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## Foreword

This first issue of the Asian EFL journal for 2012 touches upon a number of issues worthy of note in the field of English language teaching and learning. With article topics ranging from the incorporation of literature in the classroom to the effects of student attitudes on learning, this installment includes authors from a wide geographical area spanning Asia from Iran to Malaysia.

*Integrating Input Enhancement and Processing Instruction in Promoting Acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs* by Yueh-Tzu Chiang explores the effectiveness of input enhancement and processing instruction in assisting Chinese ESL students in learning English phrasal verbs, which are often considered difficult due to their irregular construction and multiple meanings. The author discusses a three-month study carried out on a sample of forty Chinese learners to compare the success of traditional teaching methods, such as memorisation and output-oriented drills, with Processing Instruction and Input Enhancement techniques in teaching phrasal verbs. The results demonstrated a considerable advantage on the part of the Processing Instruction group, leading to the conclusion that such teaching practices should be favoured with regards to phrasal verbs.

Next, Ahour Tourahour looks at the relationship between reading practices and writing in *Cooperative and Individual Reading: The Effect on Writing Fluency and Accuracy*. A group of three writing classes from the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at the Universiti Putra Malaysia was studied using two cause and effect prompts in two conditions, one on a similar topic to the reading exercise and the other

different. The outcome of the test revealed that writing fluency and accuracy, as well as Mean T-Unit Length and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length were better from the cooperative directed reading group in both conditions. The author concludes, therefore, that cooperative learning theory and the indirect model of reading for writing should be taken into consideration when discussing the links between reading and writing practices.

*Modal Verbs for Politeness in Email Requests to Professors: The Case of Chinese EFL Learners* by Wuhan Zhu discusses the under-addressed issue of English modal verb usage for politeness in the case of email correspondence by Chinese EFL students. The sample studied includes two groups - English majors and non-English majors – in order to compare English fluency with linguistic variation. Through this study, the author exposes the various approaches of non-native speakers when speaking and draws conclusions on its impact on teaching in a non-native speaking environment.

In *Reluctance to Write among Students in the Context of an Academic Writing Course in an Ethiopian University*, Tessema Kedir investigates the willingness of university students in an academic writing course to write. This is assessed with the support of data collected from university students and instructors, focusing on the most common reluctance behaviours exhibited, and perceived reasons for this from students and teachers. The study discovered that while instructors believe this reluctance to be due to a deficiency in the students' skills and participation, the students censured the inability of instructors to involve them in classroom activities. Fundamentally, however, both parties agree that student reluctance lies in experiences pre-dating their course. The author asserts that particular attention should be paid to classroom writing activities in order to engage both reluctant and non-reluctant students while implementing practices that create self-motivation and diligence.

The implications of learners' beliefs about language learning on linguistic competence is discussed in *Chinese EFL Learners' Beliefs* by Shaofeng Li, with a detailed consideration of individual traits and of the degree of influence they have on language learning in the context of Chinese higher education. Using questionnaires, tests and interviews, a study was conducted on 142 EFL students. The outcome of a factor analysis on the resulting data demonstrated direct correlation between students' confidence in their learning abilities and their linguistic proficiency. The interviews further established that aspects of the teaching environment as well as of Chinese tradition influence the attitude of learners towards core language teaching methods and their own motivational techniques.

Following this discussion of student beliefs, *Characteristics and Transformation of Native English Speaker Teachers' Beliefs: A Study of U.S. English Teachers in China* by Siping Liu and Jian Wang delves into native-English EFL teachers' beliefs. Since teachers' ideas concerning appropriate teaching techniques and how students learn are considered to have an effect on classroom interaction and students' results, the author builds upon this theory by looking at the changes that occur in teachers' beliefs while working in an EFL environment. A study of American native English speaking teachers at a Chinese university concludes that although they do not alter their teaching methods, the experience of an EFL classroom environment deepens their understanding of students' learning process. It also emphasises the self-perception of native-English speaking teachers as authorities on English proficiency and teaching methods.

An exploration of vocabulary teaching in the Chinese EFL university classroom by Eunice Tang, *To Teach More or More to Teach: Vocabulary-Based Instruction in the Chinese EFL Classroom* examines the cultural and logistical reasons behind the prevalent

explicit vocabulary teaching methods in China. An analysis of oral practices in teaching planned and unplanned words using lesson recordings from different universities uncovered uniform teaching practices among all the teachers, which left very little opportunity for student participation. The emphasis was overwhelmingly placed on the quantity of words learnt rather than vocabulary assimilation and comprehension. An additional discovery was the lack of instructors' teaching knowledge and understanding of student learning. An underlying concern is therefore raised regarding the development of curricula and textbooks and related research.

The final essay of this issue is *Thematization in Romantic and Criminal Short Stories in English and Persian: Implications for Second Language Reading* by Elnaz Ghaleasadi. With the discovery of the advantages of incorporating short story reading in the EFL classroom rather than merely treating isolated linguistic structures, the author discusses the relative efficacy of various thematic types and progression patterns in English and Persian criminal and romantic short stories. A study of a sample of ten short stories of each genre and language investigated the differences in textual organisation between the categories. The author concludes that, due to the many similarities between stories of the same genre, the use of short stories is a powerful technique for teaching reading. It is also indicated that a thematic approach to text analysis could prove to be very effective.

One of the major themes covered in this issue demonstrates a growing interest in the psychological aspects of the EFL classroom both among teachers and students and in the possible measures that could be used to address them. Needless to say, many of the ideas and experience put forward in all the present articles can be applied outside Asia and indeed, outside the EFL classroom. On behalf of all of the editors at Asian EFL Journal, we hope you find this particular edition both enlightening and informative.

## **Integrating Input Enhancement and Processing Instruction in Promoting Acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs**

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### **Bio Data:**

Yueh-Tzu Chiang holds a BA from Tamkang University, Taiwan, an MA TEFL from the University, of San Francisco, USA and is currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Tamkang University. She now works as an English language lecturer in Cardinal Tien College of Healthcare & Management in Taiwan where she teaches general English, English reading and writing for undergraduates. Her research interests focus on second language vocabulary acquisition, learning strategy and language awareness.

### **Abstract**

This study discusses how visual input and textual enhancement, combined with processing instruction (VanPatten, 1996, 2004a, 2004b etc.), facilitates the learning of English phrasal verbs for Chinese learners of English. English phrasal verbs have long been a confusing structure for EFL/ESL learners, partly because of their random combination of verb and particle, but also because of their manifestation of polysemy. Traditional teaching and learning methods are memorization of words and output-oriented drills to deal with their grammar issues, entailing (in)transitivity and particle position, etc. Two instructional packages, Traditional Instruction (TI) and Rote Rehearsal (RR) versus Processing Instruction (PI) and Input Enhancement (IE) were imposed on forty low level Chinese learners of English. After a three-month treatment and test, the research found the PI+IE (Processing Instruction + Input Enhancement) group outperformed TI+RR (Traditional Instruction + Rote Rehearsal) group in terms of interpretation and production of target English phrasal verbs. Analysis of variance

showed a significant result suggesting the difficulty of learning phrasal verbs lies in its grammar structure, indicating a more prominent PI structured activity needs to be increased during instruction.

**Keywords:** Processing instruction, visual cues, textual enhancement, English phrasal verbs

## **Introduction**

Second or foreign language learners (ESL/EFL) usually assume that acquiring and learning to manipulate vocabulary that fits into syntactically and semantically proper contexts is an important factor contributing to the mastery of English. Words that convey meaning, express feeling, and communicate concepts and ideas are constantly utilized as a medium of representation or expression of oneself. English phrasal verbs, which include prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs (Quirk, R. et al. 1972), refer to verb-particle constructions in general, such as *pick up*, *take off*, and are considered to be one of the most frequent usage of expression in both oral and written contexts. Although they seem to occur most commonly in spoken language, “a phrasal verb hitherto felt to be colloquial or informal may, sometimes quite abruptly, become accepted in more formal contexts” (Cornell, 1985). It is also true that, at times, learners are eager to acquire them in large quantities. Take Bywater’s (1969) remarks as evidence of how foreign language learners presume themselves to be “good” language learners by the number of phrasal verbs they use:

“The plain fact is that what distinguishes the writing and, above all, the speech of a good foreign student from those of an Englishman is that what an Englishman writes or says is full of these expressions, whereas most foreigners are frightened of them, carefully avoid them, and sound stilted in consequence. Foreign students who enjoy being flattered on their English can best achieve this by correctly using masses of these compound verbs” (p.97).

Yet, phrasal verbs produce special problems and become a headache for EFL/ESL learners, “partly because there are so many of them, but also because the combination of verb and particle seems so often completely random” (Side, 1990). Their difficulties are multi-fold: the syntactic complexity within their underlying structure, the semantic incongruence within socio-cultural context, the derivation of possible connotations, and the syntactic and semantic intertwining with irregular usage. These are all problems that cause learning difficulty, particularly when Chinese learners of English have not had the opportunity to become fully immersed in an English-speaking country. Diverse cultural experiences lead to different usage of words, resulting in distinct thinking patterns driven by the very usage of one’s own language. Particles get even more complicated because their position can change, yet have the same meaning (for example, *turn off the light* vs. *turn the light off*).

Language typology research has suggested that conceptual structures of different languages are lexicalized and portrayed differently (Yasuda, 2010). For native speakers of English, verb-particle structure is seen as a single lexical chunk rather than two separate words linked to a syntactical rule (Cappelle, Shtyrov & Pulvermuller, 2010), whereas Chinese learners of English instinctively treat this structure as two or three separate words. They manage to translate each word with their mental lexicon and sometimes may foster negative transfer and/or produce interlanguage. For instance, in the phrasal verb “*get up*”, Chinese learners of English may regard *get* as to gain something and as *up* means above, together they may mistakenly think of getting things from above. Even advanced learners often demonstrate a poor command of phrasal verbs and use a one-word verb counterpart, in contrast to native speakers with resembling tasks (Neagu, 2007). When it comes to the effectiveness of instruction, a conventional way lies in,

according to Sid (1990), the manifestation of each phrasal verb with examples and definitions in the textbook and students are encouraged to learn them by heart (See O'Connell, 1987; Coles & Lord, 1976; Riter, Tisdale & Lee, 2006). Teaching and learning of phrasal verbs emphasizes output-oriented drills to deal with the grammatical issues and rote memorization of each word itself.

While the traditional approach appears sound, it is the attempt of this study to propose an alternative method for maximizing the acquisition of phrasal verbs. The method entails the issue of *input*, which has become an important role in second language acquisition for decades; its availability to L1 and L2 learners and how they perceive and process that input have been the focus of many of the studies (Doughty, 2001; Lightbown 1983, 1984 and 2001; VanPatten 2004a, 2004b). To examine the effect of second language instruction on L2 learner's received input, researchers have investigated how external manipulation or modified input can influence intake and language acquisition. Input enhancement (Sharwood Smith 1981, 1991 and 1993) and input processing (VanPatten 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004a and 2004b) are both methods underpinning the manipulation of input before L2 learner's subsequent processing occurs. Studies into each method have focused on specific features to be learned, morphosyntax and lexis, to name a few (Doughty, 1991; Shook, 1994, Alanen, 1995; Izumi, 2002; Wong, 2003). There is scant study that endeavors the combination of both methods for learning the target features. In this research, input enhancement and input processing are combined and adapted within an instruction package for learning the target phrasal verbs. The intention is to facilitate Chinese learners of English learning the target phrasal verbs with regards to their grammatical usage to more efficiently acquire their idiosyncrasies.

## Literature Review

### *Phrasal Verbs*

A phrasal verb is usually defined as a structure that consists of a verb and a morphologically invariable particle that function as a single unit both lexically and syntactically (Darwin & Gary, 1999; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985; Liao & Fukuya, 2004). Attempts have been made to classify them either as phrasal verbs, for example *to play around*, prepositional or two-word verbs, such as *to cope with* or phrasal-prepositional or multi-word verbs, for instance *to look forward to*. We normally refer to verb-particle structure here. Although the classification of phrasal verbs is versatile, they are most commonly treated as the following types: *literal, aspectual and idiomatic* (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999); *literal, completive and figurative* in Dagut and Laufer (1985). In *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1989), phrasal verbs are categorized as *literal, semi-literal, completive, non-literal* and *fixed particle*. Some syntactic characteristics of phrasal verbs are (in)transitivity and (in)separability. The most productive separable phrasal verbs are the transitive ones in which the particles can be separated from the verbs by the direct object (e.g. *She looked the dictionary up*). Separation is obligatory when the direct object is a pronoun (e.g. *She looked it up*). Inseparable phrasal verbs indicate the unfeasibility of departing verb plus particle construction. Thus, there is an unobligatory separation of the pronoun (e.g. *Peter ran into an old friend.*), and it could be placed in sentence final (e.g. *Peter ran into him.*), but not *Peter ran an old man into* and *Peter ran him into*.

Verb-particle combinations are rarely found outside of the Germanic family (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), such as Chinese, which leads to unfamiliarity with these structures and a lack of strategies to acquire them. As a result, despite the frequent

occurrence of them and learners' perception of regarding them as important, there is avoidance phenomenon that means learners tend to use single-word equivalents instead (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena 1989; Laufer & Eliasson 1993; Gaston, 2004; Liao & Fukuya, 2004). The growing interest in phrasal verbs is reflected in modern English dictionaries, "which often list phrasal verbs separately in their own right (for example, giving *put up* as a separate entry rather than listing it under *put*) and attach the problem of their polysemy more satisfactorily than before" (Cornell, 1985, p.269). Dictionaries including only phrasal verbs have also been produced, (see Cowie & Mackin 1975; Sinclair, et al., 1989; Parkinson 2007) as well as some self-learning and teaching materials (see McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007). Phrasal verbs have been regarded as a subcategory of the general lexical phenomenon of formulaic language, which refers to "prefabricated routines and patterns" (Khatib & Ghannadi, 2011). Mackenzie (2000) reported that much speech and writing in the native language is enabled by "the internalization of a vast number of institutionalized utterances, or lexical phrases, or fixed and semi-fixed expressions". Second language research has not yet paid satisfactory attention to the acquisition of phrasal verbs (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002; Liu, 2003; Khatib & Ghannadi, 2011) despite the difficulty of phrasal verbs that L2 learners face. The bulk of the research focuses on the classification of them (see Bolinger, 1971; Side, 1990; Darwin & Gary, 1999) and some talk about their complex underlying structure (see Dixon, 1982; Cornell 1985); there is a need to propose a handful teaching techniques to better acquire them.

### ***Input Enhancement***

In the realm of second language learning, linguistic *input* is described as the repertoire

being processed and *intake* is that sort of input that has been attended to by L2 learners while processing (Leow, 1993), or the mental registration of the input that occurs after processing (Corder, 1967; Combs, 2004). Recent Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies have shed light on the way *attention* alters or intervenes in “the process of input selection and subsequent memory of input” (Combs, 2004, p.1). Three streams distributed in response to the role of selection of input through mediation of instruction are *consciousness-raising* (Sharwood Smith, 1981), *focus on form* (Long, 1991) and *analytic teaching* (Lyster, 1994). Input enhancement was formerly recognized as consciousness-raising, intending to draw learner’s attention to formal properties of an L2, or increase learners’ awareness of structures and functions of the target language. It is believed by many researchers that the role of consciousness-raising when attending to input is vital for learning to take place. Input enhancement is based on the premise that sheer exposure to certain L2 structure is insufficient for language acquisition, or at least mastery, to occur (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985, 1988a, 1988b; Gascoigne, 2006a). In the same vein, Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis (1990, 1994, and 1995) recommends attention being drawn to the salient part of specific language form or the target form. For acquisition of target L2 form to take place, the features that L2 learners learn must first be noticed by the learners. It is believed by a significant number of researchers that saliency of specific L2 form will bring special attention or awareness to L2 learners and hence facilitate second language acquisition (Doughty, 1991, 1998; Ellis, 1994a, 1994b; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Schmidt, 1990, 1994; Sharwood Smith, 1991, 1993; VanPatten, 1990, 1992; White, 1998)

Techniques employed to enhance input, including “explicit discussion of target forms...processing instruction, garden-path techniques, and textual enhancement through

typographical alterations such as boldface type or color coding” (Gascoigne, 2006b, p.552). In this study, textual enhancement through manipulation of typography, **boldface** as well as visual cues (i.e. picture) are the means to provoke perceptual attention to the target phrasal verbs.

### ***Processing Instruction***

Processing instruction (PI), presented by VanPatten (1990), is predicated on the model of input processing that falls into focus on form instruction category. In input processing, learners perceive the meaning-bearing input while mapping the meaning with its form, assign syntactic categories to the words they comprehend, and then project the associated phrases onto a sentence (Chung Cheng, 2002). Form is about a language’s surface structure and functional facets while meaning is referential real-world meaning. A form-meaning connection is the relationship between referential meaning and the way it is encoded linguistically (Wong, 2002). In other words, unlike the traditional instruction and rote recitation approach that deal with grammar practice and vocabulary memorization, input processing focuses more on the role of meaning-bearing input and the process by which learners transfer their input into intake. Three components of processing instruction (PI) are: 1) explicit information about the target structure, 2) explicit information about processing strategies, and 3) structured input activities. First, provide explicit linguistic data to L2 learners with the designated target form, then inform learners about a specific input processing strategy that may lead them to process the incorrect input and finally implement ‘structured input’ activities, manipulated and functioned so as to draw learners' attention to the relevant aspect of input necessary for intake (Wong, 2004).

### ***Input Enhancement Combines with Processing Instruction***

Input enhancement is considered to be any “deliberate attempt to draw the learner’s attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language” (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1988a, p. 107). It is any external attempt to raise consciousness (Rutherford, 1987) or noticing (Schmidt, 1995) to make features of the input more salient to learners. From VanPatten’s perspective (1996), PI is consistent with the input enhancement position in that it not only sheds light on the saliency part of the target form, which draws learners attention in some way, but also “provides opportunities for consistent form-meaning mappings in activities” (p.84). To this end, it is hypothesized in this study that textual enhancement and images through the aid of structured input activities raise L2 learners’ perceptual attention to the target phrasal verbs and hence facilitate acquiring them.

### **Previous Studies**

Studies of textual input enhancement have investigated mostly the effect on L2 morphosyntax or grammar learning with mixed results (Doughty, 1991; Alanen, 1995; Jourdenais et al., 1995; White, 1998; Leow, 1997; Izumi, 2002). A few studies have examined the effects on vocabulary acquisition. Barcroft (2003) found productive learning of enhanced L2 words and the decrease of productive learning of unenhanced L2 words. Davis (1989) concluded the positive effects of marginal glossing on L2 reading. Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus (1996) suggested that incidental vocabulary learning was facilitated by increasing word frequency in a text, use of a bilingual dictionary and explanation of marginal glosses. Although not classified as textual input enhancement, Gascoigne (2006) operationalized computer-mediated input enhancement as a way to

investigate the effect on Spanish and French beginner learners' recall of accent versus traditional pen-and-paper process. The empirical result supported the effectiveness of explicit and computer-mediated input enhancement over the traditional one.

While Jourdenais et al. (1995) and Leow (1997) treated textual enhancement as an independent variable, some other studies investigated it in combination with other variables. There are studies link to topic familiarly (Overstreet, 1998; Lee, 2007) and the explicit direction to focus on form (Shook, 1994). Kim (2006) explored the effectiveness of textual input enhancement combined with lexical elaboration on low-frequency vocabulary acquisition through reading. The previous studies discussed syntactic features and L2 vocabulary acquisition with the use of input enhancement; however, research into the acquisition of phrasal verbs is limited. Very recent research by Khatib & Ghannadi (2011) studied the effect of marginal glosses as implicit and explicit interventions respectively compared to a non-interventional group, which learned target phrasal verbs incidentally. The result revealed the interventional group outperformed the non-intervention group (i.e. marginal glosses as a tool of textual input enhancement performed better in both recognition and production of phrasal verbs).

Research on input processing has emphasized the specific syntactic feature. VanPatten & Cadierno (1993)'s study proposed a "form-meaning connection" approach to better solve the confusion of SVO, SOV, OVS, OV surface structure of Spanish. Farley (2001) found an overall greater effect on processing instruction (PI) than meaning-based output on how learners interpret and produce the Spanish subjunctive of doubt. Several studies have looked into specific forms L2 learners received from PI compared to traditional instruction, which involved grammar explanation and output-based practice (Cadierno, 1995; VanPatten, 2000, 2004a, 2004b). In consideration of the combination of input

enhancement and PI, Hwu (2004) applied input enhancement and input processing theory in instruction of Spanish preterite and imperfect within a multimedia CALL context. Russell (2009)'s study investigated the effects of PI on the acquisition of the subjunctive in adjectival clauses by learners of Spanish. Structured input activities were combined with computerized visual input enhancement (VIE) in order to increase the saliency of target grammatical form for web-based delivery. Although there is no significant difference between PI and traditional instruction, there is a superior performance in PI combined with (VIE) than PI alone in interpretation tasks.

### **Research Questions**

The present study investigated the feasibility of incorporating textual enhancement, boldface, and picture with processing instruction (PI) to draw learner attention to the target phrasal verbs. The researcher sought to find whether the use of two methods (processing instruction + input enhancement) or traditional instruction (i.e. rote rehearsal and output-oriented drills), which were regarded as different instructional packages, had more significant impact on learning the phrasal verbs? The study was motivated by the following research questions and underlying hypotheses:

1. What are the effects of PI+IE (Processing Instruction + Input Enhancement) on the learners' acquisition of target phrasal verbs (as measured by an interpretation and production task)?
2. What are the effects of TI+RR (Traditional Instruction + Rote Rehearsal) on the learners' acquisition of target phrasal verbs (as measured by an interpretation and production task)?
3. Which instructional package, PI+IE or TI+RR, performs better in the post test?

4. Do the effects, if any, reflect the difficulty in syntactic nature of phrasal verbs ((in)transitivity and (in)seperability)?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 40 EFL students in Taiwan's five-year junior college, non-English majors and age distribution ranges from around 16 to 19. According to a preliminary survey of their background, they normally have learned English for at least six years in school or outside the classroom, have not been exposed to an English-speaking country over a month and have not passed any English certificate tests, such as GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) or TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). English proficiency was considered low/ pre-intermediate depending on the Joint College Entrance Examinations of Taiwan and our junior college's standardized test. Participants were randomly distributed as PI+IE group (experimental) and TI+ RR (control) group. Each group consisted of 20 students.

### ***Target Phrasal Verbs, Reading Materials and Pictures***

Fifty phrasal verbs were selected from the corpora of ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English) in terms of frequency and use. Twenty-five out of the top fifty most frequent phrasal verbs were chosen due to a prior phrasal verb knowledge test, the purpose of which was to eliminate the already-known words from the L2 learners. The target phrasal verbs were provided to learners in accordance with the types of phrasal verbs - literal, aspectual and idiomatic (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Dagut & Laufer,1985) through two distinct instructional packages, PI+IE (processing instruction+

input enhancement) and TI+RR (traditional instruction+ rote rehearsal),. The passages used in the study were selected from online phrasal verb materials (Appendix 2) and *BBC English Phrasal Verbs OK* (Shepherd, 2003). The pictures were chosen from *Making Sense of Phrasal Verbs* (Shovel, 1992). The passages were typed, highlighting the target phrasal verbs, boldface, as well as their Chinese definitions.

### ***Design***

The present study was conducted to know whether the input enhancement approach (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith 1985 and elsewhere) in tandem with processing instruction (VanPatten, 1996 and elsewhere) facilitate the acquisition of target phrasal verbs and an awareness of their grammatical problems, namely transitive vs. intransitive, the separable feasibility (particle position) and the fixed-particle chunks. It was designed to make a comparison between the traditional approach to grammar teaching and memorization, including explicit grammar explanation, output-oriented drills and rote rehearsal. Both the experimental (PI+IE) group and control groups (TI+ RR) were instructed by the same teacher and experienced the following:

1. *Two pre-tests*: The first one was administered to both groups one week prior to the commencement of the treatment to eliminate the already known phrasal verbs. The second included production and interpretation tests, done after the first pretest.
2. *The treatment*: Both groups were under two instructional packages (see Table 1).
3. *The post-test*: The participants in both groups completed a post-test (consisting of production and interpretation tests) at the end of the treatment session.

**Table 1**

*Instructional packages: (PI+IE) vs. (TI+ RR)*

Experimental group (PI+IE) <i>n</i> =20	Control group (TI+ RR) <i>n</i> =20
explicit instruction of grammatical issue of target phrasal verbs (PVs)	
boldface on the target PVs on the passage (Appendix 2)	no boldface on the target PVs on the passage
pictures of target PVs (Appendix1)	a list of target PVs (Appendix 4)
structured input activities (Appendix 3)	output oriented drills and exercises

***Instruments***

The purpose of the first pre-test (which was in the form of a checklist) was implemented to see whether the learners already recognized the phrasal verbs. The checklist consisted of 50 phrasal verbs, all selected from ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English). Participants were asked to translate them into Chinese. Based on the results of the test, 25 target phrasal verbs that were entirely unknown by the learners were chosen. The utilization of the form of a checklist had been successfully used in other studies (e.g. Knight, 1994; Kim, 2006; Khatib & Ghannadi, 2011). The second pre-test and post-test in this study, which were identical, were designed by the researcher. The tests involved two parts: the production part included multiple choice and sentence reorganization; the interpretation part contained translation and a recall test. The production part was implemented to know learners' understanding of target phrasal verbs' grammatical usage (i.e. (in)transitivity and (in)separability). The interpretation part was done to find learners' acquisition and/or recognition of target PVs. In the multiple choice and sentence reorganization sections, there was a grammatical judgment test and locate the verb and particle test [e.g. she looks up the word in the dictionary.\_\_\_\_\_ (She it looks

up.)), respectively. The translation and recall sections were tests that involved writing down both Chinese and English equivalents of target PVs. The original test was administered to another 30 students to test its' reliability. The test was revised to meet the reliability criteria. The reliability index for the production part is Cronbach's Alpha (0.74) which is moderate and the interpretation part is (0.81) which is good after deleting scale variance of the items that caused inconsistency of the reliability.

***Instructional Procedures***

The study was conducted from the first week of the semester to the thirteenth week, around three months with consent of the participants. Forty participants were randomly divided into two groups, PI+IE (experimental) and TI+RR (control), twenty in each, under distinct instructional packages with the same instructor. The instruction was not all in English but with explanation of grammatical rules in Chinese. Both groups met once a week during regular 50-min class sessions. Both groups completed two pre-tests; one was to ensure the unknown phrasal verbs, another was to check their starting point and prior knowledge. Both groups also finished the after treatment post-test. Table 2 presents the overall design of the study.

**Table 2**

*Overview of the study (Week=W)*

Procedure: PI+IE (n=20) & TI+RR (n=20)	
W1 pre-test I	W7 5 target PVs/article/grammar/picture (or list of PVs)
W2 pre-test II	W8 review test (of W7)
W3 5 target PVs/article/grammar/picture	W9 5 target PVs/article/grammar/picture

(or list of PVs)	(or list of PVs)
<i>W4</i> review test (of <i>W3</i> )	<i>W10</i> review test (of <i>W9</i> )
<i>W5</i> 5 target PVs/article/grammar/picture (or list of PVs)	<i>W11</i> target PVs/article/grammar/picture (or list of PVs)
<i>W6</i> review test (of <i>W5</i> )	<i>W12</i> review test (of <i>W11</i> )
	<i>W13</i> overall post-test

PI+IE Group (Experimental group):

The instructor introduced the first five target phrasal verbs (PVs) with corresponding pictures to the students to catch their attention (Appendix1). After they reviewed the five target ones, the passage that contained the five PVs was distributed to the students (Appendix 2) for silent reading. After students were aware of the five PVs, the next step was to follow the processing instruction (PI) stages by presenting them with explanation of the specific grammatical form of the five PVs, their (in)transitivity, (in)separability and position with a chart or diagram and then, provide both positive (i.e. a correct structure being formed) and negative evidence (i.e. an incorrect structure that needed to avoid of). Learners received clues or hints in PI on paying attention to form in the input. The clues or hints about certain common grammatical misconceptions were shown repeatedly in the activity paper or on the board. The following step was “structured input” activities which reinforced the target feature that has been explained before and forced learners to make form-meaning mapping (Appendix 3). The follow-up week, there was a review test to let the students brush up on the first five PVs. It was an instruction cycle, and the sequence began with the instruction of the other five target PVs the next week.

TI+ RR Group (Control group):

The first five target PVs were presented as a list and at the same time with their Chinese equivalents (Appendix 4). The passage that did not contain any special highlight was then given to the students. The instructor carried on teaching the specific linguistic feature of the five PVs with explanation of grammar rules of (in)transitivity, (in)separability and particle position. Output-oriented exercises were provided in association with the target linguistic forms and phrasal verbs. The next week, a review test of the five PVs was executed. The following week began a teaching cycle with the other five target PVs.

## **Results**

The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, number of participants and standard errors) referring to the results from the pre-test reported in Table 3 yielded no significant difference ( $p < .175$ ), indicating the starting point of the two groups were pretty much the same. Table 3 shows that both groups performed similarly in pre-test with closing mean scores (mean [M] = 1.85 for the experimental group (PI+IE); M=1.64 for the control group (TI+RR)). An assumption about different effects of two groups was made; in other words, the treatment or instruction will be the key to the difference of two groups' performance. The statistical analyses across the two groups demonstrated that the pre-test of the two groups did not have a significant effect ( $p = .49$ ), while the post-test reported a significant effect ( $p = .002$ ) (Table 4). The alpha level was set at 0.05. The performance difference between the control and experimental groups resulting from the treatment, or instruction, was confirmed.

