some of them prefer two-year regular courses because they want more training and practice so that they can have a stronger foundation. Some choose small group tutorials and suggest that four people in a group is optimum because they want to learn from their mistakes as well as others' mistakes at the same time. In that case, they will learn more. In addition, students can practice their English speaking with their classmates so as to gain more confidence for real interviewing settings. Others opt for individual tutorials since they want more intensive sessions. If the tutorials are conducted on a one-to-one basis, they would be more willing to ask questions about themselves without being embarrassed in front of others.

7.3 *Discussion of the Results from the In-depth Individual Interviews with Course Instructors of "JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*

Next, I will discuss the results from interviews with the three course instructors.

*a) **Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing***

Lack of confidence was ranked at the top of the list. The three course instructors noted that their students lacked confidence in speaking English for students did not have enough training or practice in spoken English. All of the instructors also stated that their students had limited vocabulary. As students seldom read English newspapers, they cannot acquire the words they need as reporters, nor can they build adequate news sense. The teachers reported that students had problems in constructing and applying open-ended and close-ended questions. Their questions were not sensible. Maybe the students are affected by the Chinese language, so when they construct questions in English, they may face problems. An instructor stated that students did not know what to

ask and they do not know how to frame questions. Comprehension problems were also pointed out. The course instructors said that their students did not understand their interviewees' answers. The teachers should put more emphasis on teaching their students these items in class in order to well equip them. They should ask students to read more English newspapers and provide more English interviewing practice and training for the Journalism students.

b) *Communication Needs and Difficulties in Writing*

Grammar is a common English news writing problem in the Journalism undergraduates' work which is consistent with Bhatia's and Candlin's study in Business communication (2001). The three course instructors emphasized that using wrong tenses was the biggest problem among their students. The students were unaware of which tense to use. It implies that the students do not know the functions and usages of different tenses. Teachers should therefore give clear instructions on when and how to use the different tenses in news writing. Lack of vocabulary is another writing problem (Chia, Johnson, Chia & Olive, 1999; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001). Since students are sometimes too lazy to read English newspapers, they do not acquire enough vocabulary they need. Course instructors can prepare a vocabulary list of commonly used words and expressions for their students, and encourage their students to read English newspapers every day.

Students have problems in using conjunctions and connectives. Some of them overuse connectives because that was the way they were taught in secondary school. Students also have difficulties in using prepositions. Teachers should therefore drill their students on how to use conjunctions, connectives and prepositions more accurately. Expressing numbers is also difficult for students. Since the mathematical units have

different terms and are counted differently in Chinese and English, students may have problems understanding large numbers and figures, and thus mix them up in the end. Punctuation is another problem. Course instructors noted that students mixed up the use of punctuation in Chinese and English. As local native Cantonese learners can be easily affected by Chinese, it is therefore necessary for teachers to point out the differences between word use and punctuations in class. Students have problems in writing complex sentences, so two course instructors suggested that students should write short and simple sentences instead, trying to avoid making serious grammatical mistakes.

Regarding the importance of news writing, all three course instructors mentioned the criteria of accuracy and grammar. In terms of accuracy, they all referred to accuracy in news reporting and diction. They ranked the two criteria higher than the others. Two instructors stressed the inter-relationship between accuracy and grammar. If grammar is wrong, it will hinder the meaning and thus affect accuracy. Since students have general grammar problems, it may affect the meanings in the messages they are trying to convey. Teachers should therefore emphasize the importance of the two criteria and their inter-relationship in order to let students learn more clearly about these criteria in English news writing.

7.4 A Comparison of Student Questionnaire Results with Student Interviews' Results

Making a comparison between student questionnaire results and student interview results, I can cross check the findings from student questionnaire with the answers from student interviews (as recommended by Bhatia & Candlin, 2001).