**Table 3***Means, Standard Deviations and Standard Errors of Pre-test of Two Groups*

<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>PI+IE</i>	20	1.85	.51	.18
<i>TI+RR</i>	20	1.64	.44	.15

Note. SD=standard deviation. SE=standard error.

<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Correlation</i>	<i>Sig</i>
<i>PI+IE vs. TI+RR</i>	-.531	.175

**Table 4***Performance of Learners within Pre-test and Post-test*

<i>n=40</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.(2-tailed)</i>
<i>Pretest 2 groups</i>	.21	.82	.29	.73	7	.49
<i>Post-test 2 groups</i>	1.73	1.00	.35	4.87	7	.002

Table 5 and Table 6 describe how learners performed differently with reference to the two instructional packages. In experimental group (PI+IE) (Table 5), the mean scores rose from 1.77 to 5.56 after the instruction and yielded significant difference ( $p=.00$ ), suggesting that the experimental group improved after the instruction. In the control group (TI+RR) (Table 6), learners' range and space of progress did not share the same portion of improvement compared to that in the experimental group. As shown in Table 6, the mean scores rose from 1.63 to 1.83 with no significant difference ( $p=.36$ ). From the statistical viewpoint, it suggests that traditional instruction may help learners acquire chunk structures but not as dramatically effective as the experimental one.

**Table 5***Performance of Learners in Experimental Group across Tests*

<i>PI+IE</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.(2-tailed)</i>
<i>Pre-test</i>	20	1.77	.43	.12	-1.78	.28	.00
<i>Post-test</i>	20	5.56	.66	.25			.00

**Table 6***Performance of Learners in Control Group across Tests*

<i>TI+RR</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.(2-tailed)</i>
<i>Pre-test</i>	20	1.63	.43	.154	-2.00	.213	.36
<i>Post-test</i>	20	1.83	.41	.147			.36

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Post Hoc Analysis made sure that the instruction effect and test types effect (multiple choice, translation, recall and sentence reorganization) proved to affect the result as shown in Table 7 ( $F=32.143$ ;  $Sig.=.000$ ). The production part was the grammaticality judgment test which was comprised of multiple choice and sentence reorganization sections while the interpretation part focused more on learners' recognition (tokens of gains/ acquisition) of the target PVs, including translation and recall test sections. Table 8 and Table 9 indicated the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in both the interpretation and production tests. The control group showed no statistically different effect after the instruction.

**Table 7**

<i>Levene Statistic</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
2.695	17	162	.001

Note. Based on Test of Homogeneity of Variance

*Analysis of Variance for Exp. group x Con. group and Groups x Test types*

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Between Groups</i>	40.36	17	2.374	32.143	.000
<i>Within Groups</i>	11.96	162	.074		
<i>Total</i>	52.32	179			

**Table 8**

*Analysis of Variance for Comparison of Interpretation Scores with two Groups across Tests*

<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.(a)</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval</i>	
				<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
<i>(Experimental)Pre-Post</i>	-1.49(*)	.110	.000	-1.899	-1.084
<i>(Control) Pre-Post</i>	-.125	.135	1.00	-.623	.373

Note. (\*)The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. (a) Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

**Table 9**

*Analysis of Variance for Comparison of Production Scores with two Groups across Tests*

<i>Production</i>	<i>Md</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sig.(a)</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
				<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
<i>(Experimental)Pre-Post</i>	-.283(*)	.110	.020	-.690	.124
<i>(Control) Pre-Post</i>	-.0375	.135	1.00	-.536	.461

Note. (\*) The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. (a) Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

Table 10 illustrated different test types affect learning difficulty. Statistical layout demonstrated that both experimental and control groups showed no significant effect concerning the multiple choice and sentence reorganization test. These two category of tests which were mainly about grammaticality judgment are the parts that confuse

learners more and hence make learning more difficult ( $P > .05$  in both multiple choice and sentence reorganization). On the other hand, translation and recall tests which focus more on the competence of recognition, acquisition and the ability to produce these target words improved after two instructions ( $p < .05$  in both groups). From the above findings, the grammar of phrasal verbs, including particle position, (in)transitivity and (in)separability, remain the hardest part for EFL learners.

**Table 10**

*Analysis of Variance for Test Types Comparison Scores (Exp. Group vs. Con. Group)*

<i>Exp. vs. Con.</i>	<i>Md</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sig.(a)</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval</i>	
				<i>Lower bound</i>	<i>Upper bound</i>
<i>Multiple Choice</i>	.312	.124	1.00	-.143	.768
<i>Translation</i>	.537(*)	.124	.004	.0820	.993
<i>Recall test</i>	.437(*)	.124	.034	.0180	.893
<i>Sentence Reorganization</i>	.250	.124	1.00	-.205	.705

Note. (\*) The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. (a) Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

## **Discussion**

In this section, the results of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions proposed earlier.

### ***Research Question 1. Effects of PI+IE on the Learners' Acquisition of Target PVs.***

The result indicated that textual input enhancement in the form of boldface added with pictures have significant impact on recognition of the target phrasal verbs. This is in line with Yun (2010)'s study that foreign language learners, despite their L1 backgrounds,

show better effects while acquiring vocabulary with visual (multiple) hypertext glosses (e.g. pictures) than text-only. The result demonstrated as well that processing instruction aided the learning of phrasal verbs' major grammatical aspects (i.e. (in)transitivity and (in)separability) as shown in the evidence of Table 9; the production task, which was comprised of mainly a grammaticality judgment test, gained significant results from pre-test to post-test. The results obtained through the combination of processing instruction and input enhancement also corresponded with that of Russell (2009). In her study, learners who received PI with visual input enhancement (VIE) outperformed learners who received structured input activities without VIE. According to Schmidt (1990), noticing played a key role in the process from input to intake, giving learners chances to pay attention to the salient part, at the same time reinforcing its form through meaning-oriented activities would let them get into further cognitive processing for acquisition.

***Research Question 2. Effects of TI+RR on the Learners' Acquisition of Target PVs.***

Based on the statistic results, mean scores (from 1.63 to 1.83) indicated slight improvement of the learners in TI+RR group from pre-test to post-test. Learners did learn from this instructional package, which explained the feasibility of teaching phrasal verbs with a list and Chinese equivalents as well as traditional grammar approach. However, when we looked closer at the result, we found it yielded no significant effect on neither interpretation nor production tasks. This might suggest that learners learned something else but not directly from TI+RR approach.

***Research Question 3. The Comparison of PI+IE and TI+RR.***

As shown in Table 5 and Table 6, it was found that PI+IE group had significant impact

from pre to post-test while TI+RR group did not. That is to say, PI+IE outperformed TI+RR in the processing of learning these target PVs. The result is supported by several studies which compared traditional instruction with PI (VanPatten, 1996, 2000; Chung Cheng, 2002; Wong, 2002), although not exactly combining with the use of IE. Considering the combination of PI and IE and the comparison with the traditional approach in the acquisition of phrasal verbs, it is in line with the results of Russell's (2009). Her study suggested that learners who receive PI in combination with VIE noticed target forms in subsequent authentic input with metalinguistic awareness with a significantly higher level of awareness than those who had traditional instruction or solely structured input activities.

***Research Question 4. The Difficulty of Phrasal Verbs' Syntactic Structure.***

Based on the test design, the interpretation section consisting of the translation and recall test were mainly used to examine learners' recognition of target phrasal verbs; while the production section containing multiple choice and sentence reorganization was to test learners' grammatical concept of the target phrasal verbs (e.g. the correct position of the particle). The result of the study indicated the difficult part in learning phrasal verbs lied in its irregular syntactic structure as shown in Table 10. Multiple choice and sentence reorganization did not have significant difference ( $p=1.00$ ) across both groups, yet mean scores show both groups improved after instruction. Also, for overall production results, the experimental group still outperformed the control one, indicating PI and input enhancement did help to improve learners' ability to distinguish correct usage of phrasal verbs. PI differentiates from the traditional approach in that "structured activities" were carried out in the whole teaching process continually forcing learners to

make form-meaning connection. It is then assumed that phrasal verbs' irregular grammar rules remain the hardest part in processing and learning and suggests more structured input activities implemented during the instruction period.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this research supports the proposal by VanPatten's processing instruction (1996 and elsewhere) and Rutherford & Sharwood Smith's input enhancement (1985 and elsewhere) that chunk structures can be more easily accessible and retrieved from memory by making them more salient to learners. Vocabulary learning, according to Brown (2001) requires "good grounds for intervening at the metacongitive level" (p. 377). This kind of intervention does not refer to the rebirth of the same traditional methods of vocabulary teaching (Brown, 2001; Pica, 2005; Khatib & Ghannadi, 2011). Lexical items such as phrasal verbs need to be put under the spotlight for meaningful language acquisition and learners need to be directed to the provision of meaningful phrasal verbs learning. It includes raising learners' awareness of the intended target feature as well as mapping form to meaning.

From the above viewpoint, to raise learners' awareness requires employing techniques such as typographical alternation. In accordance with textual enhancement and imagery, learners' attention is drawn to the enhanced part that is retained in the short-term memory and by encountering these enhanced chunks over and over again, the working memory releases some workload and may lead to a longer retention effect. The learners who learned phrasal verbs through typographical alteration and imagery performed better than those who learned them solely with memorization. Paying attention is facilitative if adult learners are to acquire mastery over a foreign language (Schmidt, 1990). In considering

mapping form to meaning, compared to the traditional instruction of phrasal verbs that focuses on explanation of specific linguistic features, output-oriented exercises and memorization of a list of phrasal verbs, this study hopes to provide an alternative way to enhance teaching and learning of phrasal verbs especially in Asian EFL contexts, or more specifically in Chinese EFL ones. Because of the distinct parameters, both languages perform differently in terms of wordings and structures. Instead of remembering phrasal verbs word by word and with word-to-word Chinese translation, highlighted target words shown in the readings and with the pictures help learners raise their awareness to the enhanced one. VanPatten (1990, 1996) hypothesized that learners' limited attentional resources would be selectively directed towards meaning before form had occurred. For him, it is difficult for basic level L2 learners to attend to both form and meaning at the same time (see VanPatten's 1990 study). His principles of input processing outlined second language acquisition process and order and in this principle-based condition, he suggested structured input activities which help learners make more meaning-form connection. PI helps learners pay attention to form and meaning with its referential and affective activities (aural and oral skills required) that assist learners abandon their old strategies such as memorization of rules, drills and exercises to a better ultimate L2 attainment.

### **Future Research**

Despite the fact that the findings support the methods that have implications for teaching and learning phrasal verbs in EFL contexts, there are issues which need to be fully considered in terms of various variables and contexts.

First of all, the study decided on twenty-five target PVs as the study main focus in

terms of frequency and use. It would be more prudent to include more phrasal verbs and see the generalization of implications for teaching and learning. Second, the present target PVs were scrambled so they may have contained different literal, aspectual and idiomatic types of phrasal verbs. The phrasal verbs' productivity and polysemy should be noted. Certain idiomatic or figurative phrasal verbs are opaque, hard to comprehend and have different meanings depending on the contexts. A follow-up study can be done to understand which type of phrasal verbs cause more learning difficulty. Third, the study only suggested the findings from pre-test to post-test, and so a longer period of time of delayed post-test can be done to understand the effect of retention of the phrasal verbs over time. Lastly, the traditional approach and PI are similar in the beginning instructional stage as both explain explicitly about specific target features. They are certainly mutually dependable if structured input activities can be included and expanded as several types of "drills and activities" other than output-oriented exercises only.

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## Appendix 1

A sample picture from Shovel, 1992, p54.



## Look up to

**Appendix 2:** Excerpt from <http://www.churchillhouse.com/en/online-english/phrasal-verbs/>

I really felt sorry for Jane today. I saw her sitting outside, but she didn't look as relaxed as she usually does. I asked her if anything was **stressed** her **out** 壓力大, but instead of replying she **burst out** 爆發 crying. I was so shocked. It **turned out** 變成 that she had an important deadline to meet at work, and her boss, who she really **looked up to** 崇拜 had been **winding** her **up** 結束 by constantly reminding her of how important the project was, and how everyone was **depending on** 依賴 her to do it well. As she was telling me she started **working** herself **up** 激動 again, to the point that she started shaking. I tried my best to **smooth** it **over** 紓解, and even offered to help her with some of the work, but I don't think she'll be able to relax again until the project is complete.

**Note:** Experimental group marked with boldface the phrasal verbs, whereas the control group did not.

### **Appendix 3: Structured activity-sheet of activity paper**

#### Activity A

記得片語動詞有及物不及物, 及物可加受詞或東西, 不及物則不行!

注意! 有些片語動詞, 有固定的介係詞喔 ex: look forward to, 現在, 請聽老師所念的句子, 判斷是否文法正確, 圈選 yes(y)/no(n)

Remember phrasal verbs can be transitive and intransitive. Transitive phrasal verbs can be added with object, but intransitive ones cannot.

Attention! Some phrasal verbs have fixed particles. Now, listen to what the teacher reads and decide the correct grammar by checking yes or no.

1. yes no
2. yes no
3. yes no
4. yes no
5. yes no
6. yes no

(Instructor reads: 1. Tom threw away the ball. 2. Please come back Taiwan. 3. I cannot put up to your temper. 4. The car broke down. 5. Please turn the radio on. 6. Please cut down smoking on.)

#### **Appendix 4: Target phrasal verbs listed with Chinese meanings.**

- get out 出去
- carry out 實行
- go away 走開
- come in 進來
- go on 繼續
- check out 退房
- check in 入住
- stressed out 緊張, 有壓力
- find out 找出, 查明

- turn out 轉變成
- call off 取消
- look up (to) 尊敬, 崇拜, 拜訪
- look down(on) 看不起
- come up 發生, 走過來
- burst out 爆發
- work up 打開
- smooth over 關上
- turn down 拒絕
- set out 開始
- wind up 使結束
- depend on 依賴
- refer to 參照
- come up with 想出(方法)
- look forward to 期待
- put up with 忍受

## **Cooperative and Individual Reading: The Effect on Writing Fluency and Accuracy**

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### **Bio Data:**

Touran Ahour is an Assistant Professor and academic staff member at the Department of English, Faculty of Persian literature and Foreign Languages, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz branch, Iran. She has received her PhD degree in TESL from the Universiti Putra Malaysia. She has published several books and articles. Her research interests include writing assessment, reading-writing connections, syllabus design, materials evaluation and ELT issues.

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to find out the effect of Cooperative Directed Reading on the writing performance of ESL undergraduate students compared to Directed Reading without Cooperation and no treatment. A quasi-experimental research with the non-equivalent pretest-posttest control group design was used. The students of three intact expository writing classes were employed as the sample of the study from the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at Universiti Putra Malaysia. The pretest-posttest essay writings of the students were collected on two comparable cause and effect prompts in two conditions. One was thematically related to their reading topics while the other was not. The writing samples were rated through an analytic scoring scale, and T-unit counts. The results of the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) revealed better performances of the Cooperative Directed Reading group in writing fluency, writing accuracy, Mean T-Unit Length, and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length than Directed Reading without Cooperation group compared to the No Treatment group in both conditions of the study. The findings verified the importance of using the underlying principles of cooperative learning theory and indirect model of reading for writing as one of the models of reading-writing connection theories. The implications and recommendations are presented.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning, directed Reading, writing fluency and accuracy, reading-writing connection, analytic scoring, T-Unit count

## **Introduction**

A comparison of the past and present learning environments in the fields of reading and writing indicates that around the 1950s and 1960s reading and writing were taught as separate subjects. That is why one can rarely find studies on the reading-writing connection in these decades. Gradually, beginning in the 1970s, researchers' curiosities about the relationship between reading and writing were aroused. Then, in the 1980s, researchers' attention was directed to reading and writing as processes (Tierney, 1992). Most of the studies in the area of reading and writing connections were conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s. These studies indicate that thinking and learning are enhanced

through the cooperative use of reading and writing. However, as some researchers (e.g., Hirvela, 2004; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008) state, the work on L2 reading-writing connections was brought into a larger and more meaningful perspective following the 1993 publication of *Reading in the Composition Classroom, Second Language Perspective* by Joan Carson and Ilona Leki.

Stotsky (1983) reviewed various correlational and experimental studies conducted from 1930s to 1981 on reading-writing relations in L1. The findings indicated that better readers were better writers, and that their writings were more syntactically mature than those of poor readers. In addition, better writers read more than poor writers did. Most of the correlational studies (e.g., Calhoun, 1971; Heller, 1979; Maloney, 1967; Thomas, 1976) were conducted to uncover the correlations between subjects' writing ability and their reading achievement, reading experience, and reading ability. Likewise, some causal or experimental studies (e.g., Andreach, 1975; Campbell, 1976; DeVries, 1970; Mills, 1974) were carried out to reveal the effects of reading on writing. The subjects of these studies ranged from elementary school to post-secondary students. Readings of different genres (including narrative, descriptive, argumentative, and expository passages) were given to the students. The students were then asked to write essays, which were mainly used as an outcome measure for writing and rated based on either holistic or analytic composition scales. The syntactic complexity or maturity, as well as written fluency and accuracy, were measured through the use of T-units. Shanahan (1980), for example, correlated the reading comprehension of his subjects with T-unit length in their written stories. In her report, Stotsky (1983) indicates that the most influential type of texts in reading-writing connection studies were those which had used the literary texts.

In a similar vein, later correlational, experimental, and exploratory studies of the

reading-writing connection in both L1 (e.g., Crowhurst, 1991; Eckhoff, 1983; Parodi, 2007; Shanahan, 1984; Shanahan & Lomax, 1986) and L2 with the ESL subjects (e.g., Allison, Berry, & Lewkowicz, 1995; Constantino, 1995; Esmaeili, 2002; Flahive & Baily, 1993; Janopoulos, 1986; Tsang, 1996; Tudor & Hafiz, 1989) have revealed the positive correlation or influence of the reading experience on the writing ability of students. Although the use of conventional approaches to reading and writing are still prevalent in the classroom environment, the recent tendency has been to integrate these two skills (Earle & Zimmermann, 2003; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). Earle and Zimmermann indicate that for success in college and beyond, students need to acquire the basic skills of reading and writing by combining them as the dual sides of the literacy coin. Leki (1993) refers to the students' lack of new knowledge in the conventional ESL writing classes that could be obtained through reading different texts. She mentions that by integrating new and previous knowledge, students can analyze and react to the new knowledge and information so that they can transfer this essential knowledge to their writing.

With regard to the writing classes at the university level in the ESL situation of Malaysia, where the present study was conducted, some deficiencies were reported including: a) reading as an essential input to writing is neglected in these classes. Short non-authentic reading passages are used merely as writing models for teaching the conventions of writing (Morais, 2000); b) these classes are more teacher-centered in which the individual-oriented activities are employed. This decreases the students' motivation and interest in doing the activities that in turn leads to the low achievement of the students (Singh, 2003). In this regard, the present study is significant for showing the reading-writing connection through the underlying principles of both cooperative learning theory and indirect model of reading for writing (one of the reading-writing

connection theories) that are not used as the integration in the prior studies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Cooperative Learning Theory***

Cooperative reading programs take a lot of insight from the cooperative learning theory concerning the constructivists' and interactionists' views. Vygotsky's (1978) social interaction view (and theory of meaning construction based on this view) has influenced cooperative learning situations. Vygotsky insists on the learning and cognitive development through social interaction and indicates that it cannot happen through isolated learning. He believes in the intellectual development through participation in cooperative activities. Reyes and Valone (2008) point out the usefulness of a social constructivist approach in teaching environments for English language learners because they can learn both language and content through social mediation. Likewise, interactionists' theorists (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Long, 1985; Swain, 1999) indicate that second language learners' communicative abilities can be enhanced by interacting with each other through oral and written discourse. Some reading researchers (e.g., Renandya, Rajan, & Jacobs, 1999) believe that reading and talking about what was read can increase the effectiveness of reading.

The cooperative learning methods are advocated (Slavin, 1990, 1991, 1995) in that active and meaningful learning, as cognitive psychologists believe (e.g., Dornyei, 1997), occur through cooperative learning which results in long term retention. In Slavin's (1990) review out of 68 studies about 49 studies (72%) revealed the positive effect of cooperative learning on achievement. In this regard, Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1999), who reviewed various research studies conducted on cooperative and individualistic

learning, indicated the higher achievement of cooperative learning groups compared to individualistic learning groups with a large mean effect size ( $ES= 0.64$ ). Johnson and Johnson (1999) point out that the traditional teaching method can be more effective if they are accompanied with cooperative activities. In this way, most of the barriers for learning in individualistic and competitive types of lecture-oriented classes would be removed.

The issue of cooperation, though not highlighted in the reading-writing studies, is inferred from the group activities that are used in their reading and follow-up activities. The advantages of cooperative activities in reading circles have been discussed in most of the studies (e.g., Day, 1993; Dupuy, 1998; MacGillivray, Tse, & McQuillan, 1995; McQuillan & Tse, 1997). Furr (2007) defines the benefits of reading circles and their positive role in arousing the interesting and meaningful discussions in English among the students in the classrooms. Similarly, Jacobs and Gallo (2002) suggest the positive role of cooperation when it is added to the silent reading task in the second language classrooms. They indicate the influential role of peers as interactive audience for sharing what they have read. Parrott (1987) proposes the idea of ‘reading syndicates’, as the embodiment of cooperation that promotes the interest of the intermediate or advanced language students in reading and increases their literacy competence. Hill and Van Horn (1997) offer book club strategy in which the group discussion, which relates the students’ reading to their real lives and values, is its key ingredient so that the students can have meaningful interaction. Elley’s (1991) study, where he compares shared-book group with the sustained silent reading group, embodies the use of cooperation in which more improvement was seen in the writing of the shared-book group. In this case, the present study aimed to highlight the advantages of using the principles of cooperative learning

theory, including individual accountability and group interdependence, through the employment of cooperative reading strategies in writing classes.

### ***Reading-Writing Connection***

Considering the various perspectives on reading and writing relationship, Tierney and Shanahan (1991) suggested three general categories that different researchers have tried to investigate in L1. In this case, reading and writing are considered: (a) as shared knowledge and shared process (e.g., Stotsky, 1983), (b) as transaction among readers, writers, and texts (e.g., Pearson & Tierney, 1984; Shanklin, 1982; Shanahan & Tierney, 1990), and (c) as cooperative events in which the cognitive dimensions of reading and writing are emphasized. This category focuses on what happens when reading and writing are used together (e.g., Hayes, 1987).

Likewise, Eisterhold (1990) presented three basic models underlying the reading-writing connection: (a) directional model (reading to writing or writing to reading) in which the emphasis is on one direction of the effect of reading on writing or the reverse, (b) non-directional model indicating that reading and writing are cognitive processes of constructing meaning, and (c) bi-directional model reflecting that reading and writing are interactive as well as interdependent. Some studies in L1 (Shanahan & Lomax, 1986, 1988) aimed to explore the reading-writing relation theories to find the best model for their connection. Shanahan and Lomax (1986) found that interactive model was the best followed by the reading-to-write model compared to writing-to-read model. They suggested the integration of reading and writing and disagreed with the traditional idea of teaching reading for years before introducing writing.

Hirvela (2004) asserts that “L2 reading-writing scholars have been influenced heavily

by the L1 perspectives” (p. 20). Hirvela differentiates between direct and indirect models of reading for writing. He indicates that in the direct model, students intentionally and consciously discover knowledge of writing (i.e., rhetorical or organizational patterns, linguistic features, lexical and stylistic characteristics of writing) through reading. On the contrary, in the indirect model knowledge of writing comes subconsciously to the students through exposure to reading. Based on what Hirvela says, direct and indirect models of reading for writing are embodiment of learning-acquisition distinction proposed by Krashen (1984).

In most of the ESL writing classes, the focus is on the direct model of reading for writing. In other words, readings in the textbooks are used as models for explicit teaching and learning of the conventions of writing (Reid, 1993). In order to highlight the acquisition dimension of reading-writing connection, this study aimed to focus on the indirect model of reading for writing. On this basis, the students were encouraged to read without the emphasis on the explicit and deliberate discovery of writing knowledge. Writing knowledge was assumed to be obtained indirectly through exposure to various authentic reading materials and the discussion around them.

### **Research Objectives and Hypothesis**

The general objective of this performance-based study was to find out the effect of Cooperative Directed Reading (CDR) on the writing performance of ESL undergraduate students, in two conditions of thematically related and thematically unrelated reading-writing topics, while comparing it with the effect of Directed Reading without Cooperation (DR-C) and no treatment (NT) conditions. In the thematically related reading-writing condition, the writing topic was related to one of the reading topics

during the treatment; whereas, in the thematically unrelated reading-writing condition the writing topic was not related to the reading topics. In this case, the specific objectives of the study and their related null hypotheses were as follows:

1. To compare the effect of Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment on the writing performance of the students in terms of fluency and accuracy in two conditions:
  - a. thematically related reading-writing topics (pretest1/posttest1)
  - b. thematically unrelated reading-writing topics (pretest2/posttest2)

Null Hypothesis 1 (Ho1): There is no statistically significant difference in the writing fluency and accuracy mean scores of the students between the Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment Groups in the thematically related and unrelated reading-writing conditions.

2. To determine to what extent Cooperative Directed Reading affects the students' writing performance in terms of objective measures of fluency (i.e., Mean T-unit length= MTUL), and accuracy (i.e., Mean error-free T-unit length= MEFTUL), compared to Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment groups in two conditions:
  - a. thematically related reading-writing topic (pretest1/posttest1)
  - b. thematically unrelated reading-writing topic (pretest2/posttest2)

Null Hypothesis 2 (Ho2): There is statistically no significant difference in the Mean T-unit length and Mean error-free T-unit length scores of the students' writings among Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment

Groups in the thematically related and unrelated reading-writing conditions.

Directed reading in this study is defined as a type of reading for which the teacher provides the reading materials and directs the students' cooperative reading activities in the cooperative directed reading group and the students' individual reading activities in the directed reading without cooperation group.

## Method

This study was a quasi-experimental research with the employment of nonequivalent pretest-posttest control group design. In this regard, the reading variable with its three conditions (i.e., Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation or individual reading, and No Treatment) was the independent variable of the study and the writing performance was the dependent variable of the study. A brief description of different sections of methodology is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Brief Description of Method Sections*

<b>Methodology</b>	
<b>Sample</b>	
a. cooperative directed reading group (CDR): n= 41 b. directed reading without cooperation group (DR-C): n=40 c. no treatment or control group (NT): n=21 Malay (67.7%); Chinese (13.7%); Indian (10.8%); Others (8.8%)= (N= 102)	
<b>Materials</b>	
<b>Reading passages</b> related to different interesting topics were selected among authentic internet magazine and newspaper articles. Every week the students read one article and did the related activities within 60 and 75	<b>Discussion role sheets</b> in while-reading stage (Given to cooperative directed reading circles in CDR group):  <b>1. Discussion director:</b> guides group discussion in the circle and develops a list of

<p>minutes for DR-C and CDR groups respectively.</p> <p><b>Reading topics:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender discrimination</li> <li>2. Value of healthy attitudes</li> <li>3. Addiction to internet</li> <li>4. Preventing burnout</li> <li>5. On dreaming</li> <li>6. About conflict</li> <li>7. Understanding and resolving conflict</li> <li>8. Life through a lens</li> <li>9. Marriage and divorce</li> <li>10. Happiness: ways to happiness</li> <li>11. Young and old</li> <li>12. Your motto in life</li> </ol>	<p>questions that lead to discussions.</p> <p><b>2. Passage master:</b> selects key sections of the passage that s/he thinks their circle members would find interesting, informative, exciting, fun, or strange to reread and discuss.</p> <p><b>3. Connector:</b> thinks of ways the text is connected to their personal life or the outside world.</p> <p><b>4. Illustrator:</b> draws a picture or sketch or other kind of diagram related to the reading.</p> <p><b>5. Summarizer:</b> prepares a brief summary of the passage read that day and the key points.</p>												
<p><b>KWLH sheet</b> Given to CDR and DR-C groups</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Pre-reading</th> <th colspan="2">Post-reading</th> </tr> <tr> <th>K</th> <th>W</th> <th>L</th> <th>H</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>What I <b>know</b> about the topic.</td> <td>What I <b>want</b> to know.</td> <td>What I have <b>learned.</b></td> <td><b>How</b> I can learn more.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Pre-reading		Post-reading		K	W	L	H	What I <b>know</b> about the topic.	What I <b>want</b> to know.	What I have <b>learned.</b>	<b>How</b> I can learn more.	<p><b>Audio-recording</b></p> <p>The discussions of the cooperative reading circles were randomly audio-recorded in each session for further analysis of their thought process.</p> <p><b>Observation and note taking</b></p> <p>The teacher observed the groups' reading and discussion activities and took notes.</p>
Pre-reading		Post-reading											
K	W	L	H										
What I <b>know</b> about the topic.	What I <b>want</b> to know.	What I have <b>learned.</b>	<b>How</b> I can learn more.										
<p><b>Essay Writing tests</b></p>													
<p><b>Pretest1 and posttest 1</b></p> <p>The students of three groups were asked to write a five paragraph essay on the topic of <i>conflict</i> which was thematically related to the reading topics.</p> <p><b>Writing prompt 1</b> Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of everyday life. Explain what kinds of conflicts people encounter in their lives all over the world and what their causes are. What are the consequences of conflicts if they are not resolved?</p>	<p><b>Pretest2 and posttest2</b></p> <p>The students of three groups were asked to write a five paragraph essay on the topic of <i>the rich and poor</i> which was thematically unrelated to the reading topics.</p> <p><b>Writing prompt 2</b> In any society there are rich and poor people. The gap between the rich and the poor is either growing wide or is already very wide. Explain some of the causes of this gap and state its consequences in the society and the lives of people.</p>												

<b>Writing assessment</b>	
<p>The writings of the students were evaluated in two ways:</p> <p><b>1. Analytic scoring scale</b> with seven criteria:</p> <p>a. Relevance and adequacy of content  b. Compositional organization  c. Cohesion  d. Adequacy of vocabulary for purpose  e. Grammar  f. Mechanical accuracy I (Punctuation)  g. Mechanical accuracy II (Spelling)</p>	<p><b>2. T-unit counts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Total number of words</li> <li>- Number of T-units</li> <li>- Number of error-free T-units</li> <li>- Mean T-unit length= It is obtained by counting the total number of words and dividing it by the number of T-units.</li> <li>- Mean error-free T-unit length= It is obtained by counting the total number of error-free T-units and dividing it by the number of T-units.</li> </ul>
<b>Data Analysis</b>	
<p><b>1) Null Hypothesis1:</b> There is statistically no significant difference in the writing fluency and accuracy mean scores of the students among the Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation, and No Treatment Groups in the thematically related and unrelated reading-writing conditions.</p> <p>One-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to test the Ho 1.</p>	<p><b>2) Null Hypothesis2:</b> There is statistically no significant difference in the Mean T-unit length and Mean error-free T-unit length scores of the students among Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation, and No Treatment Groups in the thematically related and unrelated reading-writing conditions.</p> <p>One-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to test Ho 2.</p>

### *Sample*

The required sample was selected from the population of university students. The students from the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), one of the four research universities in Malaysia, were identified as subjects of the study. This university has 16 faculties, one of which is Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication where the subjects were drawn from. The subjects were reading for a Bachelor's Degree in English. As the study aimed to help enhance writing performance of the students through using authentic

expository reading materials and discussion around them in writing classes, expository writing classes were considered for this research. An expository writing course is offered by the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. At the time of this study, there were three expository writing classes for the students majoring in English in their second semester and the syllabus was the same for all. In other words, the students had to attend three hour lectures which were organized as two hours for lectures and one hour for tutorial for each class every week. The tutorials of the expository writing classes were given to the first author of this study with the consent of the head of the department and the lecturers of these classes.

According to the regulation of the university, after the registrations the students had to be in their classes and cannot be moved, so randomization of the students was impossible. The classes were randomly assigned into the Cooperative Directed Reading ( $n=41$ ), Directed Reading without Cooperation ( $n=40$ ), and No Treatment ( $n=21$ ) groups through fishbowl technique comprising the total number of 102. This sample size ( $N=102$ ) was adequate for the experimental research of the present type because as McMillan and Schumacher (2006) point out “the general rule in determining sample size is to obtain a sufficient number to provide a credible result. This usually means obtaining as many as possible” (p. 127). However, some scholars (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) suggest the requirement of at least 15 subjects per group in experimental researches for comparing different groups. In this way the confidence in parametric analysis is increased.

The students of these classes were from different ethnicities including Malay (67.7%), Chinese (13.7%), Indians (10.8%), and others (8.8%). Based on their SPM (a national examination taken by all form five students in Malaysia), MUET (Malaysian University

English Test: a test of English Language proficiency, with four components of listening, speaking, reading comprehension, and writing, for university admissions) Band grades, and previous CGPA scores, the students in three groups were at the intermediate proficiency level.

### ***Materials***

Different materials were used in the present study including:

1. Reading materials that were selected among the authentic internet magazine and newspaper articles for each session comprising twelve topics for twelve weeks of the treatment.
2. Discussion role sheets (adapted from Tierney & Readence, 2000) including five roles for five members in each cooperative reading circle. The roles consisted of *discussion director*, *passage master*, *connector*, *illustrator*, and *summarizer* that were rotated for each reading.
3. K-W-L-H strategy sheet. This strategy sheet was introduced by Ogle (1986) as a model (for different age groups) that develops active reading of expository texts. It consists of four columns in which columns **K** (what I **know** about the topic) and **W** (what I **want** to know/learn) are related to pre-reading activities and columns **L** (what I have **learned**), and **H** (How I can learn more) are related to the post-reading activities. Because the purpose of H column is to encourage the students to think more, a modified version was used in this study through adding two questions, ‘What information surprised you?’ and ‘How can you use this information in your life?’, under H column. In this way they can think more about the topic and relate it to their real world. The column **K** activates the students’ background knowledge and encourages them to predict. The column **W**

encourages them to generate questions and anticipate the answers prior to reading, which provides purpose for their reading. The columns **L** and **H**, after reading a passage, encourage the students to read and think critically and compare what they have read and learned with the real situation.

4. Audio-tape was used for recording the students' discussions in cooperative reading circles. Their discussions were recorded randomly for the different reading topics and later were transcribed for obtaining further information regarding their thought process for critical and creative thinking.

5. Observation and notes of the teacher (the first researcher of the study) from the groups' activities.

### ***Instruments***

The nature of the study required the researchers to collect actual writing performance of the students through direct test of writing or 'timed impromptu writing test' (Weigle, 2002) before and after the treatments. The writing samples of the students were evaluated in two ways through the analytic scoring scale and T-unit counts.

#### **Analytic Scoring Scale**

The analytic scoring scale of Weir (1990) (see Appendix A) was used to assess the writing samples of the students in the pretests and posttests in both conditions of the study. This scale has been developed for the Test in English for Educational Purposes (TEEP). It consists of seven scales, each with four levels with score points ranging from 0 to 3. The first four scales (i.e., relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organization, cohesion, and adequacy of vocabulary for purpose) are related to the

communicative effectiveness or fluency and the next three scales (i.e., grammar, punctuation, and spelling) are pertinent to the accuracy of writing. Therefore, in this study the sum of the first four scales for writing fluency and the sum of the last three scales for writing accuracy were computed and used in the analysis.

Weir's scale was extensively piloted and revised in order to be used reliably by trained raters (Weigle, 2002). However, as it is said no scoring procedure or scheme (analytical and holistic) is suitable for all purposes and it may produce unreliable and invalid information for different purposes even if it has guidelines and set criteria (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981; Perkins, 1983). For this reason, the reliability of this scoring scale was tested in this study and a high Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha = .81$ ) was obtained for the average of Pretest1 ( $\alpha = .76$ ), Pretest2 ( $\alpha = .81$ ), Posttest1 ( $\alpha = .76$ ), and Posttest2 ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

#### T-Unit Counts

For objective measures of writing fluency and accuracy, total number of words, number of T-units, and number of error-free T-units were counted. Then, for fluency, Mean T-unit Length (i.e., proportion of total number of words to the number of T-units), and for accuracy, Mean Error-Free T-unit Length (i.e., proportion of error-free T-units to the number of T-units) were calculated (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). A T-Unit is defined as "one main clause with all subordinate clauses attached to it" (Hunt, 1965, p. 20).

The complete guideline with the examples for counting the T-units (adapted from Casanave, 1994; Polio, 1997; Sotillo, 2000) was provided to the raters (see Appendix B). Unlike previous studies, in the current study, the spelling and punctuation mistakes were counted as errors. This idea was reflected by Larsen-Freeman and Strom (1977) who said

that for a T-unit to be an error-free it should be perfect in all aspects including spelling and punctuation. Because spelling and punctuation were two criteria in the scoring scale for assessing the students' writing accuracy, the researchers decided to consider them in the objective evaluation of the students' writings.

## **Procedure**

### ***Expository Writing Course***

The expository writing course was divided into lecture and tutorial sessions. The lecture sessions for each class were conducted by its own lecturer, while the tutorial sessions of all classes were conducted by the researcher of this study. In the lecture hours, the students were taught writing conventions based on the textbook "Writing Academic English" by Oshima and Hogue (2006). The textbook consists of three parts, that is, writing a paragraph (e.g., paragraph structure, unity and coherence through transition signals and the like), writing an essay (e.g., process, cause/ effect, comparison/contrast, argumentative), and sentence structure (e.g., noun/adverb/adjective clauses). In each part, some model paragraphs and essays are introduced (the students' encounter with readings was limited to these models) then some exercises (e.g., multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, editing and writing practice) are presented for practice. There are also short appendices on the process of academic writing (stages of creating, planning, writing, and polishing) and punctuation rules. In general, the students' practice in writing was limited to the exercises and tasks based on the textbook.

### ***The Experiment***

The experiment was conducted in the tutorial sessions for the duration of one academic

semester for 14 weeks where the first and last weeks were used for the pretests and posttests, respectively. The purpose of giving two pretests was to find out the effect of the treatments on two conditions of the thematically related and thematically unrelated reading-writing topic. The students were asked to write two essays on the topics of ‘conflict’ and ‘the rich and poor’ for their pretest1 and pretest2, respectively. The following task dimensions (adapted from a number of dimensions mentioned by Weigle, 2002, p. 63) were considered in both tests.

- Genre: essay
- Rhetorical task: exposition
- Pattern of exposition: cause & effect
- Length: five paragraph essay
- Time allowed: 45 minute for each essay
- Prompt wording: explicit, moderately specified (Hamp-Lyons, 1991a)
- Choice of prompts: no choice
- Scoring criteria: relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organization, cohesion, adequacy of vocabulary for purpose, grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Writing Prompt1/ Pretest1 (thematically related to the reading topics)

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of everyday life. Explain what kinds of conflicts people encounter in their lives all over the world and what their causes are. What are the consequences of conflicts if they are not resolved?

Writing Prompt2/ Prtest2 (thematically unrelated to the reading topics)

In any society there are rich and poor people. The gap between the rich and the poor is either growing wide or is already very wide. Explain some of the causes of this gap and state its consequences in the society and the lives of people.

During their treatments, the students in Cooperative Directed Reading and Directed Reading without Cooperation groups read authentic expository reading articles about different topics (e.g., gender discrimination, value of healthy attitudes, addiction to internet, preventing burnout, dreaming, conflict, marriage and divorce, happiness, young and old) which were selected among the wealth of authentic internet magazine and newspaper articles considering their comprehensibility at the level of the students.

In the Cooperative Directed Reading group, two strategies of the cooperative reading circles (CRCs), modification of non-fiction literature circles (Daniels, 2002a, 2002b; O'Brien, 2007), and K-W-L-H (Ogle, 1986) were adopted. At the first session the class was divided into groups of five members, each with five discussion roles (see Table1). At the first session, the teacher (i.e., the first author of this study) demonstrated the roles and answered the students' questions to clarify them. In order to increase the members' cooperative activities, sometimes, they had jigsaw reading competition at the beginning of their discussion. The first group that completed the task won a prize (e.g., a pen). Then, they started their discussion, based on their roles, on that topic. Their discussions were also randomly audio-taped for further research, the results of which require a separate paper to be thoroughly discussed (see Appendix C as a sample scenario in a focused group CRC). The teacher also observed the CRCs one by one, listened to their discussions, and took notes. When needed, she asked them some questions to promote

their critical thinking or answered their questions to facilitate the flow of discussion. The discussion roles were used in the while reading stage after pre-reading and before post-reading stages of KWLH strategy sheet.

The activities for the Directed Reading without Cooperation group were related only to the K-W-L-H strategy sheet. The students in this group were required to read and do the related activities individually. At the end of each session, two or three of the students (i.e., leaders of two or three CRCs in the Cooperative Directed Reading group and individual students in the Directed Reading without Cooperation group) came to the front and reported what they have discussed and/or learned through their reading activities. The control group did not have any treatment of this type. They had their usual lecture class activities based on their textbook. At the end of the semester the three groups took part in a 90 minute posttest consisting of writing two essays on the same two prompts of the pretest1 and pretest2 for the posttest1 and posttest2, respectively.

### ***Raters and Rater Training***

Three independent paid raters were employed to rate the writing samples of the students collected in pretests and posttests. All raters were female, Indian, and experienced teachers of English in Malaysian secondary schools with university degrees in Teaching English as a Second Language. Raters 1, 2, and 3 had 30, 25, and 19 years of teaching experience as well as 14, 10, and 8 years of rating experience as SPM raters, respectively. Rater training was conducted in two different sessions for each measuring method based on the analytic scoring scale and the T-unit guide. The raters rated the anchor papers and the researcher compared their ratings. If there were discrepancies, the raters discussed until they reached a consensus.

### ***Inter-rater Reliability***

The inter-rater reliability was estimated by means of Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient for the fluency (i.e., sum of the dimensions of relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organization, cohesion, and adequacy of vocabulary for purpose with the score ranging from 0 to 12), accuracy (i.e., sum of the dimensions of grammar, punctuation, and spelling with the score ranging from 0 to 9), total number of T-units, and number of error-free T-units (see Table 2). The highest correlations were found between the Rater2 and Rater3 for the Pretest1 and Posttest1 and between the Rater1 and Rater3 for the Pretest2 and Posttest2 in Fluency and Accuracy based on the analytic scale. Therefore, the average ratings of these raters were computed and used in the data analysis. However, the estimates of the inter-rater reliability based on T-unit counts, indicated high correlations between the counts of three raters for number of T-units and number of error-free T-units. Consequently, the average counts of three raters were used in the data analysis.

**Table 2**

*Inter-rater reliability for four tests*

<i>Variables<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Pretest1*</i>			<i>Pretest2*</i>			<i>Posttest1*</i>			<i>Posttest2*</i>		
	<i>R1-R2</i>	<i>R1-R3</i>	<i>R2-R3</i>	<i>R1-R2</i>	<i>R1-R3</i>	<i>R2-R3</i>	<i>R1-R2</i>	<i>R1-R3</i>	<i>R2-R3</i>	<i>R1-R2</i>	<i>R1-R3</i>	<i>R2-R3</i>
Fluency	.73	.73	.96	.84	.99	.83	.91	.90	.99	.77	.95	.76
Accuracy	.66	.68	.94	.78	.97	.76	.86	.89	.92	.73	.99	.73
NTU	.99	.99	.99	.98	.99	.98	.99	.99	.99	.94	.98	.92
NEFTU	.99	.99	.99	.96	.98	.95	.99	.99	.99	.85	.94	.82

*Note.* R= Rater; NTU= number of T-units; NEFTU= number of error-free T-units;

<sup>a</sup>N=102 for each variable

\* Correlation is significant between the raters in each test at the .05 level (two-tailed)

### **Data Analysis**

The data were entered into the SPSS 15 for further analysis. In order to find out whether there were significant differences between the groups' initial writing proficiency levels, a one-way analysis of variance was carried out. The result revealed statistically significant differences in the pretest1 overall writing performance,  $F(2, 99) = 3.17, p = .04$ , and Pretest2 Mean T-Unit Length,  $F(2, 99) = 6.26, p = .003$ , between the three groups. Therefore, to test the hypotheses of the study, the pretests were employed as the covariates in conducting the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). It is used to statistically adjust the posttest scores for pretest differences that may exist between the groups of the study (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Sproull, 2002).

The a priori alpha level of  $p < .05$  was set for all presented statistical tests for the two-tailed hypotheses of the study. In order to reduce or eliminate the Type I error, the Bonferroni Adjustment was used in all statistical analyses. The effect sizes for the statistically significant values in the one-way multivariate analysis of covariance were calculated through the square root of obtained partial Eta squared values. Leech, Barrett and Morgan (2005) point out that partial Etas from SPSS multivariate tests are equivalent to R and suggest using R criteria of Cohen (1988) (.14= small, .36= medium, .51= large, and .70+ = very large) for interpreting the effect sizes.

## Results

### *First Hypothesis*

In order to test whether there were statistically significant differences among the mean writing fluency and accuracy scores of the students in the three groups of Cooperative Directed Reading, Directed Reading without Cooperation, and No Treatment , a one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted. Table 3 represents the means, and standard errors for the writing fluency and accuracy of the three groups in two conditions of the thematically related (pretest1, posttest1) and thematically unrelated (pretest2, posttest2) reading-writing topics, before (unadjusted) and after (adjusted) controlling for the differences in the pretest1 and pretest2 scores.

**Table 3**

*Unadjusted Means and Standards Errors for Writing Fluency and Accuracy in Four Tests and Adjusted Means and Standard Errors for posttest1 and posttest2 in Three Groups*

	<i>Unadjusted</i>								<i>Adjusted</i>			
	<i>pretest1</i>		<i>pretest2</i>		<i>posttest1</i>		<i>posttest2</i>		<i>posttest1</i>		<i>posttest2</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>
<b>CDR(n=41)</b>												
<i>M</i>	8.08	6.69	8.06	6.56	8.66	6.83	8.76	7.41	8.54	6.67	8.70	7.35
<i>SE</i>	.25	.16	.25	.21	.26	.15	.27	.15	.22	.16	.22	.18
<b>DRC(n=40)</b>												
<i>M</i>	7.31	6.15	8.32	6.35	7.99	6.59	7.83	6.40	8.17	6.76	7.94	6.49
<i>SE</i>	.23	.23	.26	.24	.26	.20	.27	.23	.22	.17	.22	.19
<b>NT (n=21)</b>												

<i>M</i>	8.21	6.29	8.14	6.76	7.50	5.81	7.33	5.64	7.38	5.81	7.24	5.59
<i>SE</i>	.36	.34	.48	.29	.35	.36	.26	.30	.30	.23	.30	.25

*Note.* F= Fluency, A= Accuracy; CDR= Cooperative Directed Reading, DR-C= Directed Reading without Cooperation, NT= No Treatment; pretest1/posttest1= thematically related reading-writing topic; pretest 2/posttest2= thematically unrelated reading-writing topic

As Table 3 shows, the adjusted mean scores of the Cooperative Directed Reading group compared to the Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment groups were higher on the posttest1 writing fluency and posttest2 writing fluency and accuracy; whereas, the Directed Reading without Cooperation group had a higher mean score only on the posttest1 accuracy compared to both the Cooperative Directed Reading and No Treatment groups.

The exploratory data analysis was performed to check for the relevant assumptions. The results revealed no serious violation of assumptions. Therefore, the researchers proceeded with the analysis. Using Pillai's trace the dependent variables of the posttest1 and posttest2 for fluency and accuracy were significantly different between the three groups, Pillai's trace=.366,  $F(8, 186)= 5.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2=.18$ . The calculated Eta, compared to Cohen (1988), showed a medium to large effect size ( $ES= .42$ ). Follow up univariate ANCOVAs (see Table 4) were conducted on each dependent variable to determine the locus of the statistically significant multivariate effect. The result indicated statistically significant differences in the dependent variables accounted by three groups. The calculated Etas revealed medium to large effect sizes with the posttest2 fluency (partial  $\eta^2=.15$ ) higher than posttest1 fluency (partial  $\eta^2=.10$ ) and posttest2 accuracy (partial  $\eta^2=.26$ ) higher than posttest1 accuracy (partial  $\eta^2=.11$ ). In other words, 10%

( $ES = .32$ ) of variance in the posttest1 fluency, 11% ( $ES = .33$ ) of variance in the posttest1 accuracy, 15% ( $ES = .39$ ) of variance in the posttest2 fluency, and 26% ( $ES = .51$ ) of variance in the posttest2 accuracy were explained by the three groups of CDR, DR-C, and NT. This suggests that the three groups affected the writing fluency and accuracy of the students more when the writing prompt was thematically unrelated to the reading topic (posttest2) than when it was not thematically related to the reading topic (posttest1).

**Table 4**

*Tests of Between-Subjects effects on Posttest1 and Posttest2 mean scores in writing Fluency and Accuracy*

<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Partial <math>\eta^2</math></i>
<b>Group Fluency</b>						
Posttest 1	18.15	2	9.07	4.97*	.009	.10
Error	173.55	95	1.83			
Posttest 2	30.29	2	15.14	8.19*	.001	.15
Error	175.62	95	1.85			
<b>Group Accuracy</b>						
Posttest1	12.82	2	6.41	6.04*	.003	.11
Error	100.88	95	1.06			
Posttest2	43.13	2	21.56	16.77*	<.001	.26
Error	122.16	95	1.29			

\*  $p < .05$

Bonferroni adjustment pairwise comparisons were conducted to find out which group was significantly different from the other groups (see Table 5). The result revealed statistically significant differences for writing fluency and accuracy mean scores on the

four tests between the Cooperative Directed Reading and No Treatment groups with a better performance of the Cooperative Directed Reading group in both conditions of the study. A statistically positive significant mean difference was also found between the Cooperative Directed Reading and Directed Reading without Cooperation groups on the posttest2 accuracy, implying that the Cooperative Directed Reading group did better in writing accuracy compared to the Directed Reading without Cooperation (individual reading) group when writing prompt was thematically unrelated to the reading topics.

**Table 5**

*Pairwise comparisons based on Bonferroni adjustment for fluency and accuracy mean scores in posttest1 and posttest2 between three groups*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>CDR vs. DR-C</i>	<i>CDR vs. NT</i>	<i>DR-C vs. NT</i>
<b>Posttest 1</b>			
Fluency <i>MD</i>	.37	1.16*	.79
<i>P</i>	.72	.007	.12
Accuracy <i>MD</i>	-.09	.85*	.94*
<i>p</i>	.99	.009	.005
<b>Posttest 2</b>			
Fluency <i>MD</i>	.76	1.46*	.70
<i>P</i>	.05	< .001	.21
Accuracy <i>MD</i>	.86*	1.76*	.89*
<i>P</i>	.005	< .001	.02

*Note.* CDR= Cooperative Directed Reading, DR-C= Directed Reading without Cooperation/ Individual Reading, NT= No Treatment; MD= Mean Difference; Posttest1= thematically related reading-writing topic; Posttest2= thematically unrelated reading-writing topic

\*  $p < .05$

There were also statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment groups in posttest1 and posttest2 accuracy. In other words, the Directed Reading without Cooperation or individual reading group had higher mean scores in the writing accuracy compared to the No Treatment group in both conditions of the study. The results of the one-way multivariate analysis of covariance rejected the null hypothesis and supported the alternative hypothesis that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the three groups in their writing fluency and accuracy.

### ***Second Hypothesis***

In order to test whether there were differences in Mean T-Unit Length (MTUL) and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length (MEFTUL) scores of the students in the three groups of Cooperative Directed Reading (CDR), Directed Reading without Cooperation (DR-C), and No Treatment (NT), a one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was carried out on four dependent variables of posttest1 MTUL, posttest2 MTUL, posttest1 MEFTUL, and posttest2 MEFTUL after controlling for the differences in pretest1 MTUL, pretest2 MTUL, pretest1 MEFTUL, and pretest2 MEFTUL as covariates. The independent variable was the group with three levels of CDR, DR-C, and NT. Table 6 demonstrates the means and standard errors for MTUL and MEFTUL, in the three groups, in two conditions when the writing prompt was thematically related to the reading topic (pretest1, posttest1) and when it was thematically unrelated (pretest2, posttest2), before and after controlling for the differences in the pretest1 and pretest 2 scores.

**Table 6**

*Unadjusted Means and Standard Errors for MTUL and MEFUL in four tests and Adjusted Means and Standard Errors for posttest1 and posttest2 in three groups*

	Unadjusted						Adjusted						
	pretest1		pretest2		posttest1		posttest2		posttest1		posttest2		
	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	
CDR(n=41)													
<i>M</i>	14.61	.32	17.01	.23	16.71	.31	18.91	.29	16.96	.30	19.24	.28	
<i>SE</i>	.32	.03	.44	.03	.51	.02	.66	.03	.44	.02	.54	.02	
DRC(n=40)													
<i>M</i>	5.40	.27	18.57	.21	16.09	.26	17.62	.25	15.52	.27	16.93	.26	
<i>SE</i>	.42	.03	.50	.02	.49	.03	.39	.03	.46	.02	.56	.02	
NT (n=21)													
<i>M</i>	14.52	.26	15.91	.23	14.47	.22	15.63	.19	15.07	.23	16.31	.20	
<i>SE</i>	.42	.03	.56	.03	.71	.03	1.07	.03	.63	.03	.77	.02	

*Note.* F= Fluency (MTUL= Mean T-Unit Length), A= Accuracy (MEFTUL= Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length); CDR= Cooperative Directed Reading, DR-C= Directed Reading without Cooperation, NT= No Treatment

The exploratory data analysis revealed no serious violation of the assumptions. Using Pillai's trace the dependent variables of posttest1 and posttest2 for fluency (Mean T-Unit Length) and accuracy (Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length) were significantly affected by the three groups, Pillai's trace= .242,  $F(8, 186)= 3.20$ ,  $p= .002$ , partial  $\eta^2= .12$ . The follow up univariate ANCOVAs (see Table 7) were conducted on each dependent variable to determine the locus of the statistically significant multivariate effect. The results indicated that group with three levels significantly affected the posttest1 MTUL,  $F(2, 95)= 4.01$ ,  $p= .021$ , partial  $\eta^2= .08$ ; posttest2 MTUL,  $F(2, 95)= 6.69$ ,  $p= .002$ , partial  $\eta^2= .12$ ; and posttest2 MEFTUL,  $F(2, 95)= 3.81$ ,  $p= .026$ , partial  $\eta^2= .07$ . The calculated Etas revealed medium effect sizes (i.e., .28, .35, and .27) for the relevant dependent variables, respectively. This indicates that there were statistically significant differences in the Mean T-Unit Length and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length of the three groups in their posttest1 and posttest 2.

**Table 7**

*Tests of Between-Subjects effects on Posttest1 and Posttest2 mean scores in MTUL and MEFTUL*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>TypeIII Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Partial <math>\eta^2</math></i>
<b>Group MTUL</b>						
Posttest 1	63.46	2	31.73	4.01*	.021	.08
Error	752.63	95	7.92			
Posttest 2	157.71	2	78.85	6.69*	.002	.12
Error	1119.23	95	11.78			
<b>Group MEFTUL</b>						
Posttest1	.07	2	.04	2.30	.106	.05
Error	1.44	95	.02			
Posttest2	.09	2	.05	3.81*	.026	.07
Error	1.16	95	.01			

*Note.* MTUL= Mean T-Unit Length, MEFTUL= Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length

\*  $p < .05$

In order to determine which group had significantly higher Mean T-Unit Length and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length from the other groups, pair-wise comparisons using Bonferroni adjustment were conducted (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Pairwise comparisons based on Bonferroni adjustment for mean scores of MTUL and MEFTUL in posttest1 and posttest2 between the groups*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>CDR vs. DR-C</i>	<i>CDR vs. NT</i>	<i>DR-C vs. NT</i>
<b>Posttest 1</b>			
MTUL	1.43	1.89*	.46
<i>P</i>	.087	.048	.999
<b>Posttest 2</b>			
MEFTUL	.03	.07	.05
<i>p</i>	.999	.105	.591

Posttest 2			
MTUL	2.31*	2.93*	.62
<i>P</i>	.013	.007	.999
MEFTUL	.02	.08*	.07
<i>p</i>	.999	.022	.118

*Note.* CDR= Cooperative Directed Reading, DR-C= Directed Reading without Cooperation, NT= No Treatment; MTUL= Mean T-Unit Length; MEFTUL= Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length.

\*  $p < .05$

The result revealed a statistically positive significant mean difference between the Cooperative Directed Reading group ( $M= 19.24$ ,  $SE= .54$ ) and the Directed Reading without Cooperation group ( $M= 16.93$ ,  $SE= .56$ ) in the posttest2 MTUL. Compared to the individual reading group, the cooperative reading group had a longer Mean T-Unit Length in the thematically unrelated reading-writing condition. There were also statistically positive significant mean differences between the Cooperative Directed Reading and No Treatment Groups in MTUL of the posttest1, ( $M= 16.96$ ,  $SE= .44$ ) vs. ( $M= 15.07$ ,  $SE= .63$ ); MTUL of the posttest2, ( $M= 19.24$ ,  $SE= .54$ ) vs. ( $M= 16.31$ ,  $SE= .77$ ); and MEFTUL of the posttest2, ( $M= .28$ ,  $SE= .02$ ) vs. ( $M= .20$ ,  $SE= .02$ ). All indicated that the Cooperative Directed Reading group performed better than the No Treatment group. Comparing the Directed Reading without Cooperation and No Treatment groups, no significant difference was statistically found between their Mean T-Unit Length and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length in both conditions of the study. The results of the one-way Multivariate Analysis of Covariance rejected the null hypothesis that there was statistically no significant difference between Mean T-Unit Length and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length of students' writings in the three groups of the study.

## Discussion

The findings revealed that the Cooperative Directed Reading group performances in writing fluency, writing accuracy, Mean T-Unit Length, and Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length were much higher than the Directed Reading without Cooperation group compared to the No Treatment group (see Table 9 for the summary of the results). The Cooperative Directed Reading group had statistically one non-significant mean difference in the Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length on the posttest1 compared to the No Treatment group. The Directed Reading without Cooperation group had statistically significant differences only in the writing accuracy of the posttest1 and posttest2 compared to the No Treatment group. This reveals the positive effect of the cooperative reading on the writing fluency and accuracy compared to the reading without cooperation or individual reading.

**Table 9**

*Summary of statistically significant and nonsignificant results for One-way Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) in pairwise comparisons*

	Fluency		Accuracy		MTUL		MEFTUL	
	P1 <sup>°</sup>	P2 <sup>°</sup>	P1 <sup>°</sup>	P2*	P1 <sup>°</sup>	P2 <sup>°</sup>	P1 <sup>°</sup>	P2 <sup>°</sup>
CDR vs. NT	s	s	s	s	s	s	ns	s
DR-C vs. NT	ns	ns	s	s	ns	ns	ns	ns
CDR vs. DR-C	ns	ns	ns	s	ns	s	ns	ns

*Note.* MTUL= Mean T-Unit Length, MEFTUL= Mean Error-Free T-Unit Length; P1= Posttest1 (thematically related reading-writing condition), P2= Posttest2 (thematically unrelated reading-writing condition); CDR= Cooperative Directed Reading, DR-C= Directed Reading without Cooperation, NT= No Treatment; s= significant, ns= nonsignificant; \* =large effect size for significant differences between groups; <sup>°</sup> =medium effect size for significant differences between groups.