7.4.1 Part I: Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing in English

Similar items, such as lack of vocabulary and translating from Cantonese into English, are found in both sections; however, due to sampling constraints, there may be slight differences between findings by the two research methods. Almost all of those who participated in student interviews stated that they wanted to learn how to express themselves in a polite manner as in how to greet their interviewees, ask questions, give responses and end the interview in a polite way, whereas, less than one-third of the respondents of the questionnaire chose "Item 6: Asking questions in a more polite way".

7.4.2 Part II: Communication Needs and Difficulties in News Writing in English

Similar findings were obtained by both research methods. Limited vocabulary was again ranked in the top three. While four out of six students in the individual interviews stated that they had difficulties in using tenses in an overall sense, only one-third of the respondents who filled out the student questionnaire said that they had problems in using correct tenses and perfect tenses, but less than 10% of them had trouble when using past or present tenses. Paragraphing is another problem. Five out of six students interviewed had difficulties in paragraphing but only one-fifth claimed that it was either *"very difficult or difficult"*. One possible explanation for the above observations is sampling constraints.

7.4.3 Part III: Training Needed in the College

The results collected through the two research methods are consistent here. I obtained a more in-depth understanding of the reasons why students chose different options during individual student interviews, as mentioned in the previous sections.

7.5 *A Comparison of Student Questionnaire Results with "JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting" Course Instructor Interviews' Results*

7.5.1 <u>Part I: Communication Needs and Difficulties in Interviewing in English</u>

The findings of a lack of vocabulary are the same from the two groups of respondents. Limited vocabulary remains one of the biggest issues. Forming open-ended questions is another matter, and so is the comprehension problem with interviewees' answers. These findings from the student questionnaire are consistent with those from the course instructors. Yet, owing to limited choices, lack of confidence was not given as one of the difficulty items in the questionnaire. This is a high-ranked new-raised issue by the course instructors. I suggest that this item be added in future communication needs analysis questionnaires for Journalism undergraduates.

7.5.2 <u>Part II: Communication Needs and Difficulties in News Writing in English</u>

There seem to be certain conflicts between the perceptions of course instructors and Journalism students in the importance of English news writing. The first one is regarding grammar. While the Journalism students pay less attention to correct grammar, the course instructors put a lot of emphasis on both accuracy in diction and reporting, and on correct grammar. In addition, the course instructors pointed out the importance of the inter-relationship of the two criteria. This finding is opposite to Li's and Mead's study on the communication needs of textile and clothing merchandisers (2000). In their study, the graduate merchandisers were concerned about grammatical accuracy, whereas their supervisors focused more on correctness of content and the use of appropriate tone. My results suggest that different professions and disciplines have their own special criteria for discourse

types. Teachers should tell their students what criteria are important for a certain genre lest the students be on the wrong track and produce texts with wrong focus.

The second conflict is the use of tenses. Only 8% and 3% of the Journalism students reported that they had difficulties in using the past tenses and present tenses respectively, but through in-depth interviews, the course instructors noted that wrong use of all tenses was the most significant and common problem found in English news writing among these Journalism students. It can be inferred that these students may sometimes overestimate their abilities in using the English language (as suggested by Zughoul & Hussein, 1985). If students are unaware of their problems, they may be reluctant to overcome them and resent them. If the teachers want to teach them, the students may think it is a waste of time. Thus, I suggest that teachers should show their students some evidence of their wrong use of tenses to justify their teaching. One possible way of doing this is to show some students' work on slides to the class and point out the mistakes.

7.6 A Comparison of Student Interviews' Results with "JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting" Course Instructor Interviews' Results

a) <u>In Interviewing</u>

Similarities are that both students and course instructors ranked the problem of lack of vocabulary, and asking questions in a high position. However, differences are seen. Journalism students stressed their difficulties in greeting their interviewees, asking questions, responding and ending the interview in a polite way, but it seems that the course instructors have not discovered their students' difficulties in these areas. The four communication skills are crucial when students conduct interviews. Teachers should

therefore give students more training of interviewing in English, and should prepare a list of phrases on how to express oneself politely to their students.

b) *In Writing*

While the selected Journalism students reported their difficulties in paragraphing, the course instructors who taught them did not mention this item. It may imply that course instructors may sometimes neglect the real needs of these students. If the two parties do not have time to communicate and discuss the students' learning difficulties, teaching may not be as effective as it could be. It is recommended that course instructors should spend some time on seeing students individually in order to recognize their learning problems.