The findings also revealed that reading in different modes (e.g., the persuasive texts used by Crowhurst (1991) vs. the expository types in the present study) can positively affect quality of the students' writings on the related mode. The findings of the brief qualitative analysis of the students' discussion transcripts verified the findings of the quantitative analysis. In this regard, the discussion transcripts of Cooperative Reading Circles (CRC) indicated the transfer of different patterns that they have encountered in their readings. For example, in the transcripts of the CRC2 and CRC3 on the topic of 'marriage and divorce', the patterns of situation-cause-effect (e.g., *university-influence from third people- divorce*), and situation-problem-solution (e.g., *country- rate of divorce is increasing- tolerate their spouse, accept the strengths and weaknesses*) were found, respectively. Similarly, on the topic of 'life through a lens', the pattern of problem-effect-solution (e.g., *internet addict- lives in her world, neglects other works- advice her*) was found in the transcript of the CRC7. This might have influenced their writing performance compared to the other groups.

The reading and discussion around the topic encouraged the students to structure their mind and thought through sorting out the generated ideas and arranging or organizing them in a meaningful way. This was revealed in two ways. One was through the diagrams that the illustrators in the CRCs drew and explained to the other members (see Appendix C as an example). This is connected to the planning stage or pre-writing stage in the writing process in which the writer generates ideas and organizes them to give meaningful structure to his or her ideas (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The other, was through the oral and written summary of the summarizers in each group. For example, the summary of the summarizer in the focused group (see Appendix C) shows the pattern and line of thinking from the definition of what is a 'healthy attitude' in the first sentence

through comparing and contrasting having or not having a healthy attitude and providing solutions to conclusion in the last sentence. According to the writing theory, one of the biggest blocks to writing is a lack of ideas (Flower & Hayes, 1977). In this case, the reading passages and discussions around them provide some ideas to the students that can help them in the generation of their mind map and putting it on the paper.

The thought process of the students was also seen in their post-reading activities. For example, after reading and discussing on the topic of ‘dream’ (in sleep), a student in cooperative directed reading group considers other connotative meanings of dream (i.e., wish, desire) and, under the column LH, writes about her own dreams in life as, “**I have a lot of dreams**. The biggest dream in my life is I want to **finish my study** with a good result, able to **get a suitable job** with a good salary and lastly **get married** with my beloved partner hopefully.” As Morais (2000) stated, reading authentic materials and discussing around them activates students’ thinking and generating of ideas. This in turn can improve their writing ability.

Comparing this study to the exploratory study of Esmaeili (2002), which found the higher writing scores of the students in the thematically related condition, provided us with two findings. One is that the effect of the thematically related reading-writing condition is more evident in a short term such as in reading recall writing tests like in Esmaeili’s study. The other is that, a better influence of the thematically unrelated reading-writing condition might be manifested in a longer period like in the current study.

This study was an attempt to propose a useful method or strategy of teaching for improving the writing quality of university students in ESL situations. Literature indicated that the conventional writing classes are, basically, lecture-centered and do not lead to the higher achievement of the students (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Morais,

2000; Singh, 2003). Consistent with Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1999), the statistically significant results of this study with the medium and large effect sizes indicated the priority of using cooperative reading activities in the writing classes rather than individual ones. The findings from the qualitative analysis of the discussion transcripts and the written worksheets of the students verified these results. The students' choice of words and their relevance to the topic; use of different patterns in appropriate ways to convey their meaning; and generating, structuring and organizing their ideas are manifestation of their underlying thought processes, which influence the 'translation' (Flower & Hayes, 1981) of ideas on paper at the stage of writing.

Although the manipulation of reading without cooperation indicated progress in the writing performance of the students, the influence of reading plus cooperation through discussion, similar to the study of Allison et al. (1995) was higher. The control group with no treatment did not show any significant improvement in their writing performance. The results revealed the advantages of using additional authentic reading materials and discussion around them in the expository writing classes. This implies that instruction alone, in writing classes, is not as much effective as the integration of instruction with peer cooperation in reading activities.

## **Conclusion**

This study revealed the positive effect of cooperative reading, whether thematically related or unrelated, as an influential input for improving the writing quality of the students. The findings indicated the importance of using the underlying principles of cooperative learning theory (Oxford & Nyikos, 1997; Slavin, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978) and indirect model of reading for writing as one of the models of reading-writing connection

theories (Eisterhold, 1990; Hirvela, 2004). Therefore, cooperative directed reading can act as a facilitator in acquiring, implicitly, knowledge of second language writing and increasing or activating knowledge of content area.

The findings of the study would hopefully encourage the writing teachers to employ the cooperative reading circles among their students either in the pre-writing activities or in the tutorials of their writing course. The ESL curriculum developers, syllabus designers, and material writers can consider these kinds of learning strategies in developing writing curriculums. One part of the writing curriculum can be devoted to reading and cooperative learning activities to facilitate the process of teaching writing. In this regard, cooperative reading activities can be considered as part of the syllabus of writing textbooks. The material writers can provide activities, tasks, and exercises to encourage the students to participate in cooperative learning activities in order to enhance reading and writing skills of the students.

The current study compared the cooperative reading group consisting of groups with five members each, with individualistic reading group. A better result was found for the cooperative group. Further research is recommended in the case of employing reading groups. A comparison between, for instance, small group and paired group reading activities may yield additional findings that can help the teachers in choosing and assigning the students into group activities.

The indirect model of reading for writing was considered in this study, because the emphasis was on the subconscious acquisition of writing knowledge through reading different authentic magazine articles and discussion around them. Further research is required in the application and comparison of both the direct and indirect models of reading for writing. This would provide new findings in the area of reading and writing

connection that would help the teachers to decide on the functionality and effectiveness of each model.

In this study the reading treatments were manipulated and only the writing performances of the students were measured at the beginning and end of the study. It would yield further results, if, in addition to measuring writing performance, reading comprehension of the students would be measured in the pretest and posttest. This can reveal the effect of cooperative reading on reading and writing that has not been challenged through the experimental studies of this type.

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## Appendix A

### Analytic Scoring Scale (Adapted from Weir, 1990)

Score Criteria	0	1	2	3
Relevance and adequacy of content	The answer bears almost no relation to the task set. Totally inadequate answer.	Answer of limited relevance to the task set. Possibly major gaps in treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition.	For the most part answers the tasks set, though there may be some gaps or redundant information.	Relevant and adequate answer to the task set.
Compositional organization	No apparent organization of content.	Very little organization of content. Underlying structure not sufficiently controlled.	Some organizational skills in evidence, but not adequately controlled.	Overall shape and internal pattern clear. Organizational skills adequately controlled.
Cohesion	Cohesion almost totally absent. Writing so fragmentary that comprehension of the intended communication is virtually impossible.	Unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most of the intended communication.	For the most part satisfactory cohesion although occasional deficiencies may mean that certain parts of the communication are not always effective.	Satisfactory use of cohesion resulting in effective communication.
Adequacy of vocabulary for purpose	Vocabulary inadequate even for the most basic parts of the intended communication.	Frequent inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps frequent lexical inappropriacies and/or repetition.	Some inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps some lexical inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.	Almost no inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Only rare inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.
Grammar	Almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate.	Frequent grammatical inaccuracies.	Some grammatical inaccuracies.	Almost no grammatical inaccuracies.

<b>Mechanical accuracy I (punctuation)</b>	Ignorance of conventions of punctuation.	Low standard of accuracy in punctuation.	Some inaccuracies in punctuation.	Almost no inaccuracies in punctuation.
<b>Mechanical accuracy II (spelling)</b>	Almost all spelling inaccurate.	Low standard of accuracy in spelling.	Some inaccuracies in spelling.	Almost no inaccuracies in spelling.

## Appendix B

### Guideline for counting T-units in the present study

(Adapted from Casanave, 1994; Polio, 1997; and Sotillo, 2000)

- a. Count an independent clause as 1-T-unit. Example:
  - 1) He came to this country to continue his education. (1 T-unit)
  - 2) The boy is running. He is wearing a windbreaker. It is old. It is green. (4 T-units)
- b. Count an independent clause and all its dependent clauses as 1 T-unit. Example:
  - 1) When they graduated from college, the government let them work in Beijing. (1 T-unit)
  - 2) The boy who is running is wearing an old green windbreaker. (1 T-unit)
- c. Count **two independent clauses** that are connected with the conjunction “and” as two T-units. Example:
  - 1) [In 1991, my husband got a scholarship from Louisiana Tech University] [and he came to this country to continue his education]. (2 T-units)
- d. Count **an independent clause** that is followed by conjunctions such as “and”, “but”, “or”, together with any **dependent clause(s)** as one T-unit. Example:
  - 1) So he went through the woods **and** pulled the feather out of his hat from the partridges **and** put a flower in his hat **and** walked on through the woods. (1 T-unit)
- e. Count run-on sentences and comma splices as two T-Units with an error in the first T-Unit. Example:

1) Problems will always exist between humans regardless of race or ethnic background or anything, it is part of the human existence equation.

T                      T  
1 error              1 error-free

2) My school was in Saudi Arabia, it was the best school there.

T                      /                      T  
1 error                                      1 error-free

If several comma splices occur in a row, count only the last as error-free.

f. For sentence fragments, if the verb or copula is missing, count the sentence as one T-unit with an error. Example:

1) He to the office. (1 T-unit with error)

2) The candidate addressing the crowd. (1 T-unit with error)

g. If a Noun Phrase (NP) is standing alone, attach it to the preceding or following T-unit as appropriate and count as an error.

h. If a subordinate clause is standing alone, attach it to the preceding or following sentence and count it as 1 T-unit with an error. Example:

1) In my country, Indonesia, there are many culture characteristics which are respected. Because Indonesia is an Asian country and we always call Asian countries "East Countries. (1 T-unit with error)

i. Count the following as subordinators: after, although, because, if, until, where, since, when, while, as if, as though, so that, in order that, so as, in order, as (many) as, more than, although, even though, despite, so (that). Example:

1) "In order not to pick poisonous mushrooms, you must know much information about all kinds of mushrooms." (1 T-unit)

2) I am going home because it is late. (1 T-unit)

j. When there is a grammatical **subject deletion** in a coordinate clause, count the entire sentence as 1 T-unit. Example:

1) First we went to our school and then went out with our friends.

2) More and more women should take an active part in society and use their ability to help others.

3) He left the house and drove away.

k. Count S-nodes with a deleted complementizer as an embedded clause as 1 T-unit.

Example:

- 1) I believe that A and (that) B.
- 2) The main idea of this story is that you can't deny your race or ethnic group and [that] you can't show people how white or how American you are supposed to be.
- 3) (I think [ that you can do it {if you try} ] )

l. Direct quotes should be counted as follows:

- 1) "I don't trust anybody who would deny their color like that." (1 T-Unit)
- 2) "They can't stand the idea of anything good being black. If a black person does something good, they say he did that because of the white in him." (2 T-Units)
- 3) John said, "A and B". (2 T-units)  
1 T-unit      1 T-unit

m. Do not count tag-questions as separate T-units.

- 1) He waits, doesn't he? (1 T-unit)
- 2) He can't wait, can't he? (1 T-unit with error)

n. In a sentence that has a subject with only an auxiliary verb, do not count the subject and verb as a separate T-unit. Example:

- 1) John likes to ski and Mary does too. (1 T-unit)
- 2) John is happy and Mary is too. (1 T-unit)

o. Count T-Units in parenthesis as individuals T-Units.

p. Count spelling mistakes as errors. Example:

- 1) Giving or receiving something with your left hand is unpolite.

q. Count word endings, articles, prepositions, word usage, and tense as errors.

Example:

- 1) John is knowing Russian. (1 T-unit with error)
- 2) We beware of pickpockets. (1 T-unit with error)

## Appendix C

### One sample scenario in a Focused Group CRC

This scenario has been prepared based on the transcription of the tape recording of the students in a focused group CRC. The discussion is done after the whole class brainstorming on what they know about the topic and what they want to know (the first two columns of KWLH strategy sheet). Then they read the article and start discussion.

**Reading topic:** The value of a healthy attitude

**CRC name:** Peace

#### Discussion roles and students' name

Discussion director: Izdihar

Passage master: Long

Illustrator: Suhaila

Connector: Fatima

Summarizer: Anisa

#### Symbols

(.)	short pause
[ talk]	overlapping talk
.	falling intonation at full stop
Ta(h)lk	laughter bubbling within a word
ta:l:k	stretching the preceding sound; more colon more stretched the sound
( )	unclear talk
(eee)	thinking

**Izdihar:** ok, Fatima (.) do you think what affects our health? How much health is important? [talk]

**Fatima:** (eee) I think being healthy is important (.) if we are healthy we can live better (.) boredom is one thing that affects uumm our life.

**Anisa:** anger can cause heart attack (.) environment affects our health.

**Izdihar:** Do you agree Suhila?

**Suhaila:** Yeah, but other things like (eee) stress, high expectation (eee) negative attitudes affect more

**Izdihar:** Long (.) do you have something to add?

**Long:** thinking negatively can worsen our life (.) anger is (eee) emotion yeah emotion directly related to illness. I agree with Anis. Page 1 paragraph six about chronic anger is interesting (.) you know our body and mind are related but we are not aware sometimes. What do you think Izdihar?

**Izdihar:** I like page 3 paragraph 2 about yah enjoying our hobby

**Anisa:** For me the best idea is put in uum paragraph 8 on page 3 (.) you know it's about humor Ta(h)lk ( )

**Long:** I agree (.) let me read this paragraph again aloud

**Fatimah:** yeah humor is the Ta(h)lk the best technique in people life

**Izdihar:** ok (.) everybody (.) listen to Long

**Long:** "humor also has a positive effect on health in the way that it affects your attitude. There's research showing that the way people believe and the way their attitude is adjusted are directly related to health. People who have a negative or pessimistic attitude about life are actually more susceptible to common everyday illnesses, such as colds or stomach pains."

**Anisa:** It is interesting (.) we should entertain ourselves by telling a joke Ta(h)lk or hearing a joke from someone else [talk] coz it makes us laugh and cheerful

**Izdihar:** yah yah. Ok (.)Fatima how do you connect the article to your life? anything [talk]

**Fatima:** yes (.) (eee) I have a friend who is hot-tempered you know she easily gets angry (.) doesn't rest enough

**Long:** how can (.) I mean (eee) how do you know?

**Fatima:** oh, from her behavior uumm actions you know she studies very hard yah hard and without resting (eee) she doesn't like to uumm let's say mingle with other people and she easily gets angry

**Anisa:** I see Ta:lk It means we should combine work and rest (.) hardworking is good if one arranges the time for everything

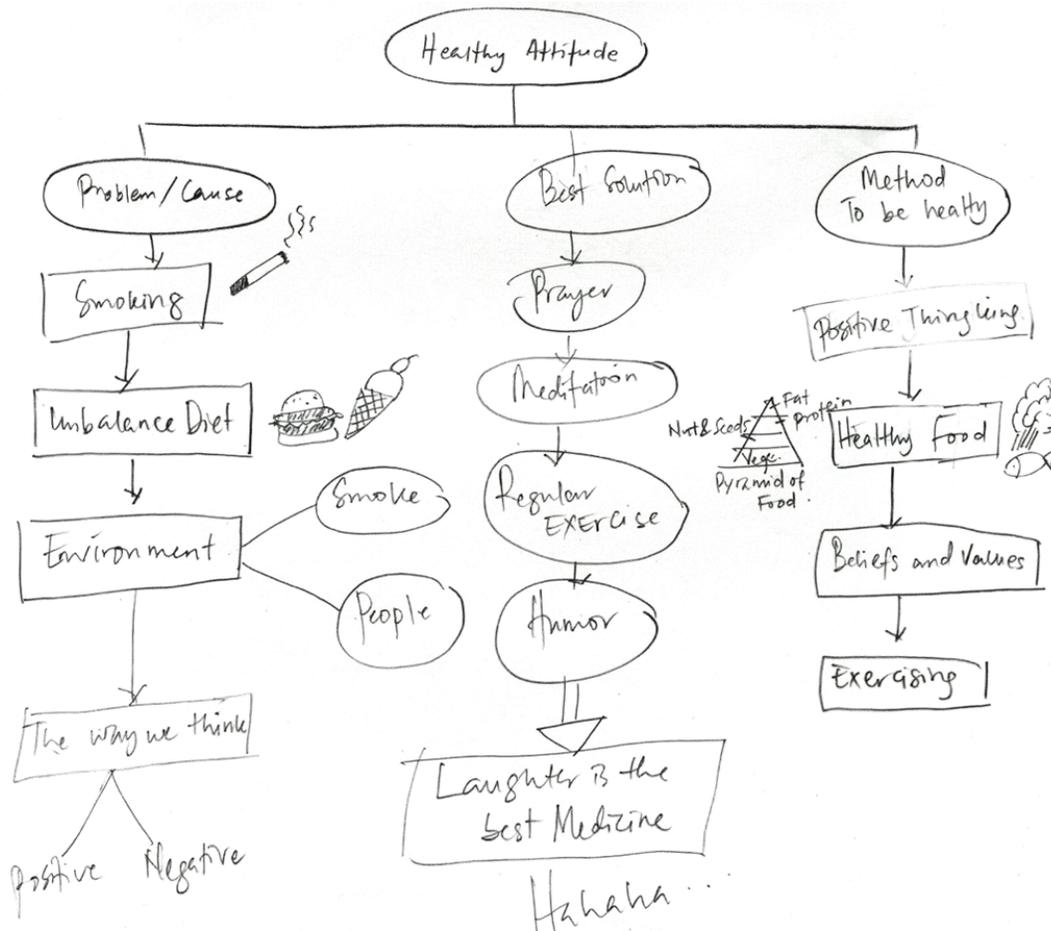
**Long:** balance is good

**Fatima:** I do some exercises like jogging with my friends (.) I don't want to get ill.

**Izdihar:** haha it makes me more eager to go out and spice up my life. Now let's see what is that Suhaila is busy drawing (.) writing. Can you share it with us?

**Suhaila:** oh (.) yah (.) you see this is a chart (.) uumm I have put problems and causes of healthy attitude in one column under each other (.) do you see? here (she shows her drawing).

**All:** yeah



**Suhaila:** smoking, imbalance diet, environment, positive and negative ways of thinking ya all affect our attitude (.) next column you see the best solution for having healthy attitude like prayer, meditation, regular exercise, humor (.) yah laughter is the best medicine, hahaha. Then you see here in third column yes some methods for being healthy such as (.) positive thinking, healthy food, beliefs and values, exercising (.) yes [talk] they are good for our health. Any idea?

**Izdihar:** I agree with all these. A healthy and optimistic attitude can result in a longer uum and healthier life. What do you like about it Long? Fatima?

**Long:** we have to be a calm person and not hot-tempered and hahaha I must try to have uumm a positive thinking.

**Fatima:** we should practice regular exercise and listen to soothing music and think

positive to make sure our body and feelings become healthier

**Izdihar:** Anisa (.) you are the summarizer (.) right? [talk] now let's Anisa summarize the article (.) tell us about the key points.

**Anisa:** ok (.) I have prepared a summary (.) healthy attitude is about promoting good attitude and habit to change our health condition. By smiling and doing other activities such as exercise (.) listening to soft music (.) laugh can increase our immune system towards illness. Feeling stressed (.) boredom (.) and fatalism are some of the ways to non-healthy life. Think sick (.), you are going to be sick. Think positive to keep your life healthier. We can control ourselves by changing the way we think and our bad habits. We can control our emotions (.) do some changes in a way to better life. Be among happy people (.) humorous people. It can give benefit to our health level. Let's say negative minds bring illness (.) positive minds prevent illness and yah hahaha humor and laughter are important.

**Izdihar:** let's now prepare ourselves for reporting to the other groups (.) who wants to report?

**Fatima:** you do it yourself (.) it's better.

**Anisa:** yeah (.) you are the discussion director hahaha [talk]

**Izdihar:** ok (.) I'll explain what we discussed about [talk]

## **Modal Verbs <sup>[1]</sup> for Politeness in Email Requests to Professors: The Case of Chinese EFL Learners**

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### **Bio Data:**

Wuhan Zhu is a Doctoral candidate in the School of English at the University of Sheffield in the UK. He had been teaching English and linguistics in China. He obtained his MA and BA in English linguistics and Education from Nanjing Normal University, China. He has published eight academic papers in Chinese and international linguistic journals. His current interests include applied linguistics, pragmatics and cross cultural communication.

### **Abstract**

This paper is motivated by the premise that not much is known about how English modal verbs are used to express politeness in Chinese English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) contexts. Specifically, this study examines and compares the use of modal verbs in email requests between two groups of Chinese EFL learners, namely English majors (EMs) and non-English majors (NEMs), in order to disclose the learners' English-proficiency factors for linguistic variation. An in-depth comparison of the use of modals in head acts and supportive moves, and the choices of perspectives that are closely related to the modal verbs was conducted within and between the two groups. The study, therefore, sheds light on the sub-strategies (their form, function and distribution) of speech acts in Non-Native English speaking (NNEs) contexts. This paper adds to the body of Inter-language Pragmatics (ILP) research through revealing learners' pragmatic ability of using modal verbs. The paper finally offers some pedagogical implications in foreign language settings.

**Keywords:** EFL learners, politeness, modal verbs, emails

## **Introduction**

Modal verbs in English have been widely investigated theoretically and empirically. They have also been widely explored in the second language acquisition (L2) research field for the special characteristics of diversity and the polysemous meanings (Aijmer, 2002). However, few studies have considered how modal verbs are used to express politeness in different genres in the research field of inter-language pragmatics (ILP), which mainly studies “learners’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability” (Rose & Kasper, 2001, p.3). The current study aims to add to the body of this research by investigating how modal verbs are used and reasons for modal verb usage in request emails by two groups of Chinese EFL learners

## **Background and Rationale of the Study**

### ***Modal Verbs***

In the linguistics literature, modal verbs have been widely discussed and spotlighted (Aijmer, 2002; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Hunston, 2004; Kratzer, 1981; Palmer, 2001; Quirk et al., 1985; Sweetser, 1990, to name but a few). Modal verbs are regarded as the main source of expressing modality, which is broadly divided into two major types: *deontic modality* and *epistemic modality* (Biber et al., 1999; Palmer, 2001; Quirk et al., 1985). The deontic modality, as Papafragou (1998) concluded, is to express the necessity or possibility of acts, e.g., obligation and permission, performed by morally responsible agents. The epistemic modality, on the other hand, deals with the degree of speaker commitment to the truth of the proposition that forms the necessity or possibility of acts.

Deontic modality is also defined as *root modality* by some other researchers (e.g. Sweetser, 1990). In the present study, root modality is used and is regarded as the same as deontic modality. The following utterances are examples of root and epistemic modal verbs respectively:

(1) Root modal verbs: You *may* get the chocolate only after finishing your homework. (A mother said to her son.) (Expressing the mother's permission)

I *will* try my best to study maths. (Expressing the speaker's intention)

(2) Epistemic modal verbs: That *might* be mum. (A kid said to his father when he heard the doorbell.) (Expressing a possibility)

You *must* be Mary's father. (Expressing a possibility)

Moreover, modal verbs have also been arousing great interest in the research field of L2 acquisition. Two research issues have normally been addressed in L2 contexts: the order of acquiring different modal verbs and the characteristics of using modal verbs and modality (Liang, 2008). Employing corpus-based techniques, Liang's (2008) findings on the acquisition order of modal verbs by Chinese university students was similar with other research findings on the acquisition order of modals by native English speakers (Papafragou, 1998; Sweetser, 1990). In these studies, both the Native speakers and the EFL learners acquired the root modal verbs, such as *can* for ability and permission and *will* for intention, earlier than the epistemic ones like *may* and *might* for possibility.

Other studies in Chinese EFL contexts (e.g. Chang, 2001; Guo, 2005; Hunston, 2004; and Hyland & Milton, 1997), have reported on how Chinese learners of English use modal verbs to express modality, and discussed some typical errors of using modal verbs; for example, overusing root modal verbs '*can*', '*will*', '*must*', '*should*' and under-using

epistemic modals, such as *would* and *could* by Chinese learners. These findings are consistent with other studies that have concluded that L2 English learners overuse the majority of root modal verbs and underuse the epistemic modal verbs (Aijmer, 2002; Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2005; McEnery & Kifle, 2002).

However, much of the previous research has focused on modal verbs in written essays of Chinese EFL learners. Few studies have considered how modal verbs are used to express politeness in different genres from a pragmatics perspective, which Bowers and Brumfit (1994) call the “trickier uses of modals” (p.123) due to their “idiomaticity” (p.123). This study aims to fill this research gap to investigate the trickier use of modals. Moreover, the requests to professors was chosen for the study because requests are commonly regarded as one of the most difficult speech acts for L2 learners, as requests need considerable cultural and linguistic expertise on the part of learners (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

### ***Requestive Strategies, Politeness and Modal Verbs***

Making requests, as a directive speech act (Searle, 1979), involves the speaker’s attempt to get the listener to do something by what he/she says. It normally involves a degree of imposition (Trosborg, 1995) on the listener by the speaker, so it is regarded as a *face-threatening act (FTA)* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson, face can be divided into two opposite aspects: positive and negative face. Positive face is defined as the need of all humans to be appreciated, while negative face is the desire not to be imposed upon. Making a request, accordingly, poses a threat to the listener’s negative face, for the speaker is imposing on the listener to do what the speaker wants. Therefore, the speaker should try to minimize the threat to the listener’s negative face to

realize his/her request goal. According to this theory, in the following two sentences, which are adopted from the emails written by the students to professors in the study, the first sentence is obviously more polite than the second, for the first one gives an option to the professor not to act and thus minimizes the negative face threat. Examples are demonstrated in the following:

1. *I wonder if you could write a reference for me.*

2. *I want to ask you to write a reference for me.*

Brown and Levinson (1987) further pointed out that, in western culture, it is generally agreed that using indirect requests helps to minimize the threat to the listener's face. The choice of indirectness is influenced by the seriousness of an FTA, which is decided by three variables: relative power, social distance, and imposition ranking. The more serious an FTA is, the more indirect the request needs to be. As a general rule, the more indirectly a request is realized, the more polite it is (Leech, 1983).

In the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), which was constructed for investigating cross-cultural and intralingual variation in the speech acts of requests and apologies, Blum and Kulka (1989) divided the indirect requests into two categories: conventionally indirect requests and non-conventionally indirect requests. For conventional indirectness, the most important conventions are pragmalinguistic in nature. That is, conventions of propositional content (means) and linguistic form combine to signal requestive force. Blum and Kulka (1989) further specified that "conventional means" (p.41) decide the kinds of sentences that are typically used as indirect request. In English, questioning a listener's ability or willingness or predicting listener's doing the act and formulaic suggestions are usual ways of requesting indirectly. And "conventions of form" (p.41) detail the exact wording used. For example, the use of '*can you*' rather

than ‘*are you able to*’ in questioning ability is a conventional form.

Blum-Kulka (1989) further pointed out that modal verbs are crucial in conventionally indirect requests, as they refer to the topicalized preparatory condition such as in the sentence pattern *can I/ you do....* Through re-examining the corpus of conventional indirect strategies in the CCSARP request data in Australian English, Blum-Kulka (ibid) ranked modal verbs *can/could* as the most frequently used for conventionally indirect requests and *will/would* the next most frequently used form. However, Eggins (2004) claimed that *can* and *will* constitute the most frequent types of modal verb used in making requests.

To summarize, modal verbs, as a sub-strategy in requests, play a key role in expressing polite requests. Therefore, this study is an attempt at shedding more light on the acquisition of modal verbs by non-native speakers of English.

### ***Studies on Email Requests***

The other motivation of the study is that electronic mail (email) has become a widespread tool for electronic communication (Bafoutsou & Mentzas, 2001). Moreover, at universities and colleges, emails have frequently been used between students and teachers and assume many functions (Crystal, 2001, Haworth, 1999; Worrels, 2002). However, as Baron (1998, 2000) and Murray (1988, 1995) pointed out, people may feel it hard to write emails to those perceived as higher in status in the workplace because such status-unequal emails are involved in various face-threatening acts. According to this situation, it is imaginable that non-native speakers may feel it even harder to compose status-unequal emails, which demand the writers to have sufficient pragmatic competence, high linguistic ability, and familiarity with the norms and values of the target culture.

A large number of studies have been conducted on L2 learner-to-professor emails (e.g. Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth, 2000; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Bloch, 2002; Bjørge, 2007; Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Also, many studies have been conducted on how Chinese-speaking students make email requests to professors in English (e.g. Chang and Hsu, 1998; Chen, 2001, 2006; Lee, 2004). These studies found that L2 learners were unable to express themselves in appropriate linguistic forms and rhetorical strategies. As for Chinese learners of English, they employed different request strategies in email from what the English-speaking students did. Generally speaking, Chinese students tended to structure their request emails in an indirect sequence using many pre-request supportive moves and placing the request act at the end, while their linguistic forms of the request act were more direct with fewer lexico-syntactic modifications. The strategies are interpreted and explained from culture-specific notions of politeness and students' social-cultural identities reflected in their e-mails. Chinese speaking students probably transfer the request strategies that they normally use in Chinese to the English request emails written to professors. According to this, these studies thus conclude that the transfer may sometimes cause Chinese students to be unable to use English email requests appropriately and effectively in the institutional unequal-status communication.

Nevertheless, Lin (2009) pointed out that the previous studies have paid less attention to sub-strategies (their form, function, and distribution) of speech acts when she conducted a study on general requests; the study of sub-strategies in email requests is also lacking. Few studies, like Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000), found that L2 students used fewer modal constructions and hedged expressions in their emails than U.S. students did. Most other studies only identified the pragmalinguistic problems generally. Therefore, they lacked a more detailed analysis of each pragmalinguistic

structures, especially of the modal verbs in English, which are crucial in the realization of request. Moreover, the subjects in most studies of Chinese EFL learners were from Taiwan and Hong Kong. They cannot represent learners from the Chinese mainland, which has different sociocultural and pedagogical backgrounds

### **Research Purposes and Research Questions**

In addressing the research gaps mentioned above, this study aims to investigate how modals verbs are used in making polite email requests by Chinese learners of English. Specifically, this study compares the use of modal verbs in head acts of requests with the use of them in the emails' supportive moves within and between the two groups. According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the head act refers to "the minimal unit which can realize a request and it is the core of the request sequence" (p. 275). The head act is usually constructed with other components such as alerters and supportive moves into request sequences. An alerter refers to a factor that is utilized to draw the listener's attention to the subsequent speech act, like calling the listener's name or job titles, such as professor or waiter. On the other hand, "supportive moves are external to the head acts occurring either before or after it" (p. 287). In using specific supportive moves, a speaker intends to mitigate or aggravate his request.

From the data of the research, the following email illustrates these components. It is worthwhile to notice that Blum-Kulka's framework was originally applied to a request sequence, whilst here it is an email. Therefore, the framework needs to be adapted. The email is then divided into four parts: 1) *openings*, which include *alerter*s; 2) *closings*; 3) *head acts*, and 4) *supporters*. The email is coded in the following:

Dear Mark Brown:

How are you, Dr. Brown? (**Openings**) I hope you have been happy these days. Because I will tell you something that may be can make you unhappy.

I haven't completed my maths thesis yet. And I know I should hand it to you today, but I'm sorry I can't. I swear I will complete it as soon as I can (**Supportive moves**). I hope you can agree that I hand it to you a few days later (**Head act**). I'm sorry to trouble you (**Supportive move**).

Thank you very much.

Your student... (**Closings**)

According to the coding framework, the modal verbs in the head acts and supportive moves were analyzed and compared. Because modal verbs are not evident in the opening and closings, the opening and closings were omitted in consideration for this study. Furthermore, as Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) emphasized, perspective choices were analyzed in the study because these choices are often related to verbs, including modal verbs. In this way, the lexico-grammar characteristics of modal verbs for making requests by the Chinese learners were revealed. Two categories out of four perspectives made by Blum-Kulka were realized in the data:

- 1) Listener dominance (*Could you lend me your reference book?*)
- 2) Speaker dominance (*I hope you can agree that I hand it to you a few days later.*)

In summary, modal verbs in the head acts and supportive moves in the emails were analyzed and compared within and between the two groups of Chinese EFL learners, namely English majors (EMs) and non- English majors (NEMs). Meanwhile, their judgements of the requisitive imposition were also analyzed. In terms of Chinese

university curriculum, the EMs had received much more English instruction than the NEMs in each semester. Moreover, the EMs were third-year students while the NEMs were in their second year of university study. Lastly, all the EMs had passed the English Test for English majors while the NEMs were not expected to participate in such high-level tests at all. Considering these facts, the EMs were generally deemed to have overall higher English proficiency than the NEMs. It was intended that the differences of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence between the two groups could be found; these competencies are defined respectively as the ability to use the language to express a wide range of functions and interpret their illocutionary force in discourse according to the sociocultural context in which they are used (Bachman, 1990).

The research was guided by the following three questions:

- 1) How do the two groups of Chinese EFL learners use modal verbs in the head acts of email requests to professors?
- 2) How do the two groups of Chinese EFL learners use modal verbs in supportive moves of email requests to professors?
- 3) To what extent do the choice of modal verbs used in the head acts differ from in the supportive moves of email requests to professors?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Two groups of Chinese undergraduate students, i.e., EMs and NEMs, who were studying at a university in Nanjing, China, participated in this study. Group 1 consisted of 67 year-2 NEMs, all of whom had passed the College English Test (CET) Band 4 examinations. Group 2 was composed of 64 year-3 EMs, all of whom had passed the Test for English

Majors (TEM) Band 4 examinations. The TEM Band 4 is a prerequisite for English major bachelor degree programs which generally assumes the students who have passed it to have higher English proficiency than those who have passed the CET Band 4, a prerequisite for non-English bachelor degree programs. Table 1 summarizes the information about the participants.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of Participants by Group, Age and Gender*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Total number (n= 131)</b>	<b>Male (n= )</b>	<b>Female (n= )</b>	<b>Average ages (years old)</b>
<b>Group 1</b>	67	22	45	<b>18-20</b>
<b>Group 2</b>	64	12	52	19-21

Each group was from a normal class. None of the students in the two groups had studied abroad except 3 of the EMs visited English speaking countries for a short period; none of the students received extra English training outside the university. According to the curriculum, the English majors had more frequent exposure to the English language and culture than the non-English majors given the very intense training in English they received at the university. Considering all the factors reported above, it was reasonable that differences could be found in the two groups of students' sensitivity to the pragmatic competence in English.

According to the results of the background questionnaire, all the students had some experience of being taught by teachers whose first language was English, which means they had experience communicating with non-Chinese national teachers aka foreign teachers. More than half of the two groups of the participants started learning English in the first year in junior high school, and all the others started learning English in the fifth

year of primary school. In other words, during the time of data collection, the students had been learning English for at least 8 years. None of the participants received special instruction in email requests before the study. All the informants reported that they spent some extra time studying English after the English classes, and they thought original English films, TV and network media, and foreign teachers had been very helpful in their English studies. All the informants admitted that it was very important to learn English every day. These questionnaire findings also confirmed the universality of requests in different languages. All participants reported that they had often written emails in Chinese, where only 15% of them had never written emails in English.

### ***Instruments***

Instruments used to elicit data are divided into three parts: (1) a background questionnaire concerning the demographic information about participants; (2) email-request writing tasks completed by all the participants, and; (3) structured questions pertaining to the variables the participants considered in the process of writings.

#### 1) Background Questionnaire

A background questionnaire not only provides the necessary information about participants, but also allows the analysis of the effect of a range of variables on pragmatic development (Rose, 2000). Therefore, a background questionnaire was administered to the two groups of participants (see Appendix Part One). The questionnaire included participant information such as the time spent learning English, the resources of input, the international experiences of staying abroad, writing emails, and familiarity with target speech acts. The results of this part are presented in Section 4.1.

## 2) Task of Email-Request Writing

Considering the possibility that there would not be enough naturally-occurring data because these students did not write English emails often, a discourse-completion task was employed. The participants were asked to write full emails according to the provided situations. One potential criticism of this method is that the situations are fictional and generic. Under such circumstances, participants might be expected to base their responses upon stereotypes of the recipient (e.g. Locksley et al. 1980). However, O'Neill and Colley (2006) argue that in real educational contexts, students are acquainted with staff members within a very restricted context or may not know them at all, so stereotypes may have a more considerable influence upon their interactions than individuating information. On the other hand, according to Kasper (2000), a Discourse-Completion Test (DCT) has practical methodological and theoretical advantages over the field study. A DCT can collect a large sample and a prototype of the variants occurring in the individual's actual speech.

Situations were divided into two categories: *high imposition* and *low imposition* situations, according to the request purpose designed for the email-writing task. The categorization was based on Hartford and Bordovi-Harlig's (1996) study in American academic surroundings. High-imposition requests include those asking to bend the rules, such as asking for incomplete grades or acceptance of a late paper, or asking for extra work on the part of professors. Meanwhile, low-imposition requests include those asking for routine institutional information, asking for reference books or articles, and asking for appointments and responses that do not require much preparation on the part of professors.

Nine situations were designed to elicit email requests. These situations were based on a

pilot study, which consisted of interviews with students on what purposes they were most likely to achieve when writing email requests to professors. Guided by the responses along with Hartford and Bordovi-Harlig's categorization, the nine situations were placed into two categories of impositions. Table 2 shows the information of the situations (also see Appendix part 2).

**Table 2**

*Distribution of the situations by high and low impositions (according to Hartford & Bordovi-Harlig's categorization)*

<b>Imposition</b>	<b>Situation</b>	<b>Description of the situation</b>
<b>Low Imposition</b>	<b>1</b>	Request to borrow a book from the teacher
	<b>3</b>	Ask for a leave from a lesson because of illness
	<b>6</b>	Ask for a leave from a lesson because of a seminar
	<b>7</b>	Ask for a face-to-face discussion with a teacher
<b>High Imposition</b>	<b>2</b>	Request for an extension of submitting a paper
	<b>4</b>	Ask a teacher to write a reference
	<b>5</b>	Ask to change the title of the paper
	<b>8</b>	Ask for extra guidance from a teacher
	<b>9</b>	Ask for result of the module ahead of the prescribed time

### 3) Structured Questions

In reference to the data collected from email writing, some important points have been considered. Considering the power and relation variables, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) noted in a similar study that the power variable in this situation is relatively stable for the email recipients (professors), who are in position of relative authority. In addition, the social distance variable is also relatively stable because it can be marked as low. The questionnaire asked the students to write emails to their teacher who taught them. For this study, the power and relation variables were not considered because the two groups came from the same university in China. However, the perception of the rank of imposition by the participants was examined in the questionnaire (see Appendix part 3). The participants were asked to judge the degree of the imposition using a Likert-type scale (0 represents no imposition, 1 low, 2 neutral, 3 high and 4 very high).

#### ***Procedures for Data Collection***

In order to create an authentic atmosphere of writing for the participants, all the questionnaires were completed and written in a video-audio classroom which was organized by a teacher. Each participant had a computer and they were asked to imagine that they were writing an email to one of their teachers from an English speaking country. In this way, the participants would take the task seriously so the data would be more reliable and complete. They were asked to initially complete the first and second parts of the questionnaire. For the second part, each participant was allocated a situation according to their registration number. If they thought the allocated situation was too difficult for them, they could disregard and select one of the other nine situations. The email could be of any length, but it had to be at least a full paragraph. The participants

could consult their dictionaries or substitute a word with Chinese if they could not express it in English. After all the participants finished and submitted these two parts to the teacher through the computers, they were assigned the third part. All the participants returned their completed questionnaires according to the instructions.

### ***Data Analysis***

#### Procedures of Data Analysis

According to the coding framework, described in Section 3, the head act(s) of the email requests were initially chosen for analysis. The frequency of modal verbs of these sentences and the choices of perspectives by the two groups of participants was counted and compared. Secondly, the individual modal verbs in the supportive moves of the emails were identified and compared between the two groups. The use of the modal verbs in supportive moves was also compared with the use in the head acts within the two groups. Thirdly, the assessment of imposition was especially considered. Based on the average degree of the assessment in each situation, it was considered whether the judgements of Chinese EFL learners on the degree of imposition were the same as the assertion of Harford and Brodovi-Harlig (1996). Through this process, the effect of the assessment of the imposition on the choices of modal verbs might be found.

### **Results and Discussion**

There were 67 email letters in total by non-English majors and 64 by English majors. Table 3 summarizes the total number of the email letters written by the two groups and the number corresponding to each of the nine situations.

**Table 3***Distribution of the Email Letters by Situations and Groups*

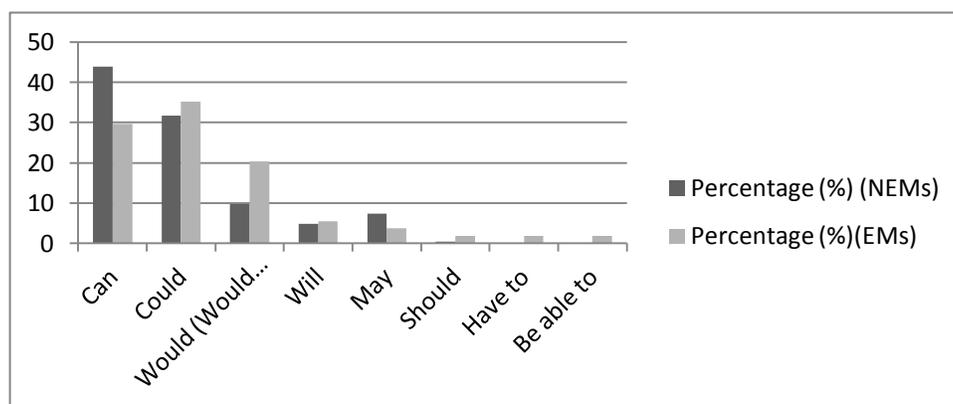
<b>Situation</b>	<b>NEMs (n=67)</b>	<b>EMs (n=64)</b>	<b>Total number (N=131)</b>
1 (borrow books)	7	11	18
2(request extension of assignments)	11	12	23
3 (request for an absence due to illness)	8	5	13
4 (request a reference)	10	10	20
5 (request changing title of paper)	6	6	12
6(request for an absence due to seminar conflict)	6	5	11
7 (request an appointment)	6	3	9
8 (request extra guidance)	5	4	9
9 (request final score for assignment ahead of time)	8	8	16

**Uses of Modal Verbs in the Head Acts and the Choices of Perspectives***Uses of Modal Verbs in the Head Acts*

In the data, 67 and 64 sentences for head acts of requests were indentified from the NEM and EM group respectively. Among these sentences, 41 modal verbs were used by the NEMs, i.e., 61.19% of all requestive sentences included a modal verb. Fifty-four modal verbs were used by the EMs, i.e., 84.34 % of all requestive sentences included a modal verb. Eight modal verbs included *can*, *could*, *would*, *will*, *may*, *should*, *be able to* and *have to*, were used in these sentences. Chart 1 reveals a comparison of the frequency of individual modal verbs against the total number of modal verbs used in each group.

Chart 1

A comparison of the frequency modal Verbs used in the head acts of the two groups of emails



The chart shows that the EMs appeared to be a slightly more inclined to use modal verbs in the head acts than the NEMs when making requests. For example, the EMs used the phrasal modal verbs such as ‘*have to*’ and ‘*be able to*’ (1.85% respectively) while the NEMs did not use them at all.

*Can*, *could* and *would* were the three modal verbs most preferred by the two groups. The NEMs used *can* more frequently (43.90%) than any other modal verbs, while the EMs used *could* most frequently (35.19%). The NEMs had a lower preference for the use of past-tense modal verbs *could* (31.70%) and *would* (9.76%) than the EMs (35.19%, 20.37% respectively).

Both EMs and NEMs used the five modal verbs *can/ could*, *will/ would*, and *may* as the main requestive modal verbs and exhibited the same preference order of *can/ could* > *will/ would* > *may*. These findings partly confirm the findings by Biber et al. (1999) that the modal verbs *will*, *would*, and *can* were extremely common in the LSWE corpus. However,

Biber found the most frequently used modal verbs in the corpus are *will* and *would*, while this study shows that *can* and *could* were used most frequently .

The highest preference of *can/could* in the present study may be due to the special speech acts for which modal verbs were used. It is consistent with the preference order of the NS-Es (native speakers of English) when they made requests in Blum-Kulka (1989) and Lin's (2009) study. On the one hand, it may indicate that both groups of Chinese EFL learners have grasped the use of *can/could*, which bears the main requestive function (Blum-kulka, 1989). On the other hand, the most frequent use of *can*, especially by the NEMs, confirms the previous findings (Chang, 2001; Guo, 2005; Hunston, 2004; Hyland & Milton, 1997) that Chinese EFL learners overused the modal verbs such as *can*, *will*, *must* and *should*. With special mention of the use of *can*, Xu (2001) specified the reasons why Chinese EFL learners overused the modal verb *can*. *Can* itself has a wide range of meanings: denoting ability, possibility, volition, as well as state. This very semantic diffusion may have possibly led to its prolific use by the participants in this study.

Alternately, the two groups seldom used the modal verb *will* for requests. This contradicts Eggins' (2004) confirmation that *will*, as well as *can*, is used most in requests. It also disagrees with other general findings that *will* is overused by Chinese EFL learners (Liang 2008). It is interesting to note that while the learners have acquired the basic principle of using *can* for request, they still did not commonly use *will* for request. It may be because neither group has a firm sense of the requestive function of *will*. They seemed to only master its function of volition and intention. This will be discussed in Section 5.2.

According to the Collins Cobuild English Grammar (1995), the past-tense request modals like *could* and *would* are more polite ways of asking than their non-past forms. In this study, both groups tended to use them. This finding is consistent with previous

studies (e.g. Jenkins, 2003; Svalberg, 1998) on the English modality in NNES contexts, which highlight a higher preference for the past forms *could* and *would*. It may show that both groups could use the past form *could* and *would* to soften the coerciveness of the requests to professors who have higher status. However, the NEMs used the past form *could* and *would* less frequently than the EMs. This may indicate that the NEMs are less skilled at using the modal verbs to express politeness. It may be attributed to the effect of the negative native language transfer. In Chinese, there is no tense distinction in modals *can/could* and *will/would*.

### ***Choice of Perspectives***

As illustrated in Section 3, only two categories of choices of request perspectives, speaker dominance and listener dominance, were employed by the Chinese EFL learners. Specifically, the requests by Chinese EFL learners were realized from the viewpoints of the Listener or the Speaker like the structures of *Can/could you...or I hope you can/could....* The other two categories, speaker and listener dominance, and impersonal categories, like the structures of *Could we...or Could one ask...*, were not used at all. This finding suggests that while the Chinese EFL learners have acquired the basic perspectives of making choices, the lack of the other perspectives, i.e., speaker and listener dominance and impersonal, may indicate that they cannot choose the perspectives as widely as the native speakers did in Blum-Kulka's (1989) study. Table 4 specifies the distribution of choices of perspective related to modal verbs by the two groups.

**Table 4***Distribution of Choices of Perspectives related to Modal Verbs by the Two Groups*

Orientation		Non-English Majors(Total:41)		English Majors(Total:52)	
Speaker- dominance	Key Features	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Can/Could/May I...?	5	12.20	4	7.69
	<b>If..., I can/could...</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9.61</b>
	Statement (I can...)	3	7.31	3	5.77
Total		8	19.51	12	23.08
Listener- dominance	Key Features	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	<b>I hope you can...</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>26.83</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7.69</b>
	I hope you could...	2	4.88	3	5.77
	I hope you will...	1	2.44	0	0
	Can you...	5	12.19	4	7.69
	Could you (please)...?	10	24.49	7	13.46
	Would you please...?	2	4.88	6	11.54
	May you...?	0	0	1	1.92
	I wonder/am wondering/was wondering/ask if you can/could....	<b>1</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19.23</b>
	Thanks (e.g. I will appreciate...) +if you can/could/may....	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9.62</b>
	Else	1	2.44	0	0
Total		33	80.49	40	76.92

It was found that the two groups had a similar use of the two perspectives. Both groups, for instance, had a greater tendency toward a “listener-oriented” perspective (the NEMs, 80.49%; the EMs, 76.92%) than the other two perspectives. The EMs, on the other hand, used more speaker-dominant requests (23.08%) than the NEMs (19.51%).

During initial observation, the EMs seemed to employ less polite ways to write email requests to their professors because they used more speaker-dominant requests. As indicated by Blum-Kulka (1989), since requests are face-threatening and inherently imposing, avoiding direct naming of the listener as the doer of the requested task reduces the degree of coerciveness implied in the requests. However, this judgement was not actually accurate. Among these speaker-dominance requests, the EMs used complex sentences with embedded ‘if’ clauses such as ‘*If..., I can/could...*’ which obviously tried to reduce the imposition to the addressee. And of the listener-dominance requests, the EMs used similarly complex sentences with ‘if’ clause ‘*I will appreciate..., if you can/could/may...*’ and ‘*I wonder if you can/could...*’ very frequently (19.23%), while the NEMs seldom did (2.44%). From the finding that the EMs used ‘if’ conditionals to mitigate the request, they seemed to have higher skills to reduce the imposition to the addressee.

The above findings further support the conclusion that the EMs, who have greater English proficiency than the NEMs, are more adept at using more suitable ways to express politeness in English. Moreover, the NEMs were much more inclined to the sentence pattern like ‘*I hope/wish you can/could/will....*’ than the EMs, which were seldom used by native speakers[2] and other learner groups for requests. Among these patterns, the NEMs used ‘*I hope you can*’ (26.83%) much more frequently than the EMs (7.69%). The sentence pattern might be transferred from the Chinese request

pattern *WoXiwang Ni Neng...*, which corresponds to the English sentence *I hope you can...*. This finding shows that less-proficient EFL learners may be more likely to use inappropriate ways to realize the speech acts in English. In this study, the NEMs, who are generally regarded as having a high level of English proficiency, still frequently transfer Chinese request patterns into English.

### *The Use of Modal Verbs in Supportive Moves*

Concerning the use of modal verbs in supportive moves of the emails, the modal verbs *will*, *can*, *could* and *would* were used relatively more frequently than the others. Among them, *will* was used more frequently than any other modal verbs by the two groups (NEMs 30 times vs., EMs 19 times). The modal verb *can* was used by NEMs slightly less frequently than *could* (24 times), but it was used much more frequently than it was by the EMs (8 times). The past modal forms *could* and *would*, like their use in the head acts, were still used slightly more frequently by EMs (8 and 5 times) than by NEMs (4 and 3 times). Table 5 details the number of modal verbs used in the head acts in comparison with the supportive moves.

**Table 5**

#### *Modal Verbs used in Email letters*

Groups	Non-English Majors (67 letters ) (Tokens: 4,256; Average=75 tokens/letter)			English Majors (64 letters ) (Tokens:3,423; Average=65tokens/letter)		
Modal Verbs	In head acts (n=)	In supportive moves (n=)	Total(n=)	In head acts (n=)	In supportive moves (n=)	Total(n=)

<b>Can</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>
Could	13	4	17	19	8	27
Would	4	3	7	11	5	16
Should	1	2	3	1	1	2
May	3	2	5	2	0	2
<b>Will</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>
Have to	0	2	2	1	6	7
Be able to	0	1	1	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>101</b>

The two groups used the modal verb *will* much more often in the supportive moves than in the head acts (30 vs.2 by NEMs, 19vs. 3 by EMs). This finding coincides with Deterding (2003), who found that Singapore speakers used *will* to describe habitual actions, while *would* was used to show tentativeness or uncertainty. The use of *will* appeared to be based more on its propositional content (expressing a future event and functioning as intention and volition) than on its pragmatic force to show a speaker's attitude discussed in various writings on English modality (Bowers & Brumfit, 1994). Thus, it seemed that in this study the Chinese participants' knowledge of the root meaning of tense and modal verbs far outweighed their knowledge of hypothetical meaning. Meanwhile, the finding may intricately modify the previous studies on modal verbs (Liang, 2008; Liu, 2004) in the Chinese Learners English Corpus (CLEC) which only point out learners overuse *will*. This study suggests that *will* may only be overused as expressing the propositional content.

The data also show that the NEMs used *can* much more frequently than the EMs. This is consistent with the highest frequency of *can* in the head acts by the NEMs. The less-

proficient learners were liable to use general words such as *can* instead of those specific ones or the ones of narrow semantic spectrum because, to them, the general ones seemed to have more functions, one of which was at least thought to cover their intended meanings. With this logic in mind, the less-proficient learners attempted more uses of the super-ordinate words, instead of the subordinate ones (Xu, 2001).

### ***Cultural Awareness and its Effect on the use of Modal Verbs***

Overall, the special pragmalinguistic repertoire of modal verbs used by the Chinese EFL learners may be attributed to their English proficiency and teaching settings and conditions of China. However, the cultural awareness of the two Chinese EFL groups, which may also influence the requestive strategies and then the choices of modal verbs, cannot be left out of consideration.

Chinese traditional culture, as Wong states (2000), is one that is characterized by collectivism. This overwhelmingly influences Chinese people to use direct positive politeness strategies for request in Chinese. It is contrary to Brown and Levinson's idea that a speaker will use an indirect negative politeness strategy to avoid and minimise the imposition of a request, especially if he or she thinks that the size of the face-threatening act is small and his or her relationship with the listener is close or intimate. On the other hand, the way in which Chinese culture regards politeness is partially associated with indirect information sequencing, and the amount of supportive moves that precede a request (Zhang, 1995).

Cultural awareness has strongly influenced the preference of information structure by both groups in the current study. Over 90% of the email requests were not straightforward and direct; the students stated their request after the beginnings and supportive moves.

This may lessen the learners' attention on the choices of modal verbs to mitigate the possible face threatening of the request.

Cultural awareness may have also directly influenced the choices of requestive strategies in the head act because analysis of the data shows that both of the two learner groups used direct strategies much more frequently (NEM, 53.7%; EM, 37.5%) than what was found in the previous studies (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Chung, 1995; Lin, 2009, Lin & Chen, 2006; etc.). The preference for the direct requestive strategies, especially by the NEMs, appear to have an impact on the choices of modal verbs. This may have influenced the NEMs to use fewer modal verbs and more direct modal verbs like *can* than the EMs.

As for the judgements on Situations 5 and 8, with the purpose of changing a title of the paper and asking for extra help from professors, neither of the two groups thought the imposition was high (mean scores < 2, and 2 means the imposition is neutral). The results are not consistent with the categorization of high imposition made by Harford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996). On the other hand, the average degree of the imposition by the two groups on Situation 2, 4 and 9, with the purposes of request for an extension, asking for a reference and asking for the results of the module ahead of appointed time respectively, was in the middle of 2 and 3. This means the participants in the study agreed with Harford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) that requests in these three situations are of high imposition, but they did not believe the imposition of these requests was very high (the average score smaller than 3). Moreover, the overall average degree of assessment of all the five situations 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9 by the NEMs was lower than those given by the EMs.

According to these results, Chinese culture may have a great impact on the assessment and thus the choice of modal verbs. In line with Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the level of

directness of a request has strong correlations with the expectations of rights and obligations between listeners and speakers: the greater the right of the speaker to ask and the greater the obligation of the listener to comply, the less motivation to use indirectness. The participants in the study did not fully agree to the high-imposition level of the five situations as in target culture. This may explain why the two groups used relatively fewer indirect strategies with modal verbs than the participants in Lin's (2009) study. In addition, the NEMs used even fewer indirect strategies with modal verbs than the EMs. This might be due to the lower assessment of imposition of situations 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9 by the NEMs than that of the EMs.

### **Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

This study echoes Lin's (2009) calls for more studies on the sub-strategies (their form, function and distribution) of speech acts in the ILP field. Most of the previous studies were concentrated on choices of main strategy types in head acts, while this study has focused on the modal verbs as sub-strategies of requests. Several interesting findings emerged from the ILP analysis. The findings allow us to infer that both groups have grasped the basic skills of using modal verbs to make requests. However, special characteristics of using modal verbs for politeness in Chinese and English were also found.

Firstly, the choices of modal verbs and perspectives are still not as diversified as in the previous studies on native speakers of English, which means the Chinese university students cannot use modal verbs for pragmatic purposes as flexibly as native speakers. Secondly, the preference orders and distributions of modal verbs also deviated from what was observed in previous studies. Between the two groups in the current study, the

preference orders and distribution of modal verbs in the head acts and the supportive moves also represent a great deal of difference: the modal verbs used by the NEMs employed are much less polite than those by the EMs, who used much fewer past forms of modal verbs. Thirdly, the Chinese EFL learners are more aware of the propositional content of modal verbs than their pragmatic force to show a speaker's attitude. Lastly, both groups seem to transfer their Chinese socio-cultural knowledge into the judgement of imposition in their approach to English requests and thus influence their choices of modal verbs for polite requests.

The findings are not consistent with the general attitudes about NEMs who have passed CET Band 4; also EMs who are in their third year and who should have strong pragmatic competence. And the English proficiency level is still a key variable that decides the NEMs, who have passed the CET band 4, seemed not to use adequate or sufficient polite modal verbs. Moreover, both groups exhibit a similarly low sociopragmatic competence in terms of the judgement of imposition of some request situations which was different from that in target culture.

As such, this study has implications for pedagogical practice. In recent years, more and more Chinese students chose to receive their higher education in English speaking countries. Yet, the deviations from the target language like the use of modal verbs for politeness might lead to inappropriate communication with English speakers in the future. Therefore, it is obligatory to put pragmatics and language teaching/learning together to cultivate learner' pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Rose & Kasper, 2001) in the contexts of Chinese EFL and other ESL pedagogy.

More specifically, aspects of pragmatic competence, sociopragmatic competence and pragmalinguistic competence need to be developed in classroom teachings. Considering

that the EMs in this study also had low sociopragmatic competence, the foreign language classroom urgently calls for cultivating and raising the sociopragmatic knowledge of learners to make them aware of the target socio-cultural norms of speech act realizations and modal verbs for politeness. In other words, the conscious-raising of modal verbs for politeness in EFL/ESL classrooms is advocated. As Kasper (1997, p.9) argues, the conscious-raising activities in classrooms could help learners to “make connections between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, their occurrence in different social contexts, and their cultural meanings” and to ultimately improve the learners’ sociopragmatic competence.

In specific consideration of EFL learners’ use of modal verbs, it is suggested that modal verbs need to be taught more explicitly in foreign language settings. As Tatayama (2001, p.220) suggests, explicit teaching is “more effective than implicit teaching in facilitating the acquisition of L2 pragmatic routines that require a high formality of the linguistic expressions.” Therefore, instructional intervention is necessary even for the learners with high levels of English proficiency in Chinese universities. However, classroom teachings in China do not seem to facilitate the exploration of modals beyond their structural meanings according to this study. Taking *will* for example, the students, including the ones from a key Chinese university, may not be very aware of its functional use for requests. As a result, the functional meanings of different types of modal verbs in different genres should garner additional consideration in Chinese English classrooms in the future.

In addition, following Economidou-Kogetsidis’ (2008) suggestions, textbook materials which emphasize the pragmatic aspects like modal verbs should be designed and developed in EFL/ESL settings. Furthermore, since EFL learners have very few

opportunities to interact with English native speakers outside of class, more communicative activities and watching videos can be implemented in classes. In this way, learners could access and integrate sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge more quickly and efficiently (Rose, 1994). Finally, in the information age, EFL learners need to be encouraged and guided to take advantage of Web resources to learn the complicated pragmatic and all the other aspects of modal verbs. For example, EFL learners could easily have access to learning materials of modal verbs with the weblinks as stated in Note 3.