7.7 Answers to My Research Questions

Here are the answers to the questions on needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates, and why they have such problems.

a) *In Interviewing*

1. *What are the language needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates when conducting interviews in English?*

The biggest language problem is lack of vocabulary (including jargon, idioms and slang), which hinders students from expressing themselves accurately. The second problem is lack of confidence. The third is asking follow-up questions and spelling. The fourth problem is listening comprehension. The fifth is translating Cantonese into English. The sixth is how to express themselves in a polite way. The seventh is pronunciation. The eighth is forming open-ended questions. However, the Journalism

students do not really need to learn "how to introduce themselves", "how to introduce the purpose of the interview", and "forming close-ended questions". Journalism students need more training and practice in interviewing in English.

2. *Why do the Journalism undergraduates have linguistic problems in conducting interviews in English?*

The main reason is that students lack an English-speaking environment. They rarely use English to communicate with others, so they lack confidence in interviewing in English. They do not have enough training and practice in interviewing in English.

b) <u>**In Writing**</u>

1. *What are the language needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates when writing news reports in English?*

The first and biggest language problem is limited vocabulary, which hampers students from truly expressing themselves. Diction in terms of connotation and word choice are difficult. The second biggest language problem is poor grammar. Wrong use of tenses is ranked first, at the top, especially perfect tenses. Following these are using participle phrases, using conjunctions and connectives, paragraphing, expressing numbers and figures, using reported speech, using passive voice, selecting useful information, using prepositions and punctuating. Journalism students need more training and practice in English news writing. They need to know the importance between the two news writing criteria: accuracy (in reporting and diction) and grammar.

2. *Why do the Journalism undergraduates have linguistic problems in writing news reports in English?*

   The main cause appears to be secondary English teaching problems. Journalism students did not learn English news writing in secondary school, and apparently they did not have enough practice in English news writing. Another reason is that the students seldom read English newspapers. The final reason is that secondary teachers apparently neglected students' grammar problems.

8. Conclusions

In this section, I will conclude my research report, and discuss some implications for teaching Journalism undergraduates. I will also discuss the limitations of my research, and give suggestions for further research.

8.1 Implications for Teaching

In general, limited vocabulary remains one of the most significant English language problems among these Journalism undergraduates. My findings are consistent with Chia's, Johnson's, Chia's and Olive's (1999), and Bhatia's and Candlin's (2001) survey results. Poor grammar is also a language difficulty in writing for many Journalism students. My findings are somewhat similar to those of Bhatia and Candlin (2001). All my findings are valuable information for course and materials design. Vocabulary should be increased in the syllabus of news reporting and writing, and jargon should be introduced and taught.

One or two more semester courses on news writing and reporting should be made compulsory for Journalism students as they certainly need more practice and training. The course instructors can hold group and individual tutorials for students outside the classroom in order to learn more about the students' learning difficulties, and also to help them in a more intensive and effective way. Teachers can focus on drilling the students on their English interviewing and news writing skills. Two lists in priority order are provided below. The number one item of each list is therefore the most important by far and it must attract a larger proportion of teaching time. The lists are presenting for teachers. Teachers should spend more time for the first items and so on down the lists. The lists are as follows:

In Interviewing

1. Vocabulary (including jargon, idioms and slang)

2. Asking follow-up questions

3. Spelling

4. Listening comprehension

5. Translation from Cantonese into English

6. How to greet, ask questions, respond, and end an interview in a polite way

7. Pronunciation

8. Forming open-ended questions

In Writing

1. Thematic vocabulary

2. Diction in terms of connotation and word choice

3. Tenses, especially perfect tenses

4. Using participle phrases

5. Using conjunctions and connectives

6. Paragraphing

7. Expressing numbers and figures

8. Using reported speech

9. Using passive voice

10. Selecting useful information

11. Using prepositions

12. Punctuating

From my research findings, I see that a lack of vocabulary is the main problem of these Journalism students. I will therefore ask students to read at least one piece of local news and international news every day, and keep a journal for the new words they have learnt. Also, more role-play of news accidents and events will be provided so that students can have more practice and training in simulated situations as reporters. Individual and group tutorials should be added in the news writing and reporting curriculum, and hence, teachers will have more contact with individual students, and can also have a deeper understanding of their students' learning problems.

In general, local Journalism courses should incorporate all the difficulty items in interviewing and news writing listed previously. Teaching vocabulary is a must for Journalism students. To give more support, both individual and group tutorials for Journalism students certainly seem necessary. More outside practice and training should also be provided.

8.2 Limitations of this Research

My research is relatively small scale. It is limited in the way that it focuses only on one college in Hong Kong. The research size of 62 students from the College may be less representative of Hong Kong and China. X College is somewhat different in one way from other local universities in that it is a private college. The English standard of its students may be relatively lower, compared with the standard of students admitted by UGC-funded local universities in Hong Kong. The situation of the Journalism students in the College may not be exactly the same as those in other tertiary institutions. This being the case, it can be a little difficult to assess how useful my research is for other institutions.

8.3 Suggestions for Further Research

I will now evaluate my research methodology and give some suggestions for improvements for future research. The advantages of using student questionnaires to investigate the needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates were that I could get standardized answers from students and could precisely describe the data in terms of number, so it was easier for me to rank the difficulty items and the data collection process could be done in one morning. My research topic is fairly original in that an extensive literature search found no evidence of any related research studying the needs of Journalism undergraduates in Hong Kong. Since I could not find a similar research questionnaire to use or adapt, most of the items used in the questionnaires were prepared by me, and from discussions with colleagues and Journalism students, though it seems that it is not possible to cover all difficulties in the item lists for students to choose from. Nevertheless, the description of Journalism undergraduates' difficulties from my research findings can be used for further study of needs and difficulties analysis of the targeted and other students, and it can also be expanded.

Through interviews with my Journalism students, I could cross check the findings from student questionnaire (Bhatia & Candlin, 2001) and ask them follow-up questions of the items they found difficult, which gave me opportunities to further understand my students' needs and difficulties when using English. By interviewing my colleagues, course instructors of the news writing and reporting course, I found that students may sometimes overestimate their abilities in using the English language (as predicted by Zughoul & Hussein, 1985). The conflicts found between the perceptions of course instructors and Journalism students towards difficulties items are useful for pedagogical reasons and are also valuable for further research. However, asking open-ended questions may lead to difficulties in data analysis

since the answers are not standardized. It is suggested that a few categories of difficulty items can be prepared before the interviews, and that interviewees can brainstorm ideas under these different categories.

This is a research study on the needs of Journalism undergraduates at a college in Hong Kong. In future studies, comparisons could be made between female and male students, between different years and/or between different colleges. Research could also be done on Journalism students in different locations, for example, in other parts of Asia and elsewhere. We can still learn much more about the English language needs of different groups of non-native speaker English Journalism students. For further studies on Journalism students, researchers can conduct discourse analysis of Journalism students' writing assignments (Bhatia & Candlin, 2001) and conduct research through participant observations by carrying out a field study when the Journalism students have to actually interview people and write a news report immediately afterwards (Holliday, 1995; Jasso-Aguilar, 1999). More in-depth qualitative and multidimensional needs analysis should be conducted for exploring student profiles and evaluating course contents (Holliday, 1995; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001; Lepetit & Cichocki, 2002). These are some recommended methods for future studies.