Lastly, the study also sheds light on the research of learner English corpus in China. It is suggested that the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), which was used by the majority of Chinese researchers for modal verbs study, needs to include more kinds of genres. In this way, a more comprehensive picture of inter-language modal verbs and other linguistic features will then be drawn. The CLEC could be used by the researchers and English teachers more efficiently for research and pedagogy.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

This study, using the Discourse-Completion Test to collect data, investigated how two groups of Chinese EFL learners used modal verbs in their elicited email requests. However, the DCT method could only provide a measurement for investigating the students' pragmatic knowledge of using modal verbs for politeness. It did not necessarily demonstrate how students use this knowledge in real-life emails. Therefore, further study of more participants' performance of email requests in natural environment is required. In addition, only two groups of Chinese university students were involved in this study, and the research findings were only compared to those in the previous studies. Future studies

might investigate a broader range of students, including native English students, other Asian non-Chinese students, and graduate students in China.

This study mainly investigated the pragmalinguistic competence of the Chinese EFL learners. Further research might focus more on the investigation of the sociopragmatic competence of the EFL learners. For example, the relationship between the imposition degree variable and modal verbs might be studied in a more detailed way by comparing modal verbs used in different imposition categories. Moreover, future studies might investigate other variables, such as power and distance across cultures on the basis of the authentic data to be collected. In this way, it is hoped that the complicated association between the choices of modal verbs and socio-psychological factors could be correlated. Moreover, this study did not consider the gender factor of email writers and recipients, which may influence the choices of modal verbs for politeness. Therefore, future studies might also give attention to this. At last, future research might also focus on which teaching method (e.g. explicit, implicit) is more effective in teaching modal verbs for politeness in foreign language settings.

**Notes:**

[1] In this study, the term ‘modal verb’ is interchangeable with the terms ‘modal’, ‘modal auxiliary verb’ or ‘modal auxiliary’. Nine central modals, can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, and would and three marginal modals, dare (to), need (to) and ought (to) (according to Biber et al. 1999) are investigated.

[2] I asked several native speakers in my school about the appropriate use of I hope you can to, and almost most of them agreed that it is not appropriate that the pattern was used for students’ request to professors. It seems to be used more often to express a wish on the part of the speaker.

[3] Some Modal verbs teaching/learning resources are available here for readers' reference:

1. <http://www.waylink-english.co.uk/?page=31320>
2. <http://www.tes.co.uk/taxonomySearchResults.aspx?keywords=modal%20verbs>
- 3 <http://www.onestopenglish.com/grammar/grammar-reference/verbs-and-tenses/modal-verbs-2-tips-and-activities/144873.article>
4. <http://www.onestopenglish.com/grammar/grammar-reference/verbs-and-tenses/modal-verbs-1-article/144870.article>
5. [http://www.elbase.com/vtr\\_refs.php?id=78](http://www.elbase.com/vtr_refs.php?id=78)
6. <http://www.betterenglish.org.ph/Parts%20of%20Speech/Verbs%20discussion%20and%20interactive%20quizzes.htm>

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire on English "Request Emails"

(The original questionnaire was written in Chinese)

Hello, everyone! This survey is to investigate the way in which students make a request in English through email. Please read the following questions and write what you really think about. Your answer will be only used in research. And you are not going to be given a 'mark' on your responses. Thank you!

#### Part One: A background questionnaire

Your Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

1. When did you begin to study English?
  - A. First-year Primary School
  - B. Fifth-year Primary School
  - C. First-year Junior Middle School
  - D. Other
  
2. How long on average did you spend learning English besides English classes in school?
  - A. Less than an hour
  - B. 1-2 hours
  - C. 2-3 hours
  - D. More than 3 hours
  
3. Have you been to an English speaking country (e.g. The UK, America, or Canada)?
  - A. Never
  - B. Yes (If you choose A, go to question 4)

If you answered 'Yes', How long did you stay there? And Why did you go there?

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4. Besides English study in classes, which of the following do you find very helpful to your English learning? (You can choose more than one answer)
- A. Additional English reading materials
  - B. Original English films, TV and network resources
  - C. Foreign friends and teachers
  - D. English tutors
  - E. Counselling parents
5. Do you think it is important to learn how to have daily conversations in English (e.g. Greetings, asking questions, and so on)?
- A. Very Important
  - B. Important
  - C. No Idea
  - D. Not Important At All
6. How would you evaluate your own English proficiency?
- A. Very Good
  - B. Good
  - C. Ordinary
  - D. Bad
  - E. Very Bad
7. The following scenarios are some common situations which often appear in daily life. Do you know how to express the above speech acts in English? Please put the numbers in order according to your familiarity (from most familiar to least familiar).
- A. Compliment on a friend's new clothes
  - B. Request another person's help
  - C. Refuse another person's request
  - D. Complain about bad weather
  - E. Apologize for being late for school
  - F. Thanks someone for help

8. Do you often write email letters in Chinese?

- A. Frequently
- B. Less Frequently
- C. Seldom
- D. Never

9. Do you often write email letters in English?

- A. Frequently
- B. Less Frequently
- C. Seldom
- D. Never

## **Part 2: A Role-Play Task**

Suppose you want to make a request through emails to your foreign teacher who speaks English as native language. What would you usually write in each situation described below? Please select one situation below and write a full email letter. Your writing will definitely not be judged as good or bad, and thus having no effect on the teacher's evaluation of you. Your email can be of any length. You may consult your dictionary or substitute the word with Chinese if you cannot express it. If you have a problem in finishing the situation allocated by the teacher, you may disregard and select another.

1. **Situation:** Suppose you need a very useful reference book of grammar for the final exam. Write an email letter to your teacher, Jane River (female, doctor) to borrow it and ask her to bring it to you the next day.
2. **Situation:** Suppose you did not finish your math paper in time. Write an email letter to your teacher, Mark Brown (male, doctor), to ask him to give you an extension on the deadline of the paper.
3. **Situation:** Suppose you were ill and absent from Ben Cohen's (male, professor) lesson. You write an email to him to ask for the notes and handouts of the lesson.
4. **Situation:** Suppose you will graduate from this university and plan to apply for a postgraduate place in a foreign university. You write an email to your teacher, Jim Fay (female, professor) to ask her to write a reference for you.
5. **Situation:** Suppose you are writing a paper for a module. But after a few days, you find the title, which is agreed with by the supervisor, John Hobbs (male, Professor), is not

suitable for you. You write an email to him to ask to amend the title.

6. **Situation:** Suppose you have to join in a seminar tomorrow, the time of which collides with the module of intercultural communication. You write an email to the teacher, Jim Beal (male, doctor) to ask for a leave and tell him the reason.

7. **Situation:** Suppose you want to have a face-to-face discussion of a research problem with the teacher. You write an email to the teacher, Linda Davis (female, professor) to ask if she could arrange an appointment with you.

8. **Situation:** Suppose you write a paper, which is not demanded by the module, to be submitted for publication. You write an email to your teacher, Joseph Walker (male, doctor) to ask him to help proofread it.

9. **Situation:** Suppose you have handed in the paper of the module. After a few days (before the scheduled time when the result is out), you are eager to know the result. You write an email to your teacher (male, professor) to ask if he could tell you the result.

### **Part Three: Imposition assessment questionnaire**

This part is to investigate the degree of imposition of the request you considered when you chose one situation in part two to write the email letter. Imposition refers to the degree of the difficulty of fulfilling a request behaviour in a specific context (e.g., borrowing a book from a friend might be easier than borrowing him a large sum of money), or the effort required the listener to fulfil the requesting act.

**Direction:** Please choose a number to mark the degree of imposition.

The **Situation Number** you wrote email for: \_\_\_\_\_

**Imposition degree of the request:** \_\_\_\_\_

0 (no imposition at all) -1(low imposition) -2(neutral) -3(high imposition -4(very high imposition)

## **Reluctance to Write Among Students in the Context of an Academic Writing Course in an Ethiopian University**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents an investigation into reluctance to write among university students as observed in an academic writing course. Twenty university students and five of their instructors were involved in the study as research subjects and data generators. Classroom observations, focus group discussions, and interviews were used to generate data, to identify and classify core reluctance behaviors and to explore the students and their instructors' beliefs about the reasons for the students' reluctance to write. The major findings of the study include that reluctance to write among students falls into two major categories, namely *complete avoidance reluctance* and *partial avoidance reluctance* which each had various manifestations. Instructors' perception of the reason for the student reluctance behaviors largely point to students' lack of requisite skills and preparedness to engage, while students' perception of their reluctance behaviour largely point to their instructors' failure to engage them actively. Both students and instructor converge on one factor: the experiences and backgrounds students bring into the classrooms being responsible for their reluctance to engage themselves in writing activities. The findings of this study have far reaching implications for writing instructors in general and English writing instructors in particular. The most important implication, however, is for designing writing tasks and adopting classroom procedures. It is evident from the findings that care must be taken to cater for the engagement tendencies and patterns of both the reluctant and non-reluctant students. At same time, it is essential to periodically bring into writing classrooms input materials that enhance students' self-motivation, acceptance of rigorous procedures, and persistence during writing tasks.

**Keywords:** Reluctance to write; Ethiopia; academic writing

## **Introduction**

It is often argued (e.g. Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Taylor, 1981; Zemal, 1985) that a sound pedagogy of writing must begin with a thorough understanding of how students learn to write. In other words, the assumptions writing instructors hold about how writing skills develop will possibly lead to effective lesson planning and materials development. We assume that understanding those student writing behaviors which are often associated with not learning would generate more relevant insight. As reluctance is an important concept associated with learning determinants, knowledge about writing reluctance seems to be highly relevant to research in writing pedagogy.

The issue of writing reluctance has not been explored directly and at college writing level. The few studies that exist have dealt with writing reluctance at secondary school writing level (e.g. Pajares, 2003; Hawthorne, 2008). However, studies having an indirect bearing on writing reluctance do exist.

While the construct ‘writing reluctance’ is yet under researched and under conceptualized (Buis, 2007), identifying what specific behaviors reluctant writers exhibit and what factors are believed to contribute to students’ reluctant nature have not been fully investigated. For this reason, the investigation presented here intends to provide insights into the characteristics of reluctant writers, and students’ and instructors’ perceptions about the factors that impact the reluctant nature that university students may hold in an EFL context. It is essential though to present some contextual background to Ethiopian education, especially the status of English.

Ethiopian education system follows an 8-4 system, i.e., eight years of primary

education and four years of secondary education. Primary education has two distinctive stages: first cycle (G1-G4) and second cycle (G5-G8). Similarly, secondary education is staged as general secondary (G9 and G10) and preparatory education (G11 and G12). Students who qualify for preparatory education and who successfully complete the preparatory studies are enrolled into universities. English plays an important role in Ethiopian education, as it is widely considered as an ‘intellectual language’. In other words, in many regions, starting from late primary schools (G7 and G8) English is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects except local languages. Success in higher education usually depends on academic English competence, part of which is competence in English writing. The significance of this paper is that examining conditions and factors that impact the learning of academic writing would generate insights into students learning behaviours and engagements.

### ***The Phenomenon of Reluctance to Write***

The phenomenon of reluctance to write has been presented in the literature from different vantage points. One is to depict reluctance as certain students’ learning style, which can be termed as psychological. The literature has depicted this in various ways, for instance, as ‘writing apprehension’ (Dally & Miller, 1975; Smith, 1984; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981). The concept of writing apprehension has important overlaps with the concept of reluctance to write but has a more narrow focus as it does work particularly on ‘affective’ dispositions, neglecting the ‘behavioural’ and ‘cognitive’ dispositions that are now thought to be equally important in explaining writing disengagement levels. Learning styles of students do manifest in writing classes too. For instance, Beattie (2010), who was fascinated by boys consistent disengagement in the writing classes, states the

phenomenon as largely a boy's tendency: "Both anecdotal experiences of teachers and research tell the tale of the disengagement of boys from writing tasks and complain of disaffected students" ( p. 171 ).

The second point of view is to present reluctance as a consequence of the writing pedagogy which favours some students to engage and others to disengage. Buis (2007), whose work takes on the task of helping teachers reshape their writing programs, approaches the phenomenon of reluctance as one of students who have become disillusioned and disheartened with writing. She identifies reluctant writers as "students with difficulties coordinating knowledge on a page" who "approach writing in a state of apprehension that diminishes or shuts down their desire to writing willingly or well." She further argues that reluctant writers begin to feel hopeless and marginalized because they develop a sense of their limitations (p. 6). The third point of view is to depict reluctance as a form of resistance which is widely articulated by proponents of critical composition.

Describing the general phenomenon of reluctance, Hawthorne (2008) states "Someone who can write (to some extent) but chooses not to" (p. 30). He emphasizes students' tendency to avoid a rigorous engagement, or withdraw from it at some stage. Anderson (2009) describes reluctant writers as students who usually are reluctant readers, slow workers, have poor spelling and punctuation skills, and are easily distracted from writing tasks. The work of reluctant writers is frequently incomplete and they often have messy written work and frequently disorganized and tatty notebooks. These are students who avoid starting writing and use excuses, such as 'I can't find my pen', and are not willing to share their written work in a group. Buis (2007) identifies such students as "disillusioned" because they have "little power over what they write"(p. 6). She further argues that reluctant writers begin to feel hopeless and marginalized because they

develop a sense of their limitations and become anxious or even apprehensive. Writing teachers and students should be aware of the nature of writing, i.e. writing is a highly recursive, complex and multi-faceted activity (Blanton, 1987; Chimombon, 1986; McDonough, 1995; Raimes, 1991; Richards, 1990; Tribble, 1996). This may suggest that writing entails a lot of time, perseverance and persistence on the part of student writers before they master and use it effectively. It also requires one's willingness to approach it with commitment and a concerted effort. As Sommers (1980) writes, "Writing develops like a seed, not a line" (p. 384). Or as Zamel (1985) notes, "Writing involves producing a text that evolves over a time" (p. 79). It seems imperative that student writers should be willing to actively involve, both physically and cognitively, in the set writing tasks and practice writing skills patiently and persistently. It also seems imperative that student writers should be given opportunities to write and rewrite until they have fully communicated the message in their minds. Oglan (1997) has suggested that reluctant writers have sometimes developed strategies for masking their reluctance, switching off the teacher's instruction and explanations, and putting off finishing the writing assignments so as to go over the deadline.

Hawthorne (2008), drawing on research to related constructions of writing engagement ( e.g. Dayson & Freedman, 2003; Galbraith & Rijlaarsdom, 1999; Hillocks, 1987, 2006; Langer, 2001) and constructions of reluctant readers (Beers, 1996), has attempted to formulate a model of writing reluctance that has been presented in a circular form to emphasize the dynamic nature of the aspects included in the model.



Fig. 1 Model of Writing Reluctance, Hawthorne (2008)

The model points to three dispositions (e.g. behaviour, affect and cognition) which might surface in various ways among reluctant students. One of the three dimensions in the model is task environment, which refers to the classroom condition which sets the context for engagement to learn writing. The second, the social/cultural dimension refers to the wider student upbringing context which periodically surfaces in the students' basic behaviours. The third dimension is the teacher, an important factor in the students' classroom learning engagement. The power relationship between students and the teacher can influence students' engagement behaviour. It can contribute to students' willingness or unwillingness. According to Hawthorne(2008), three specific issues are essential in the way we measure students' reasons for avoiding or resisting writing: (1) the fear and anxiety levels students feel, (2) their self- beliefs and attitudes towards writing, and (3) the way students regulate their feelings and cognition during writing. This model was

specifically useful to develop the questionnaire administered to classify students into 'reluctant' and 'non-reluctant'

### **The Focus of the Study**

The studies (see Dally & Miller, 1975; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981; Smith, 1984; Pajares, 2003; Hawthorne, 2008; Kearney, 1997) ) that have been conducted on the phenomenon of students' reluctance did not identify what specific characteristics reluctant writers display in the writing classroom, and have not explored the instructors' as well as the learners' beliefs about the roots of students' writing reluctance. Intending to fill the gap and explore the issue in a different context, we conducted a study which addressed the following research questions:

1. Is writing reluctance behaviour present in EFL writing classrooms?
2. What features are reluctant writers characterized by in EFL writing classrooms?
3. What factors do English instructors and reluctant learners perceive as contributing to the latter's behaviour?
4. Do the instructors' and students' perceptions of reasons for writing reluctance match?

### **The Research Participants**

The initial research subjects were 256 freshman students who were sectioned into five groups by the Registrar. In each section there were on average 50 students who were studying various majors in the Faculty of Education at Wolaita Sodo University, Ethiopia. Each section was taught Sophomore English by an instructor assigned by the Department of English. These students filled in a questionnaire<sup>1</sup> (Hawthorne's *The Survey of*

*Motivation to Engage in Writing*). The purpose of the questionnaire was to survey and identify students with significant reluctance behaviours. Analysis of the returned questionnaire enabled us to identify 60 students whose average score, i.e., 25.58, across all items in the questionnaire placed them in the bottom quartile of their section. As subsequent steps of data generation required interviews and observations we decided to reduce the sample into a size manageable to us. In other words, we purposively sampled only 20 reluctant students out of 60. We tried to identify four students from each of the five sections, so that each section would be represented randomly. The representation of male and female students was fairly balanced as there were 12 females and 8 males. In terms of diversity of backgrounds, the participants constitute 7 different language backgrounds.

Five instructors were included in the research subjects group, not as principal data sources but as actors who could provide important insights to understanding reluctance behaviour of students. The instructors included 1 female and 4 males who were purposively selected from among 30 instructors in the Department of Foreign Language and Literature at Wolaita Sodo University. The subjects were selected for their range of experience (between 7 and 23 years) and qualifications (3 MAs and 2 PhDs) as well as their exposure in the teaching of writing courses.

In fulfilment of ethical procedures of research, all participants, namely students and teachers, were informed about the research project. The conduct of the research was approved by the university research offices and chairs of the departments to which the students and instructors belonged.

## **The Investigation**

In agreement with the writing instructors, five weeks of writing lessons were modified in such a way that students would work for portions of the lessons in small groups. The lessons were purposefully redesigned to allow much more student writing engagement rather than listening to extended instructor presentations. The small group writing tasks had engagement components which included brainstorming on idea generation, planning paragraphs, drafting, and revising drafts.

The 20 reluctant students were involved in five-week intensive data generation activities as follows. The in-depth data collection began with classroom observations and document analysis. Group work observations were arranged to make possible the observation of four students at a time as observation of one student at a time was logistically impossible and methodologically counterproductive. Four students in each section were asked to work as a group during small group writing tasks. We, as non-participant observers, sat with them while they were carrying out their group work. Each group was observed five times, one observation each week. Immediately after each observation, the students' note books were collected for document interrogation.

In addition to observations and document analyses, focus group discussions were carried out to explore students' beliefs and self-explanations concerning how and why they engage or disengage, and the accounts they give on common disengagement behaviours observed during group observations. The twenty students from all the five sections were mixed to minimize group think. Four heterogeneous (in terms of gender, degree of being reluctant, section they represent) focus groups were arranged after they agreed on the timing and location of the discussion. We took field notes in addition to the tapes we recorded during all the focus group discussions.

Lastly, we employed one-on-one semi-structured interviews to involve the five writing instructors. The instructors were interviewed on issues relating to students' deliberate disengagement patterns, reasons for disengagement, influences of teachers, and non-classroom factors, such as the wider social, historical, political milieu. For data accuracy, we asked each instructor to read a copy of the transcripts created from the interview tape and to correct any misrepresentations.

We used qualitative data analysis methods, especially following content analysis procedures. First, filed notes from group observations, and writing notebook interrogations were summarized. Second, transcripts of focus group discussions and individual interviews were read. Sections of summaries and near verbatim transcripts were categorized as 'reluctance characterization' and 'reluctance explanation'. Furthermore, the data was given codes to differentiate among the research participants in terms of students, instructors, sections (for group work), and grouping (during focus group discussion). A list of initial relevant reluctance vocabulary (phrases and words) was compiled systematically using codebooks. The initial list of vocabulary which emerged from open coding was further coded, through a procedure which some (e.g. Patton 1990; Strauss & Corbin 1990) call 'data reduction'. Such a procedure gradually gave rise to concepts and categories. The concepts and categories found are the ones we present (in the Findings section) as reluctance behaviours and their manifestations, using two themes, namely 'complete avoidance reluctance' and 'partial avoidance reluctance.'

Finally, in order to find the similarities and differences between the instructors' and learners' perceptions, two sets of data, namely students' focus group discussions and instructors' interviews, were compared. The data analysis constantly involved inherently reflexive engagements with the data which eventually led to recognizing seven shared

themes of the specific characteristics of reluctant writers, five themes proposed by both the instructors and learners and two additional themes expressed by the instructors only as factors attributed to students' writing reluctance. However, we finally found the perceptions reducible into two categories within which all other factors come.

### **Findings of the Study**

The findings of the current study deal with how we finally conceptualized 'writing reluctance', categories of writing reluctance, manifestations of writing reluctance, and the accounts students give on their writing reluctance and teachers accounts on students writing reluctance.

### ***General Reluctance Behaviour***

We begin with the presentation of major findings from the questionnaire results which showed the general characteristics of students' reluctance to write. Reluctance is conceptualized in this study as students' tendency to avoid engagement in teacher-designed and presented writing tasks. It is a deliberate avoidance of cognitive and embodied engagement. To the teachers in this study the term 'reluctant writer' referred to students who do not want to write, who avoid writing and/or who resist having to write when required to by the teacher.

The survey questionnaire used to identify the target reluctant students from the study population support the view of disengagement stated above. A score in the range of 39-99 (The Writing Engagement Motivation scores may range from 39 to 195) was taken as the range in which students with low level of motivation to engage with writing belong (See Appendix). The lower one's score in this range, the more severe his/her reluctance to

write. Low motivation indicators include being resistant about writing and fearful of evaluation. The views they expressed in focus group discussions accord with the findings of the questionnaire. The students identified as ‘reluctant’, unlike the ‘non-reluctant’ ones, expressed their writing experiences and beliefs about writing and themselves as writers; and it was also evident that they hate writing, feel nervous when they have to write, do not try hard in writing tasks, and avoid systematic involvements in writing tasks. They also saw no value or point in the writing tasks they were asked to do.

### *Classification of the Reluctant Students*

The twenty students who were identified through the questionnaire as ‘reluctant’ and who were observed during classroom sessions for their specific reluctance behaviours and whose note books were interrogated could be categorized as students having both complete avoidance and partial avoidance reluctance.

#### Complete avoidance reluctance

Complete avoidance reluctance occurs when students side-step/step-over all the sub tasks in the process. The major manifestations of complete avoidance reluctance include skipping core steps that significantly affect the outcome, procrastination and faking working.

The first major manifestation of complete avoidance reluctance is skipping core steps of writing which is tantamount to not writing at all. Classroom observations consistently showed that the reluctant students had a strong tendency to ignore essential steps of paragraph processing such as the actual text or writing part of the text. Except for a few students, we were able to observe repeatedly that the reluctant students begin drafting

their paragraphs, before collecting necessary information, and end up with some tattered sentences. Such sentences convey little or no meaning.

Avoiding starting writing is the second major manifestation of complete avoidance reluctance. This behaviour of reluctant writers that was noted by the interviewed instructors, as well as the researchers, was that reluctant writers use divergent strategies to procrastinate writing

In the case of reluctant writers; however, there is an extremely high and observable tendency of withdrawing themselves from starting writing tasks. They have actual difficulty with writing and they approach writing tasks in a state of high apprehension that paralyzes their attempt, desire and motivation. They get frustrated and tend to avoid writing completely.

T1: Yeah, they usually start writing after killing much time. They spend much time doing unnecessary things like preparing a page, cutting a piece of paper, underlining the margins...

T2: At the beginning they... sit idle, discuss other issues, and tend to divert others' mind. In my view, these may be their strategies to avoid writing.

T5: They use different pretexts: "I forgot the assignment as we are told to do"

Thus, the foregoing perception of the instructors enables us to deduce that reluctant writers are known to dislike writing and to have a number of strategies to avoid it. Besides, during the non-obtrusive classroom observations, four students (in *C2 and C4*) were noted reading other notes and copying the previous notes of other courses during the writing practices. When they were asked by the classroom instructor, they used pretexts like "*I am thinking about the topic*", "*I am rehearsing what I read for the afternoon exam*"

etc.

The third major manifestation of complete avoidance reluctance is faking work. Explaining characteristic features of reluctant writers in an EFL context, the participants of the interview indicated that developing some strategies of hiding their reluctance is another quality in them. Four of the interviewed instructors revealed that reluctant writers used to shield their reluctance.

T3: Yes, they are tough...sometimes they keep themselves silent within the active involvement of the others. Especially in a class where many are engaged, they copy others' work just as they tend to do in exams.

T5: Yes, such students are concerned to hide their reluctance... They might seem acting a part...as if...they might write something wrong or irrelevant and finally they get surprised when they are told they are wrong.

The classroom observations also affirmed the same truth. During the composing process (in C1), we could see two of the reluctant students simply highlighting their former notes to pretend that they were writing so that the instructor would not be suspicious. The other three were also seen to write a word or phrase then erase it, then write it again and re-erase it. Then, they sit silent and look around or up at the roof, etc as if they were thinking for an idea or planning their work, but were perceived as producing nothing meaningful at the end. These seem to be the various strategies they use to mask their repugnance to and ignorance of writing.

#### Partial avoidance reluctance

Partial avoidance reluctance occurs when students' do some of the sub-tasks, but avoid

doing others during a writing engagement. These include avoidance of any of the tasks designated as relevant phases in the text composition process, such as brainstorming, planning, drafting, and rewriting.

Evidence from classroom observations supports students' easy withdrawal from a process writing paragraph. Almost all students spent only a few minutes to brainstorm on given topics to gather relevant ideas and information for their texts. They did not exhaustively list major points and specifics to be developed in their texts. When they were given information to develop their paragraphs from, they ignored the essential process of planning or outlining the information into a pattern. Another significant partial avoidance type observed was the sidestepping of the rewriting process. On some occasions, when the instructor insisted on them editing and revising completely drafted paragraphs, they would quickly look at their drafts and ignored everything as if the drafts had no errors. In general, the tendency to seek short cut completions of the writing task was consistently and pervasively present among the students.

The accounts given both by the reluctant students, during focus group discussions, and instructors, during interviews, point to lack of persistence and positive belief about the process of writing. To begin with the students' own accounts, we quote a student:

L5: ...it is really painful to spend time and time again to write a paragraph. It makes no difference drafting and writing the draft again. Why simply write it out...just simply write the paragraph. Then start writing another paragraph...I have no patience to wait for two or three periods to finish a paragraph.

The instructors' accounts did not significantly depart from the students' own accounts. Two reasons stated by the instructors are lack of interest and impatience.

T4: I really found that reluctant students are not interested to write even their first draft leave alone to go through the other steps. Most of the time, they go to the final step. But, their work is full of grammar, punctuation, spelling, idea coherence errors. You can't make sense out of what they write.

T5: This is common. Students, I can say, do not like to persist. They are impatient. They simply jot down something on a paper and stop there. If they go through the steps properly, you could see the results on their paper.

Sidestepping of an important element of the writing process subtasks was aggravated by students' off-task behaviours and unwillingness to cooperate with their group members. The instructors' interviewed consistently mentioned the phenomenon of off-task behaviour--about the reluctant students' frequent distractions from the given writing practices. The common expression used by the instructors were 'boredom', 'looking disturbed and anxious', 'asking irrelevant questions', and 'dead silence'.

T2: Yes, they seem to be bored off. Some students, you can see them, they struggle with writing. Just sit silent there or starts doodling, - drawing pictures and otherwise avoid putting pen to paper.

T5: What I could observe about such students is em... they feel no comfort. Gaze out of the window, talk with friends. Yeah, highly terrified when I come nearer to help them.

Usually, they look disturbed; even they distract others by asking unnecessary questions. Some say "May I use Amharic (vernaculars)?"

One of the instructors also explained that many reluctant writers drew attention to their reluctance through making statements that expressed these feelings like "the topic is boring", or "I don't know what to write." Some of the instructors also indicated that these behaviours have become issues of classroom management.

The second most frequently mentioned behaviour of reluctant writers was that such

students seem to quite lack personal initiative to cooperate in group activities. Unwillingness to share their work with their colleagues was also revealed as the trait of reluctant writers.

T1: Most of the reluctant students like to be in a group having large number of students. Yeah, I think they want to hide themselves silent in group. Physically they join a certain group, only because you made them to, but mentally they are inactive; ..... they contribute nothing.

T3: They don't want to show their work to others, I think they fear their work will look stupid.

The other feature that the instructors reported about reluctant writers was poor quality of writing produced by them. Almost all of the instructors described that reluctant students are known for their carelessly written products.

T3: The student who is reluctant to write and stops and starts all the time – their writing is always poor. The lack of quality is shown on things like simple, repetitive sentences structures, and linear ‘and then, and then’ narratives.

T5: ... they won't commit themselves to detail. Their language is often sparse and they don't play around with language in an interesting way.

The analysis of exercise books and written assignment papers of the reluctant students also asserted this fact. One could not make sense out of the class work or assignment papers of such students. They were very poor, sometimes containing nothing at all. Three of the instructors reported that, to some extent, the reluctance and quality of writing depended on the task and the type of writing the students were being asked to do. The instructors in this study felt that argumentative writing was the type of writing that

students were most reluctant to write. Further research would help determine the relationship between the type of writing, the quality of writing and students' reluctance to write.

The major findings with regard to the two types of reluctance to write can be explained in many ways. Firstly, reluctant writers exhibit passive and maladaptive cognitive and behavioural engagement which includes lack of self-regulation, effort and persistence. They show a lack of goal-setting and planning or revising and any that they do undertake is likely to be superficial at best. This seems to agree with the literature in recent studies like Bruning & Horn (2006), in Hawthorne (2008: 26) says, "Reluctant writers are students who fail to persistently and patiently practice writing skills". Besides, Young (1999) states that seeking for short-cut completion is one of the avoidance tactics that students who hate writing use. . Many, of course, agreed on the 'painful nature' of writing even for professional writers; and the concept of 'writing blocks' (Young,1999) has got the attention of a handful of researchers. Such 'blocks' can be common for both 'reluctant' and 'non-reluctant' writers.

In relation to the way reluctant writers behave during writing activities which demand group work strategies, almost all of the respondents expressed the idea that such students seem to be quite uncooperative and disengaged. The instructors' response indicated that reluctant writers are not willing to have their work proofread by someone like a colleague or a teacher in order to make the necessary amendments or sometimes to add an important point. According to Zamel (1987), however, good writers are those who give their work to be proofread by someone else, take comments and work accordingly to improve the quality of their work. Reluctant writers lack these characteristics.

The findings of the researchers' observations seem to be substantial. A handful of

students during the group discussions made in the pre-writing sessions were sitting silent and inactive; neither producing ideas nor taking notes which would help them in the later organization of their paragraphs. This seems to agree with what Buis (2007) suggests, “In extreme cases, reluctant writers present themselves as uncooperative... More often they appear withdrawn, sleepy, bored, or indifferent” (p. 6). Thus, since these students do not brainstorm before they start to write, it is often noticed that they are not confident enough to start writing.

### ***Teachers’ and Students’ Perceptions of Reluctance Factors***

The third research question was aimed at exploring instructors’ and students’ perceived factors operating as powerful deterrents to committed engagements; and self-motivated versus process-oriented student initiatives in the course of writing tasks. We present two divergent student and instructor perceptions of reluctance factors. However, as the concept of reluctance is pervaded with ambiguity, teachers and students could have confused it with writing incompetence we are revealing this conceptualization limitation as part of our effort to demonstrate reflexive critique, following Winle (1996) who suggests becoming aware of one’s own perceptual biases and inability to get messages across exactly. Despite our efforts to use concrete and alternative expressions, both teachers and students repeatedly stuck to the idea of lack of proficiency or some deficiency to write. It is important though to interpret the findings reflexively by taking into account the possibility of the influence of such unintended nuances.

#### **Teachers’ Perceptions**

The most salient teacher perceptions can be summarized as ‘blame the student’. There

were four dominant themes which emerged from the interviews as regards the factors affecting student's engagement in writing tasks. These were student's extreme lack of grammatical knowledge, inexpressiveness owing to the lack of minimum vocabulary repertoire, unfavourable predispositions and attitudes they come with to the writing classrooms.

The most recurrent accounts provided by instructors' attribute reluctance behaviour to linguistic deficiencies. The teachers emphasized that a great number of their students had not come to their classes with the level of English grammar knowledge which enables basic sentence constructions and word ordering.

T1: In my opinion, many students lack knowledge of grammar and selecting appropriate word to express their idea, you see, such students. I also feel that they lack knowledge of using proper punctuation. Any text creation requires a reasonable knowledge of English grammar. How could a student think of a paragraph without even knowing how to order words?

T4: I think the main root of our students' reluctance to attempt writing is they are not grammatically competent. They also seem to fear that they commit spelling errors.

L5: I can't produce good idea to write ... English language is really the most difficult subject I can say...

Apart from grammar knowledge, the instructors pointed to students' limited knowledge of words, such as correct spelling of commonly used words. According to the instructors, students who struggle with spelling often become frustrated when attempting to express their ideas in writing. Their responses revealed that some students may have difficulty thinking of the appropriate words or expressions they want to use while writing. Thus, the

less knowledge the students have on each sub skill, the more challenging and frustrating it will be for them to start writing. The next most commonly expressed extra-classroom influences contributing to reluctance were family background and exposure to reading or writing out of the classroom. Some of the instructors also felt that this has linkage with the socio-economic status and linguistic background of the family. Two instructors also commented that the availability of easily accessible media like video games, TV, and radio as having an impact on students' apathetic behaviour towards writing. They felt that, because these forms used mainly spoken language, students were reading less and thus were becoming less and less familiar with written language.

The teachers reasoning had some currency when viewed from theoretical perspectives. There are many sub skills involved in the writing task and it is important for students to be able to use each of these automatically as possible. Indeed, the process of writing is a complex activity and requires a juggling and coordination of many skills at the same time. If students lack the prior preparedness to deal with such a complexity, for example because of lack of pre-requisite grammar knowledge, they hardly process any text (Terrible, 1996: p. 19). In addition to all the hardships that writing creates, students also experience the difficulty of "how to say it" (Silva, 1993). In other words, many students are often frustrated at having ideas, but not being able to find the L2 forms for expressing them, of knowing what to say, but not how to say it. Silva contends that many students tend to give up on expressing their ideas through writing from their feeling that what they have written 'does not truly express their thought. This seems to agree with the acknowledgements in the literature. If students have no experience of literature, or different transactional writing genres, from home and family, then they are going to find having to read or write in these genres very difficult (Wittrock, 1989).

## Students' Perceptions

Like teachers perceptions, students' perceptions could be summarized as a blame game—students blame their teachers for their tendency to prefer deliberate disengagements or partial disengagements. In this study it was found that reluctant writers were considerably more likely to lay blame on how teacher factors influenced their engagement. The most frequently expressed factors by reluctant student writers were barriers related with English teachers. The students in the focus group discussion associated their reluctance with teacher factors.

L4: Explain things properly. Don't just make us write it down as if we know everything to do.

L13: My teacher doesn't like my writing... I hate writing course because of my teacher's offending feedback and bad grades at the end.

L20: My teachers didn't read and check my works ... so why do I suffer for something that my teacher doesn't give as such serious attention.

T2: I feel many English language teachers are incapable to enlighten writing tasks and these procedures properly... Some teachers just explain it, to the point where they think that they've done enough explaining.... and then they look at the students like the students should know everything. ....we instructors, though not all, are reluctant to read and check students' papers.

Students who took part in the focus group discussions thought that many of the English teachers fail to explain the procedures, use humiliating comments, emphasize their weakness rather than their strengths. They particularly emphasised how teachers' treatment of their students lead to students' low self-esteem. They reiterated how experiencing failure, or believing that they would fail was an important factor in

hindering their engagement with writing.

L1: ... I hate knowing how dumb I am. Like being in a low class I just feel shit and don't want to do any work.

L9: My high school teacher always told me I was never any good at writing and always believed that I would be no good in universities.

L17: I have already poor foundation and my teacher could not help me anything. Therefore, I am hopeless about writing courses. I know I can't bring good any more.

The other significant theme to come through the focus group discussions was the importance of interest in a topic and the perceived relevance that the students felt about the writing activities that they were asked to complete. The students assumed lack of interest in a topic and its perceived relevance to them is the significant factor influencing their engagement with writing.

L2: The more you write about something that you don't want to write about, the more you hate writing and don't want to do it.

L20: There is just nothing of interest; it is just a waste of time if you don't like it.

L6: I quite like writing my opinion about real life.

L9: In my opinion, almost all people just cannot bother. The topics not interested or they just don't like writing.

During the analysis, of course, it may have sometimes been difficult to place some of the participants' (particularly the students' in the focus group discussions) ideas reliably into one of the themes identified here. This is may be due to their wording. For example,

some of these items were responses like (e.g. “I often don’t finish writing tasks because I am thinking of other things”, and “It’s easier for me to write short answers than long answers to questions”).

The finding would support the general theory and literature acknowledging the importance of teacher factors in the motivation or reluctance of students to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Orpen, 1994; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990, Wigfield, 1997). The results also suggest that reluctant students, contrary to their instructors’ feelings, may be more aware about their beliefs in themselves as writers, (and whether or not they feel good about themselves as writers, or expect to do poorly in writing tasks) which has a potential importance in determining their level of engagement with writing tasks. Reluctant writers, somewhere along the way, lose heart and are self-convinced that they would never come back again and acquire the required skills so as to rebuild any solid foundation about writing (Anderson, 2009; Buis, 2007). Lastly, the lack of interest students revealed, which indirectly points to teachers’ failure to design motivating and interesting tasks, is consistent with what the literature presents in relation to the significance of stimulating inputs in task designs (Benton et al., 1995; Hidi et al., 2002).

#### Teachers’ and Instructors’ Shared Perceptions

Despite the diverging perceptions students and teachers held as regards reluctance factors, a comparison of data sets suggest to converging perceptions. The most notable convergence was in their perceptions of the topics or issues teachers select for student writing in the classrooms.

L8: (Writing about) love, or a holiday or something is alright. If you know what you are saying and doing, you can write it.

L12: Some writing activities seem to be valueless to me...

T1: How can a student generate ideas if the topic to write is unfamiliar to him/ her?

T5: I tested it; students are motivated to write on topics of their field of specialization areas.....

Both the instructors and students believed that being required to write about topics on which they have no background knowledge has a negative impact on how motivated the students are to attempt the tasks. This suggests that, for reluctant writers, much of their reluctance may arise from a feeling that they do not know what to do for a task, or how to approach a task and that they do not know what to write about in terms of content.

Another area of convergence was that the classroom methodology used might sometimes fail to cater for individual styles of engagement. These might include working at home or school, working alone or collaboratively, classroom atmosphere, disruptive students in class, time given to the writing task, and time of day in which they were asked to complete writing tasks.

L2: If I want to work, I sometimes have to separate myself from the talkers, so I won't be distracted.

L11: Many students in our classes won't listen to the instructors, particularly during group activities. We just talk anyway....

L9: I just prefer to do (my essays) at home.

T3: Some tasks could demand more time for students to complete. I think it very

much depends on the time you give to the writing tasks. Students seem to despair and stop trying if they feel that the time given is too short to complete a task.

T4: I don't know maybe other students should be there in class or group to help them. They can get others' ideas about what they are writing.

Largely in agreement with the findings of some recent research on the learner and teacher perceptions of factors attributed to students' writing reluctance (e.g. Hawthorne, 2008), these findings suggest that the instructors' and the learners' perceptions, to a great extent, diverge. The first difference between the two groups was that the instructors placed more stress on linguistic deficiencies that may stop reluctant writers' effort, while learners expressed less concern about such difficulties. This might be due to the fact that the instructors are generally more concerned with their learners' poor linguistic proficiencies and more aware of their learning process. It is also possible to argue that learners may not know how far removed their performance is from the target performance, or from the performance that they are expected to have (Scales, Wennerstorm, Richard & Wu, 2006). Secondly, the instructors discussed a number of other extra classroom factors attributed with students' writing reluctance, e.g. family background, and reading and writing culture out of the classroom, which learners did not reflect on. Such considerations by instructors may imply that they are taking a more in-depth perspective to evaluating writing reluctance in general and the roots for writing reluctance in particular.

Generally, the findings of this study would support the general theory and literature acknowledged about factors that put impact on students' reluctance to write. What the interviews and focus group discussions reinforced was the degree of complexity behind the reasons for reluctance to write and the variety of perceptions the instructors and

students have about factors which affect students' engagement with writing. The instructors' and students' comments about factors that significantly impact on students' reluctance to write support the aspects outlined in the *Model of Reluctance to Write* suggested in Figure 1.1. Specifically, the comments all support the importance that: (1) negative feelings/affect about writing and self as a writer, (2) lack of cognitive skill or knowledge of writing and (3) teachers' behaviors and feedback have on students' reluctance to write. The study findings also support one of the main ideas, illustrated in the *Model of Reluctance to Write*, which is that complex interactions occur between social/cultural factors, task environment factors and teacher factors and the three different aspects of motivation to write which affect students' levels of reluctance with writing.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There are two limitations which might have potentially affected the findings of this study. One limitation of this study was the highly probable inadequate conceptualization of reluctance by the research subjects which could affect the quality of data obtained through the focus group discussions and interviews. Second, studying students' reluctant nature is technically difficult because of the diverse subjective behaviors that students could exhibit in the context of the writing classroom. Besides, many reluctant writers, no longer wishing to be known as failures, hide their reluctance by wearing different masks. They become more concerned about shielding themselves, especially when they know that they are being observed. Despite the disadvantages of non-participant observation, we had to sit among students to capture students' behaviors as fully and richly as possible. We had no better methods at our disposal to capture students' emotions, verbal and non verbal exchanges, and turn-taking moves.

The most important conclusions to be drawn from the study are the presence of writing reluctance in writing classes in Wolaytita Sodo University. As Wolaytta is largely a macrocosm of the university conditions in Ethiopia, the conclusion is highly likely to apply to the writing classes of other Ethiopian universities. As this research reveals, writing classrooms are not the ideal places where we can expect every student to write willingly and well.

The results of this study seem to reveal that the willingness and desire to engage persistently, rigorously and painstakingly was unfortunately lower than what we normally expect from our students. At university level, where a number of writing courses are given to students, we need to support reluctant writers and challenge them to take risks and acquire the energy to engage in period after period to complete writing tasks. The findings of this study have far reaching implications on writing instructors in general and English writing instructors in particular. The most important implication, however, is for designing writing tasks and adopting classroom procedures. It is evident from the findings that care must be taken to cater for the engagement tendencies and patterns of both the reluctant and non-reluctant students. At the same time, it would be essential to periodically bring into writing classrooms inputs and materials that gradually enhance students' self-motivations, acceptance of rigorous procedures, and persistence during writing tasks.

We do not have to blame them for lack of the learning skills and self motivation to persist through lengthy and painful writing tasks... Rather, we can build on their strengths and teach them what it takes to be engaged writers. If they do not write willingly and well, instead of giving up on them or feeling sorry for ourselves, we can take a deep, hard look at what to do. We can begin this by changing their attitude, for example. It is our

contention that instructors must always keep on trying to understand their students to be able to address idiosyncratic patterns as well as dominant tendencies.

### **End note**

1. The questionnaires were developed by Hawthorne as part of an ongoing evaluation project at schools in New Zealand specifically for measuring the level of students' engagement with writing and identify the students as 'reluctant' and 'engaged'. Some modifications, of course, were made on the original *SMEW* questionnaire so that it would fit to the context of university students in Ethiopia.
2. The instructors are referred to as *T<sub>n</sub>* and the students as *L<sub>n</sub>*, *n* having no significance rather than the order in which they were interviewed, and coded in the focus groups respectively.

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## **Appendix I: Survey of Motivation to Engage with Writing**

The *Survey of Motivation to Engage in Writing* (SMEW) used for this study was used to identify the group of 'reluctant' writers. To do this the total scores from the questionnaire were obtained. Students whose scores placed them in the bottom triple of respondents (n = 60) were labeled as 'reluctant'. The questionnaire includes 39 items that cover three main conceptual categories linked to motivation to engage with writing, i.e., self-beliefs, regulation and affect. The students were required to rate the items of each subscale on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 to 5. Items on each scale were anchored at 1 = "Strongly Disagree" 3 = "Unsure," and 5 = "Strongly Agree". Few modifications were made with the original version of SWEM questionnaire. The word 'kids', for example, in the original version at questions # 13, 21, 27 was substituted by a word 'students' feeling that the former word would not fit to the teenagers at university level. Second, question #24 was avoided from the list for it was felt that such a question asks for practice which is inapplicable to Ethiopian undergraduate students.

## **Appendix II: How Students' Scores Were Calculated and Read**

To determine each individual's scores, first, all point values were added together. Then the following general observations were made about scores in certain ranges, and only general observations, but note that the further a score is from the mean of 117, the more likely the description of a range of scores would apply. The Writing Engagement Motivation scores may range from 39 to 195.

Range 100-134:

Most students (n=118) who scored in this range were considered as they did not experience a significantly unusually level of writing disengagement. However, it was the authors' belief that the closer the score to the limits of this range—that is, scores closer to 100 and 134—the more apt one is to experience characteristics of the next range of scores. A score of 117 was supposed to place one as a writer on the mean, which is the middle point between two extremes, or conditions recorded in a large sample of students.

Range 135-195:

A score in this range was considered that one had high level of motivation to writing engagement. Thus, these students (n=79) whose scores for the questionnaire in this range (M= 160.30, SD= 14.84) were grouped as 'non-reluctant' and they were not the focal subjects of the study.

Range 39-99:

A score in this range was taken as one had a poor level of motivation to engage with writing. The lower one's score in this range, the more severe his/her reluctance to write. One is resistant about writing and fearful of evaluation. Thus, these students (N=60) who scored with in this range (M= 42.53, SD=17.93) were grouped as 'reluctant' to write. These were the target population of the study among which the participants for focus group discussion were selected.

**The Dynamic Nature of Learner Beliefs: The Relationship  
between Beliefs about EFL Learning and Proficiency  
in a Chinese Context**

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**Abstract**

Notwithstanding a number of studies on L2 learner beliefs, there has been insufficient attention to how this individual difference (ID) variable is related to second language development. Also, there has been a call to adopt a dynamic approach to the role of individual difference variables in SLA, that is, conducting ID research in situational and cultural contexts (Dörnyei, 2009; Li, 2005). This study investigates the relationship between EFL learners' beliefs about language learning and proficiency in a Chinese

context. The participants were a hundred and forty-two EFL students from a large Chinese university. Three instruments were used: questionnaire, test, and interview. The data collected through the questionnaire were subjected to a factor analysis that generated six factors, which in turn were used in a multiple regression analysis as predictor variables for proficiency. The multiple regression analysis showed a clear relationship between the factor of self-efficacy and proficiency. The interview data provided further interpretations for such relationship; it also showed that the learners' rejection of the primacy of grammar, vocabulary, and translation and the instrumental motivation they demonstrated were attributable to the idiosyncratic characteristics of this instructional and cultural context.

**Keywords:** Learner beliefs, proficiency, Chinese EFL learners, self-efficacy, the BALLI

## **Introduction**

Learner beliefs, also known as metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1999), refer to what learners believe about knowledge and learning. Beliefs about language learning were found to be separate from beliefs about learning in general (Mori, 1999). Learner beliefs constitute an important individual difference variable in L2 learning. Individual differences, according to Dörnyei (2005), explain (at least partly) why some language learners are more successful than others. Ever since its debut in the field of second language acquisition in the mid-1980s, research on learner beliefs has attracted much attention. However, there has been a lack of research on the beliefs of L2 English learners from mainland China (see Li, 2005 for a comprehensive review), which has one of the largest EFL populations in the world. Furthermore, most of the related research only investigates learner beliefs per se and there has been a dearth of attention to how learner beliefs relate to language proficiency. This study aims to investigate Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about English learning and their relation to proficiency.

## **Review of the Literature**

Language learning is a complex process and is subject to a variety of factors. Whereas the ultimate attainment in first language acquisition is the same for all learners barring cognitive or mental disabilities, second language acquisition shows varied outcomes. It has been demonstrated that the varied outcomes and rates of SLA are caused by learner-external factors such as the type of available input and learner-internal factors such as individual differences in motivation, anxiety, strategy use, aptitude, personality, and learner beliefs (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2008). Research has shown that L2 learners have different beliefs as to how a second language should be learned, and these beliefs are likely to affect the learning process and outcome (see Horwitz (1999) for a full review).

Research into L2 learner beliefs has mushroomed ever since Horwitz's creation of the "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI), a 34-item questionnaire tapping into five dimensions of how L2 learners perceive language learning: nature of language learning, difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations. The creation of the questionnaire enabled subsequent researchers to investigate L2 learner beliefs in different instructional and cultural contexts, and the studies which used the BALLI as the survey instrument are collectively called the "BALLI studies" (e.g., Horwitz, 1988; Yang, 1992; Truitt, 1995; Park, 1995; Oh, 1996; Samimy & Lee, 1997). Horwitz (1999) reviewed some representative BALLI studies and examined learner belief differences across cultural groups.

Although Horwitz was unable to find significant differences across different cultural groups, it should not be taken as evidence for the absence of cross-cultural differences in learner beliefs. As Horwitz (1999) acknowledged, the learners in the included studies

received different types of instructions and were different in age, proficiency, target language, etc. These factors, together with culture, have a combined impact on the formation and development of learner beliefs. It is difficult to tease out the unique contribution of culture without holding other variables constant. In fact, one critical change ID research has been undergoing is its departure from the traditional treatment of IDs as static traits. ID factors are not “context-independent and absolute” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 218); they are dynamic and interact with contexts. While research on the interaction between context and other ID variables such as aptitude has been undertaken and has yielded interesting findings, a research agenda should be set up for studies examining the effect of culture on learner beliefs. This study situates learner beliefs in a Chinese context, investigating what learners in this unique instructional and cultural setting embrace about EFL learning.

Learner beliefs have been approached from different perspectives in previous studies. Yang (1999) and Park (1995) explored the relationship between learner beliefs and strategy use (1999); Peacock (1995, 1998) and Kern (1995) compared teacher beliefs with student beliefs; Loewen et al. (2009) and Schulz (1996, 2001) examined beliefs about error correction and grammar instruction. These studies have revealed interesting findings, and their contribution to learner belief research is significant. However, one crucial aspect that needs immediate and further investigation is the relationship between learner beliefs and learners’ second language development or proficiency. It is without doubt that any finding related to the effect of learner beliefs on L2 proficiency is of academic and pedagogical value to L2 researchers and educators.

To date, there have been only a few studies that dealt with the relation of learner beliefs to language proficiency (Peacock, 1999, 2001; Park, 1995; Li, 2005). Peacock (1999)

studied 202 EFL Hong Kong English learners and 45 EFL teachers at the City University of Hong Kong, and the purpose was to determine if teacher-student differences in beliefs about language learning affected proficiency. His instruments included the BALLI questionnaire, a comprehensive proficiency test, a self-rated proficiency sheet, and a semi-structured interview. With respect to the associations between learner beliefs and proficiency, he found that students who endorsed the importance of grammar and who underestimated the difficulty of English were less proficient; students who were more adventurous (or who did not worry about making mistakes) showed higher proficiency. In another study, Peacock (2001) further found that students with the belief that learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of vocabulary were less proficient than those who disagreed.

Another study (unpublished dissertation) that studied the link between learner beliefs and proficiency was by Park (1995), who explored Korean EFL learners' use of language learning strategies and their beliefs about language learning, and delved into the relationships among beliefs, strategy use and L2 proficiency. He found that students' use of language learning strategies, their language learning beliefs, and language proficiency were correlated. He identified four factors underlying the BALLI: motivational beliefs and beliefs about formal English, self-efficacy and beliefs about social interaction, beliefs about learning spoken English, and beliefs about foreign language aptitude. Among the four factors, the factor of self-efficacy and beliefs about social interaction was more related to L2 proficiency.

While the above two BALLI studies attempted to establish connections between learner beliefs in general and learners' overall proficiency, Li's study (2005) focused on Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about rote learning and the relationship between the beliefs and

vocabulary learning. A hundred EFL learners from a large Chinese university partook in the study. They responded to a belief questionnaire, took a vocabulary test, and participated in a semi-structured interview. Statistical and content analyses were performed respectively on the quantitative and interview data. It was found that these learners held very positive beliefs about rote learning, and that memory strategies based on Confucian heritage cultures were positively correlated with the learners' vocabulary scores. Li's study constitutes a good example of situating learner beliefs research within a particular cultural context. A most valuable contribution of the study lies in the integration of the traditional Confucian conceptions of learning with beliefs about L2 learning. Li developed the concept of Active Confucian-Based Memory Strategies that challenge the traditional view about rote learning, which is passive and mechanical in nature.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that there exists a relationship between learner beliefs and L2 achievements. However, it is evident that further empirical research is warranted to verify the preliminary findings. The review of the literature also revealed a lack of research on EFL learners from mainland China. Furthermore, while Li's study, which is about learner beliefs and vocabulary learning, is theoretically and methodologically sound, the two BALLI studies left some questions open. For instance, conducting t-tests on more than 30 separate questionnaire items lacks statistical rigor and may not be the best way to analyze survey data (Peacock, 1999). Park (1995) found correlations belief factors and proficiency. However, without controlling for the correlations for the four factors, it is difficult to know the unique contribution of each factor. In this study, some methodological moves are taken to ensure the robustness of results.

In light of the need for more research into Chinese EFL learners' beliefs and the relationship between learner beliefs and proficiency, the following research questions guide this study:

- 1) What beliefs do Chinese EFL learners have about language learning?
- 2) What relationships exist between Chinese EFL learners' beliefs and their language proficiency?

## **Method**

### *Participants and Instructional Context*

A hundred and forty-two second-year students enrolled in a four-year English Education program at a large teachers university in northern China participated in the study. They were aged between 19 and 24; 96% of them were female and 4% were male. When the data were collected, they were in their fifth semester of the program and had just taken the national proficiency test for English majors (TEM). Prior to their admission to the program, they had at least six years' exposure to English at middle and high school.

The primary mission of the four-year program is to train EFL teachers for secondary schools in their local province. Courses offered include comprehensive English, writing, listening, speaking, EFL pedagogy, culture of English speaking countries, phonetics, linguistics, literature, and translation. Some courses such as listening and speaking are required only in the first two years; other courses such as literature and translation are considered more "advanced" and are therefore required in the curriculum for third- and fourth-year students. The primary teaching approach is the Audiolingual Approach.

### *Instruments*

Three instruments were utilized in this study: a revised and translated version of the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1988) to elicit students' beliefs about learning English (see Appendix A), the national proficiency test for English majors (TEM) to measure language proficiency, and a semi-structured interview to address potential questions that are not answered by the questionnaire and to explore the extent to which the results of the questionnaire match what the students actually believe.

The BALLI questionnaire has thirty-four items eliciting students' beliefs in five areas: difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivation and expectations. The participants were asked to read some statements about language learning and decide if they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements. Instead of generating a single composite score, the BALLI was designed to tap into discrete student conceptions of language learning (Horwitz, 1988). The questionnaire has been widely used in studies about language learners' beliefs. To fit the survey into the instructional context of the study, certain parts of the questionnaire were revised. For instance, "foreign language" was changed into "English" since all participants were L2 English learners. Since the purpose of the study is to investigate the learners' beliefs about language learning, their comprehension of the survey questions should be given priority. The questionnaire was therefore translated into Chinese, the learners' native language.

The national proficiency test<sup>1</sup> is administered every year to all English majors in the country in their fourth semester of college for the purpose of testing their ability to read, understand, and write in English. Administered every year in May, the test started in 1991

and is sponsored by the National Ministry of Education. Because of the authoritativeness of the test, the results are considered as an important indicator of students' English proficiency and are an important part of a student's qualifications.

The interview consisted of ten questions regarding some core beliefs about language learning, such as the importance of grammar and vocabulary learning, the difficulty of the L2, motivation, and so on. The purpose of the interview was to elicit students' beliefs that might not have been reflected in their responses to the questionnaire and to seek for potential interpretation for their responses. The interview was conducted in Chinese.

### ***Data Collection and Method of Analysis***

The survey was administered in five intact classes simultaneously during a regular class meeting. This was done to ensure the independence of answers, which is critical to the reliability of survey results. At the time of data collection, the students were asked to fill out a background questionnaire before responding to the belief questionnaire. The survey lasted about 15 minutes. After the questionnaire was completed, 12 students were selected for an interview, six of whom were high-proficiency learners and six got low scores on the TEM test. The interview with each selected learner lasted about ten minutes; it was audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim.

A factor analysis was conducted on the data generated by the questionnaire to determine the latent variables underlying learner beliefs. In order for the factor analysis to be performed, the respondents' answers to the questionnaire items, which were initially in scales, were transformed into numeric values ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree". After the underlying factors were obtained, descriptive statistics in the form of percentage of agreement, neutral position, and

disagreement were calculated for each item loading on each factor. As with previous BALLI studies (e.g., Yang, 1992; Oh, 1996), when percentages were calculated, the answers of “strongly agree” and “agree” were collapsed into “agree”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree” were combined into “disagree”, and “neither agree nor disagree” was coded as “neutral”. To determine which factors were predictive of proficiency, a multiple regression analysis was performed on the extracted factors and the students’ proficiency scores, with the former serving as independent variables and the latter as the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis is more appropriate than correlation analysis in this study because the former shows the unique portion of variance each belief factor accounts for in proficiency. In the meantime, qualitative data derived from the interview were subjected to a content analysis to complement the quantitative analyses.

## **Results**

The first research question asks about Chinese EFL learners’ beliefs about language learning. The learners’ responses to the BALLI questionnaire were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. The scree test and the “eigenvalue-greater-than-one” rule suggested 13 factors, but only six factors were retained for analysis because it was at this factor that the scree plot started to level off and the subsequent factors started to explain much less variance. Table 1 shows the eigenvalues of the six retained factors, the percent of variance explained by each factor, and the cumulative percent of variance explained by all six factors. As shown, the total amount of variance accounted for was 40.52%.

**Table 1***The Six Factors Generated by the Factor Analysis*

Factor*	Eigenvalue	Percent of Variance	Cumulative Percent of Variance
1	3.65	10.73	10.73
2	2.76	8.13	18.86
3	2.19	6.45	25.32
4	1.89	5.57	30.88
5	1.74	5.11	35.99
6	1.54	4.53	40.52

**Note:** Factor 1: Analytic Learning; Factor 2: Importance of English; Factor 3: Role of Practice; Factor 4: Self-efficacy; Factor 5: Accent and Culture; Factor 6: Practicing with Native Speakers.

Table 2 displays the labels assigned to the obtained factors, the actual items each factor subsumed, the corresponding loadings, and the related communalities. Factor 1 was largely concerned with the constituent elements of language, and thus it was named Analytic Learning. The items on factor 2 involved the importance of English. Factor 3 had to do with the role of practice. The three items on the fourth factor were related to the learners' evaluation of their own ability to learn English, and the factor was therefore named Self-efficacy. Factor 5 contained two items on the importance of accent and culture. Three items fell into factor 6, which was about practicing with native speakers of English.