In this research, I have drawn up a detailed portfolio of English needs and difficulties in Hong Kong, written a detailed description of English needs and difficulties of Journalism undergraduates, and produced lists of prioritized items useful for the future training of students. I hope these findings are valuable for teachers of similar students in Hong Kong and elsewhere, and for those who wish to understand the needs and difficulties of Journalism students.

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Appendix I - Questionnaire for Journalism Undergraduates: Communication Needs and Difficulties in English

Introduction

This questionnaire aims at investigating the English language usage and difficulties in news writing and interviewing of Journalism undergraduates at X College. It will help me to better understand these communication needs and problems. The information provided in response to every item in this questionnaire will be strictly confidential. Your time and help is greatly appreciated.

Questionnaire for Journalism Undergraduates

➢ Please complete the following questionnaire by ticking the correct boxes. **Tick (✓) only ONE box for each item.**

➢ Your answers will not be used to evaluate you. Do not write your name on this sheet.

Please read EACH statement and then decide if you find the following items:

| 5= Very Difficult;   4= Difficult;   3= Average;   2= Not Difficult;   1= Not at All |

I) Communication Needs and Difficulties in <u>INTERVIEWING IN ENGLISH</u>

		Very Difficult 5	Difficult 4	Average 3	Not Difficult 2	Not at all Difficult 1
1.	Starting a conversation with your interviewee (Greeting)					
2.	Introducing yourself to the interviewee					
3.	Introducing the purpose of the interview to your interviewee					
4.	Forming open-ended questions (e.g. what/how/why)					
5.	Forming close-ended questions (e.g. is/are/have/has)					
6.	Asking questions in a more polite way					
7.	Asking follow-up questions for clarification					
8.	Understanding the interviewee's answers					
9.	Understanding jargon in the interviewee's answers					
10.	Spelling when jotting down notes					
11.	Pronunciation					
12.	Translating interviewee's answers from Cantonese into English					

II) Communication Needs and Difficulties in <u>NEWS WRITING IN ENGLISH</u>

Please rank the following items according to their importance of *news writing in English*.
(*1* = most important, *2* = second most important, *3* = third most important, *4* = least important)

Accuracy _____   News Sense _____   Grammar _____   Clarity _____

II) Communication Needs and Difficulties in <u>NEWS WRITING IN ENGLISH</u> (Con't)

		Very Difficult 5	Difficult 4	Average 3	Not Difficult 2	Not at all Difficult 1
13.	Using the correct tenses					
14.	Using past tenses					
15.	Using perfect tenses					
16.	Using present tenses					
17.	Using thematic vocabulary					
18.	Using participle clauses (introduced by "-ing", "-ed" etc.)					
19.	Using relative clauses (introduced by "who", "which" etc.)					
20.	Using connectives indicating <u>time</u> (e.g. afterwards/meanwhile)					
21.	Using connectives indicating <u>cause and effect</u> (e.g. therefore/because)					
22.	Using reported speech					
23.	Using passive voice					
24.	Using quotation marks					
25.	Forming hyphenated compound adjectives (e.g. 6-year-old)					
26.	Expressing numbers and figures (e.g. plural/singular, "billion", "million")					
27.	Paragraphing					

III) Training Needed in the College

Do you think you need more training and help with interviewing and news writing in English?
    Yes ☐   **No** ☐

If "**YES**", please select the following mode(s) of learning (you can select **more than one** item).
    a) ☐ Regular courses
       Duration?   Three semesters ☐   Two Years ☐   Five semesters or more ☐
       (Including the one-year course which lasts **TWO** semesters: *"JCM 210 Techniques for English News Writing and Reporting"*)

    b) ☐ Group Tutorials
    c) ☐ Individual Tutorials
    d) ☐ Others
    _____

IV) Demographics

    1. Which year are you in?   Year 2 ☐   Year 3 ☐
    2. Sex: F ☐   M ☐
    3. Age: 20 or under ☐   21-24 ☐   25 or above ☐

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME & HELP!