**Table 2***Rotated Factor Loadings for Language Learning Beliefs*

Item	Questions	Factor Loadings						$h^2$
<i>Factor 1 Analytic Learning</i>		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	
26	Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Chinese.	.69						.72
20	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	.67						.65
16	Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	.61						.57
29	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	.58						.60
<i>Factor 2 Importance of English</i>								
27	If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.		.74					.68
25	Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.		.71					.64
23	If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.		.65					.64
30	Chinese think that it's important to speak English.		.58					.60
<i>Factor 3 Role of Practice</i>								
17	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.			.65				.68
21	It is important to practice English in language laboratories.			.58				.68

13	It's o.k. to guess if I don't know an English word.	.57	.59
<i>Factor 4 Self-efficacy</i>			
15	I have foreign language aptitude.	.72	.74
18	I feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people.	.68	.73
4	English is: 1) a very difficult language; 2) a difficult language; 3) a language of medium difficulty; 4) an easy language; 5) a very easy language.	-.53	.63
<i>Factor 5 Accent and Culture</i>			
7	It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	.79	.71
8	It's necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.	.76	.75
<i>Factor 6 Practicing with Native Speakers</i>			
12	If I heard someone speaking English, I would go up to him or her so that I could practice speaking the language.	.77	.68
34	I like to make friends with people from English speaking countries.	.60	.64
31	I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.	.57	.71

Table 3 presents the response frequency of each questionnaire item under the extracted factors (See Appendix B for the response frequency of each of the 34 items in the questionnaire). Examination of the responses to the questions on the first factor, Analytic Learning, revealed that the majority of the students did not endorse the primacy of

translation, grammar, or vocabulary and that they did not think people who were good at math and science were not good at learning foreign languages. With respect to factor 2, Importance of English, most of the students considered it very important to study English because it would help them find a job. They also held that English was different from other subjects. The three statements on the third factor, Role of Practice, were overwhelmingly supported: the students deemed it important to repeat and practice a lot, and they would make a guess if they did not know an English word. When asked about their self-efficacy in learning English (factor 4), the students provided varied responses. Only 23% felt that they had foreign language aptitude (Item 15), and most of them were either ambiguous (56%) or negative (21%). Half of them felt self-conscious when speaking English in front of other people. When it comes to the difficulty of English, a large percentage of them were neutral (72%), only a small number (8%) perceived it to be difficult, and the rest (20%) thought of it as an easy language. With regard to factor 5, Accent and Culture, nearly all of them approved of the importance of speaking with an excellent accent and the necessity of knowing the target culture in order to have a mastery of the language. In responding to the items on factor 6, Practicing with Native Speakers, the students indicated that they were hesitant (only 10% would do it) to go up and speak English with a native speaker. A fairly large number of them (43%) would make friends with native speakers, and a mere 10% learned English for the purpose of knowing its speakers.

**Table 3**

*Student Responses to Factor Items*

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
	(%)	(%)	(%)
<i>Factor 1 Analytic Learning</i>			
26. Learning English is mostly a matter of translating	1	8	91

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from Chinese.			
20. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	2	19	79
16. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	6	29	65
29. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	8	25	67
<i>Factor 2 Importance of English</i>			
27. If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.	87	11	2
25. Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.	77	12	11
23. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	86	9	5
30. Chinese think that it's important to speak English.	91	7	2
<i>Factor 3 Role of Practice</i>			
17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	90	10	0
21. It is important to practice English in language laboratories.	77	17	6
13. It's o.k. to guess if I don't know an English word.	95	5	0
<i>Factor 4 Self-efficacy</i>			
15. I have foreign language aptitude.	23	56	21
18. I feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people.	50	28	22
4. English is: 1) a very difficult language; 2) a difficult language; 3) a language of medium difficulty; 4) an easy language; 5) a very easy language.	8*	72	20
<i>Factor 5 Accent and Culture</i>			
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	98	1	1

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8. It's necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.	96	4	0
<i>Factor 6 Practicing with Native Speakers</i>			
12. If I heard someone speaking English, I would go up to him or her so that I could practice speaking the language.	10	59	31
34. I like to make friends with people from English speaking countries.	43	49	8
31. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.	10	35	55

**Note:** \*For Item 4, “Agree” means “Difficult”, “Neutral” means “Medium”, and “Disagree” means “Easy”.

To answer the second research question, which asks about the relationship between learner beliefs and proficiency, a multiple regression analysis was performed on the factor scores derived from the factor analysis and the students' TEM scores. The obtained results reveal (Table 4) that only factor 4, Self-efficacy, accounted for a significant amount of variance in proficiency,  $F(1,140) = 6.43, p < 0.05$ . The R squared value is .044, which means 4.4% of the variance in proficiency was explained by Self-efficacy.

**Table 4**

*Multiple Regression Results: ANOVA*

Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Standard Error	p
Self-efficacy	.044	6.43	7.76	.012

Table 5 shows that the coefficients for the intercept,  $t(1, 140) = 95.77, p < 0.05$ , and for the predictor,  $t(1, 140) = 2.54, p < 0.05$ , are both significant. The coefficient for the

intercept is 62.38, which is the value obtained when the predictor value is zero. The coefficient for the predictor is 1.67, which means that one unit increase in self-efficacy would lead to 1.67 units higher in the predicted proficiency score.

**Table 5**

*Multiple Regression Results: Coefficients*

Variable	Coefficients	t	p
Intercept	62.38	95.77	.00
Self-efficacy	1.67	2.54	.01

## **Discussion**

The primary purpose of the study is to explore what Chinese EFL learners believe about language learning and whether L2 learner beliefs are related to their language proficiency. In order to ascertain the latent factors underlying the students' language learning beliefs as reflected through their responses to the BALLI questionnaire, a factor analysis was conducted and six factors were extracted, which were labeled Analytic Learning, Importance of English, Role of Practice, Self-efficacy, Accent and Culture, and Practicing with Native Speakers. Subsequently, a multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which belief factors were predictive of the students' language proficiency. It was found that only the factor of self-efficacy was a significant predictor.

The findings of the factor analysis are largely consistent with Yang's (1999) and Park's (1995) findings based on their factor analyses. The items loading on factor 1, Analytic Learning, and factor 4, Self-efficacy, in this study, also loaded on similar factors in their

studies, although the related factors in their studies were named differently. The consistency between this study and the two studies in question regarding the clustering pattern of the BALLI items about analytic learning and self-efficacy, therefore, point to the validity of these items in investigating L2 learner beliefs. Despite the considerable consistency between the findings of this study and those of previous studies, some differences do exist. For instance, whereas in this study the factor about analytical learning includes four items, the corresponding factor in Yang's study had 7 items. Also, in Park's study, the factor about self-efficacy also included items about social interaction; therefore, the likelihood of the included items convening under the factor by chance cannot be excluded.

A related problem with factor analysis is that while the majority of the items that cluster under their respective factors tapped into the same constructs, seemingly unrelated items might assemble around the same factor. For instance, the two items included in factor 5, which are about the importance of accent and culture respectively, do not appear to be interrelated. However, on second examination, the clustering pattern is not unreasonable. This is because it is not difficult to understand that the learners who considered a perfect accent to be of importance also believed that to acquire such an accent, one must be immersed into the target culture and mingle with native speakers. It could also be that the learners who had interest in knowing the target culture believed that one must have a perfect accent so as to communicate better with the speakers of the language and know more about their culture.

The finding that self-efficacy is the only predictor of the learners' proficiency scores suggests that the students with more positive images about themselves tended to have higher achievements; likewise, those who had negative perceptions about themselves

were likely to achieve less. As illustrated by the following excerpts from the interview, ML, who did very well in the test, was confident about her language talent; in contrast, FH, whose performance was not satisfactory, did not think she possessed the talent to learn a foreign language.

#### Excerpt 1

[Language] Talent is important to some extent. I may have some talent. When I do homework, I have a kind of feeling, which makes me get the correct answer even though I don't understand why. [ML]

#### Excerpt 2

I am not sure whether talent is important to language learning. It's important if you want to do really well; if you don't have very high expectations, talent is not important. I feel I don't have talent. ...it seems that I don't have much foreign language talent. [FH]

The association between self-efficacy and academic achievement has been well documented in L1 research. For instance, Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of 36 studies published between 1977 and 1988 on the relation of self-efficacy beliefs to academic outcomes and found that self-efficacy accounted for approximately 14% of the variance in students' academic performance. As Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006) noted, students' beliefs of self-efficacy affect their academic performance in many ways: Students with high self-efficacy are more willing to take academic challenges and expend efforts, show more persistence and perseverance, have less anxiety, and are better at self-regulating than other students.

The positive relationship between self-efficacy and L2 learning in particular has also

been established in previous research. Similar to the finding of this study, Park (1995) found that among the four extracted factors based on the BALLI survey in his study, the factor of self-efficacy and beliefs about social interaction was more related to L2 proficiency. Mills et al. (2006) examined the relationship between L2 French learners' self-efficacy, anxiety, and proficiency, and found a positive relationship between the learners' self-efficacy and their French proficiency in listening and reading. The positive link between self-efficacy and L2 achievements was also obtained by Magogwe and Oliver (2007). Furthermore, self-efficacy was found to be correlated with other aspects of learning such as strategy use (Young, 1999) and classroom performance (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004), which might also contribute to proficiency (Green & Oxford, 1995). In short, this study built on previous research in unearthing the association between self-efficacy and L2 learning.

Next, the discussion centers on some striking findings concerning the students' responses to some discrete BALLI questions that loaded on the generated factors. First, a very clear pattern emerged from the learners' responses to the three items on factor 1 regarding the nature of language learning: Most students objected to the primacy of translation, grammar, or vocabulary in learning English. The response patterns to these core beliefs differ considerably from those of the previous BALLI studies as reviewed by Horwitz (1999). While most BALLI studies showed that EFL learners did not endorse the primacy of grammar in language learning, they considered vocabulary and translation as the most important. The students' opposition to giving priority to any of the three aspects of language learning may be attributable to the type of instruction they had previously been exposed to and to the curriculum of the current program. Prior to their admission to this program, most of the students had experienced a heavily grammar-oriented

curriculum in high school which laid emphasis on the mastery of rules and memorization of vocabulary to enhance the ability to read and translate. However, the focus of the current curriculum was on the enhancement of the students' competence in all language skills because they were English majors and prospective English teachers in secondary schools. Grammar, vocabulary, or translation was therefore no longer prioritized. The following remarks by WH, one of the interviewees, illustrate the above point:

#### Excerpt 3

Grammar is more important at high school than at college. We already learned the basic grammar at high school, so now we pay more attention to skills like writing, speaking, reading, and listening. [WH]

The fact that the learners dismissed the primacy of the three aspects of language learning, however, should not be taken as evidence that they thought of them as unimportant. In fact, nearly all of the interviewees stated that grammar, translation, and vocabulary were important in learning English although they did not consider those aspects to be the most important when responding to the questionnaire. This is shown in the following excerpts:

#### Excerpt 4

Translation is important. Many jobs involve translating between Chinese and English. When communicating with foreigners, you have to translate what they say into Chinese. [TR]

#### Excerpt 5

Grammar is very important. It's not the most important but it is relatively important. If you want yourself to be understood, you have to follow rules. If you know grammar rules, you would learn faster. [AY]

#### Excerpt 6

Vocabulary is a foundation. Although a large vocabulary does not equal good English, you can't be a good learner if you don't know a lot of vocabulary. It's very important to expand one's vocabulary. [CK]

In contrast with the overall negative attitude toward the statements in factor 1, analytical learning, the learners' responses to the items in factor 2, the importance of English, were overwhelmingly positive. Eighty-seven percent of them agreed that their motivation for learning the target language was to get a good job. The instrumental motivation was also found in previous studies targeting EFL populations (e.g., Yang, 1992; Kunt, 1997), which contrasts with American foreign language learners (of German, French, etc.) whose motivation is more integrative (Kern, 1995; Horwitz, 1998). Regardless, the finding empirically testifies the importance attached to English in this country and reflects the national momentum for EFL learning. Indeed, high English competence is often a required qualification for employment and is always considered an advantage in professional competition. Clearly this is proof for the impact of social factors on the formation of learner beliefs.

The follow-up interview showed a somewhat unexpected finding about the learners' motivation. While almost all the interviewees claimed that they chose English as their major because it would increase the likelihood of finding a better job, those with lower

proficiency stated that they had no interest in English, and what motivated their choice of English as their major was only job consideration, as shown in Excerpt 7; however, those with higher proficiency indicated that, in addition to the expectation to find a better job, they were also interested in English (Excerpt 8):

#### Excerpt 7

I don't have interest in English. I applied to the program because my family wanted me to. It's easier to find a job. I feel it's very difficult. [CT]

#### Excerpt 8

I chose to major in English because I have strong interest in it. It's beautiful. The second consideration is that it's easier to get a job. [LE]

Interestingly, when responding to the question of what motivated them to study English, most of the interviewees also mentioned the influence of family members on their decision, as illustrated in excerpts 7 (above) and 9.

#### Excerpt 9

I chose to study English because I felt English was very hot. I didn't give much thought to it. My family wanted me to study English, and I followed their advice. [TY]

The above themes reflected in the interview have two implications. First, the students at the lower proficiency level made less achievement in learning probably because of their lack of interest in the target language. They chose to study English mainly because of the prospect of having more or better job opportunities. Second, the students' choice of what area of study to pursue at college was influenced by their families. This could probably

be ascribed to the value the Chinese culture places on the importance of incorporating family members' (especially parents') opinion in major decision-making. The cultural heritage behind this phenomenon can in turn be traced to the Confucian idea of complying with the advice, instructions, or opinions of older members of the family hierarchy.

Finally, the learners' responses to the items on other factors generally agree with what other BALLI studies found: practice was considered critical for language learning; the learners remained neutral about their personal aptitude; they were overwhelmingly positive about the importance of accent; and they were hesitant about approaching native speakers when such opportunities were available.

To sum up, this study identified six factors underlying the learners' responses to the BALLI questionnaire. Among them, the factor of self-efficacy was found to be a significant predictor for learner proficiency. Further examination of the data showed (1) these learners opposed the primacy of grammar, vocabulary, or translation, (2) their motivation for learning English was heavily instrumental, and (3) the formation and development of learner beliefs was affected by contextual and socio-cultural factors.

## **Conclusion**

This study ascertained the relationship between EFL learners' beliefs about language learning and their L2 proficiency in a Chinese context. Specifically, it attempts to answer two research questions: 1) What beliefs do Chinese EFL learners have? (2) How are the beliefs related to L2 achievements? Learner beliefs were elicited by using the BALLI questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with some high and low achievers. Learner proficiency was measured through a national standardized proficiency test.

An exploratory factor analysis performed on the survey data generated six constructs regarding the beliefs of this learner population. It was found that while many of the learners' beliefs were consistent with previous BALLI studies, some were very different. In general, these learners disagreed more strongly with the primacy of grammar, vocabulary and translation. This finding may be attributable to the instructional context where this study was conducted. It is a pre-service teacher training program where communicative competence (fluency, pragmatic competence, strategic competence, etc.) is valued as much as (if not more than) linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, the learners' strong instrumental motivation, together with the finding regarding the amount of parents' involvement in some learners' choice of area of study, demonstrated the influence of socio-cultural factors on learner beliefs.

To investigate the relationship between learner beliefs and proficiency, a multiple regression analysis was conducted where the six belief factors served as independent variables and the learners' test scores as the dependent variable. The factor related to self-efficacy was found to be the only significant predictor for proficiency. In other words, an increase in a learner's self-efficacy would lead to an increase in his/her proficiency scores. The follow-up interview also showed a clear relationship between the learners' self-appraisal and their performance on the proficiency test. Although the amount of variance the factor "self-efficacy" accounted for in proficiency is relatively small, it is significant. Also, considering the fact that other individual difference variables, such as strategy use (Song & Cheng, 2006), anxiety (Horwitz, 2001), learning styles (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003) and so on, also contribute to proficiency, the relative small portion of variance explained by the learner belief factor is justified.

This study has the following strengths. First, it contributes to the theoretical

construction of Dörnyei's ID-Environment (2005, 2006, 2009) hypothesis. As previously discussed, Dörnyei pointed out the fatal flaw of treating individual differences as static traits in traditional ID research. He proposed viewing IDs as dynamic characteristics that are subject to change and that interact with instructional, social, and cultural contexts. This study has provided empirical support for the claim by demonstrating that the learners' language learning beliefs were affected by and interpretable from the institutional dynamics (or requirements) and the traditional Confucian ethics. The identification of IDs as dynamic characteristics is important as it suggests that there is a possibility to change or adjust some affective characteristics such as learner beliefs that may exert a negative influence on learning. It also rationalizes the need for SLA researchers and practitioners to identify learning conditions and settings that suppress a learner's cognitive weaknesses (such as aptitude) or draw on the learner's cognitive strengths (see Robinson (2002) for insights on aptitude-treatment interaction).

Second, it constitutes a timely complement to previous learner belief research. As shown, most previous studies on this topic are descriptive, and there is a lack of research on how learner beliefs are related to proficiency. Some existing studies either have methodological limitations and/or have failed to show a clear picture about the relationship between learner beliefs and proficiency.

The third strength of this study lies in the research methodology. By performing a factor analysis rather than looking at the learners' responses to discrete items (as in some previous studies), the researchers were able to present a clearer and more holistic picture of learner beliefs; by performing a multiple regression analysis rather than using other statistical procedures such as correlation analyses or t-tests, we were able to obtain more robust findings. Furthermore, the results based on the follow-up interview proved to be an

effective complement to the quantitative results; they enabled us to better interpret the learners' beliefs and their relation to proficiency.

Despite the positive findings, this study has the following limitations. First, the proficiency test did not measure speaking, raising the question of whether the association between learner beliefs and proficiency would have been different had speaking been a component of the test. Second, since learner beliefs, like other learner characteristic variables such as motivation, are dynamic and change over time, it is difficult to make conclusive claims based on the results of this study. The third weakness relates to the survey instrument. As Horwitz acknowledged (1999), the BALLI is not intended to provide a composite score, so most BALLI studies only presented frequency counts for each individual item. This makes it difficult to compare results across studies. Also, although the questionnaire was developed based on the recall protocols of ESL educators and students, the underlying constructs were not established through psychometric measures. Certainly, several factor analyses (e.g., Park, 1995) have proven that the instrument has at least some construct validity in that some factors have consistently emerged across studies such as those related with analytic learning and self-efficacy. However, there might be a need to improve the BALLI or develop other, more theory driven, L2 learner belief elicitation instruments.

Future research might conduct studies across different instructional and cultural settings. For instance, it would be interesting to compare English majors with non-English majors in terms of what they believe about language learning and what relationship holds between learner beliefs and proficiency in the two different contexts. In order to obtain a clear picture about cultural influence on learner beliefs, other variables such as age, target language, instructional dynamics must be held constant. Also, it is advisable to include

other learner variables such as strategy, motivation, and anxiety in the survey and explore the unique proportion of variance each variable accounts for in proficiency.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>The test has two versions: one is for second-year English majors, which is the one the participants of this study took, and the other is for fourth-year English majors.

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## **Appendix A**

### **The BALLI Questionnaire\***

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When responding to the questionnaire, the participants were required to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each statement.

1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.
4. English is: 1) a very difficult language; 2) a difficult language; 3) a language of medium difficulty; 4) an easy language; 5) a very easy language.
5. I believe I'll learn to speak English very well.
6. People from my country are good at learning English.
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.
8. It's necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.
10. It's easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
11. It's better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.
12. If I heard someone speaking English, I would go up to him or her so that I could practice speaking the language.
13. It's o.k. to guess if I don't know an English word.
14. If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? 1) less than a year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 3) 5-10 years, 5) You can't learn English in one hour a day.
15. I have foreign language aptitude.
16. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.
17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
18. I feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people.
19. If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them

later on.

20. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.
21. It is important to practice in language laboratories.
22. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.
23. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.
24. It is easier to speak than understand English.
25. Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.
26. Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Chinese.
27. If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.
28. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.
29. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.
30. Chinese think that it's important to speak English.
31. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.
32. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.
33. Everyone can speak English well.
34. I like to make friends with people from English speaking countries.

## **Appendix B**

### **Student Responses to the BALLI Items**

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Items	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	86	9	5
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	78	15	7

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3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	75	15	10
4. English is: 1) a very difficult language; 2) a difficult language; 3) a language of medium difficulty; 4) an easy language; 5) a very easy language.	8*	72	20
5. I believe I'll learn to speak English very well.	86	13	1
6. People from my country are good at learning English.	56	43	1
7. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	98	1	1
8. It's necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.	96	4	0
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	53	25	25
10. It's easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	49	31	20
11. It's better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	62	30	8
12. If I heard someone speaking English, I would go up to him or her so that I could practice speaking the language.	10	59	31
13. It's o.k. to guess if I don't know an English word.	95	5	0
14. If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? 1) less than a year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 4) 5-10 years, 5) You can't learn English in one hour a day.	41	34	25
15. I have foreign language aptitude.	23	56	21
16. Learning English is mostly a matter of leaning a lot of new vocabulary words.	6	29	65
17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	90	10	0
18. I feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people.	50	28	22
19. If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on.	53	17	30

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20. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	2	19	79
21. It is important to practice in language laboratories.	78	17	5
22. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	48	25	27
23. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	86	9	5
24. It is easier to speak than understand English.	30	28	42
25. Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.	77	12	11
26. Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Chinese.	1	8	91
27. If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.	87	11	2
28. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	46	18	36
29. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	8	25	67
30. Chinese think that it's important to speak English.	91	7	2
31. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.	10	35	55
32. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	40	36	24
33. Everyone can speak English well.	78	13	9
34. I like to make friends with people from English speaking countries.	43	49	8

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**Note:** \*For Item 4, “Agree” means “Difficult”, “Neutral” means “Medium”, and “Disagree” means “Easy”.

## **Characteristics and Transformation of Native English Speaker Teachers' Beliefs: A Study of U.S. English Teachers in China**

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### **Bio Data:**

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Dr. Jian Wang is a full professor of teacher education. His research on teacher learning, mentoring, and teaching practice appeared in *Educational Researcher*, *Review of Educational Research*, *Teachers College Record*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Elementary School Journal* and *Journal of Teacher Education* of which he is currently a co-editor.

### **Abstract**

Native English speaker (NES) teachers presumably play a unique role in developing English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners' oral competence. Teachers' beliefs about what and how to teach and how students learn are assumed to strongly influence their teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. Thus, it is worth exploring whether and to what extent NES teachers can develop their beliefs in the EFL context. Drawing on pre- and post-survey and observation data, this study explores the beliefs of 15 American NES teachers teaching oral English at a university in China. It reveals that while many of the beliefs of what and how to teach remained unchanged, their beliefs of how students learn have changed due to their immersion in the Chinese classroom. It also

confirms the claim that NES teachers perceive themselves as judges of accepted English competence and pedagogy.

**Keywords:** American EFL teachers, teachers' beliefs, belief change, Chinese EFL context

## **Introduction**

Under the influence of the global economy, oral English as a communicative competence is becoming an ever more popular goal in many non-English speaking countries. Although non-native English speaker (NNES) teachers are still the dominant force in EFL teaching (Crystal, 2008), NES teachers are often believed to play a unique role in developing students' oral English competence for communicative purposes in non-English speaking countries (Savignon, 1991) because of their natural English competence mostly developed by birth and geography (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Thus, a growing number of NES teachers are invited to teach oral English in EFL contexts. Driven by the same need for students to develop oral English competence and the assumed role that NES teachers can play in helping students develop such competence, the Chinese education system has been putting a great deal of effort into inviting a large number of NES teachers to teach oral English. However, NES teachers' assumed effectiveness in helping Chinese students develop oral English competence does not always match the reality and opinions of their Chinese students (Rao, 2010). Tensions or even conflicts between NES teachers and their Chinese students have been observed by both researchers and practitioners (McKnight, 1994; Orton, 1990; Rao, 2010). Besides the tension identified in the classroom, NES teaching has also been critiqued for other reasons. For example, Phillipson (1992) labeled NES teaching as native speaker fallacy, which only “served the interests of the Center,” i.e., the English speaking countries in the West but

ignored the “flourishing of local pedagogical initiative that could build on local strengths and linguistic realities” (p. 199). Phillipson contended that NES teachers’ advantage is their knowledge of idiomatic expressions, fluency and cultural familiarity. But in terms of developing EFL students’ basic linguistic knowledge, they suffered low evaluations by EFL students (Rao, 2010). These critiques naturally prompt the examination of causes of the tension and conflicts. An understanding of the causes is important in helping improve language planning policy related to NES teacher training and classroom methodology.

From the perspective of teacher education, researchers (Kennedy, 1991b; Pajares, 1992) argued that teachers hold tacit beliefs about what and how to teach and how students learn. The beliefs strongly influence their teaching decisions, practices, and the result of student achievement. These beliefs are usually developed in the specific context of their teaching and through their personal learning and teaching experience in their home countries (Borko, 2004; Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992). When teaching in a new context, two preconditions decide whether teachers will adjust their initial beliefs to the new context. The first is whether they have developed relevant teaching experiences about the new contexts (Richardson, 1996). The second is whether their new teaching contexts help create a conceptual discrepancy in their own belief system (Kennedy, 1991a; Glasersfeld, 1995). In other words, the teacher may find inconsistencies between their initial beliefs and the new instructional context.

Following this line of thinking, a reasonable question can be raised as to whether and to what extent NES teachers can develop new beliefs of English teaching and learning in an unfamiliar foreign teaching context. Presumably, their initial beliefs would affect their teaching practice and possibly cause tensions between themselves and their students. Alternatively, it is also reasonable to assume that NES teachers with more previous EFL-

related teaching experience are more likely to develop beliefs consistent with their new EFL teaching contexts. Therefore a clearer understanding of NES teachers' beliefs may shed light on classroom interaction between NES teachers and EFL learners.

The data for this study come from a pre- and post-survey and class observation of 15 American teachers teaching oral English in a university in a city in central China. In particular, the following specific research questions are examined:

1. What kinds of beliefs of English knowledge, teaching approaches, and EFL students do the American NES teachers bring into this context?
2. What kinds of initial beliefs are changed or modified as a result of teaching in the EFL context and how do such changes happen?
3. What is the relationship between prior and present beliefs in EFL teaching?
4. What is the relationship between the NES teachers' belief and their teaching practice?

### **Theoretical and Empirical Bases**

Two theoretical frameworks guide the design and interpretation of the study. One is the constructivist assumptions of teachers' beliefs and their transformation, which include the following specific ideas. First, teachers hold belief systems about what kind of knowledge to teach, how to teach, and how students learn (Pajares, 1992). Such systems will influence teachers' decision making, and shape their teaching behaviors directly (Tillema, 2000). Second, these beliefs are not only rooted in their personal experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Grimmett & Mackinnon, 1992) but also in second language learning and teaching (Borg, 2009; Freeman, 2002). Third, once established, these beliefs are often resistant to change unless the following two situations are

presented (Kagan, 1992). One is the situation of teaching in which teachers' existing conceptions become problematic, which leads to their conceptual discrepancy that in turn opens the door for them to modify their beliefs (Glaserfeld, 1995; Kennedy, 1991a). The other is the context of teaching in which they can test their own ideas and see alternative ideas in action (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Richardson, 1996). In this study, we examine the characteristics and transformation of American NES teachers' initial beliefs of oral English knowledge, teaching strategies, and Chinese university students learning oral English. We also examine how the role of their prior EFL teaching experiences may shape changes in their belief.

The second theoretical framework is the theory of three concentric circles of English acquisition (Kachru, 1985). The theory suggests that English acquisition can occur in the inner, outer, and expanding circles. In the inner circle, learners develop their English competence as their mother tongue, e.g., native English speakers in the US, UK, and Australia. In the outer circle, learners acquire English as a foreign language but in the context where English is used in various social, educational, administrative, and literary areas. Such an outer circle includes the former colonial countries such as Singapore, India, and Ghana. In the expanding circle, learners acquire English as a foreign language for international communication and for specific purposes in a context in which English use and learning are not culturally and historically associated. Following this theory, a much larger cultural gap is assumed to exist between English users in the inner and expanding circles than that between the inner and outer circles. Widdowson (1993) attributed the cultural gap partly to the teaching by NES teachers from the inner circle, who have established their position as “custodians and arbiters” of accepted English and pedagogy in the EFL teaching context in the expanding circle (p. 187). With their privileged

position NES teachers fail to notice EFL students' cultural, ideological, and social norms and "the complexities of the meanings students within limited languages skills are trying to produce" (Luk & Lin, 2007, p. 27). In addressing the native speaker fallacy, Phillipson (1992) pointed out that the NES teachers' privileged position "serves to strengthen the hold of the Centre over the Periphery" (p, 192). To narrow the gap, Kramsch (1993) proposed the concept of a *third place*, neither the NES culture nor the culture of EFL students. The concept echoes the hypothesis of border pedagogy (Giroux, 1992) which calls for crossing the borders of the two cultures. In our study, we examine the conceptual and practical difficulties that NES teachers from the inner circle encounter in the expanding circle and the ways in which they adapt to their new teaching context as they teach Chinese university students oral English.

A search of the existing literature revealed no empirical studies on the characteristics and changes of NES teachers' beliefs in EFL contexts. However, teachers' belief changes are richly documented in the literature in different subjects. Teachers are found to change their beliefs after their immersion in a new program or context of teaching. Palmquist and Finley (1997) investigated 15 secondary science teachers participating in a science teaching program. Before the program, the participants held a view mixed with contemporary and traditional attitudes in teaching science. After the program, the authors found the teachers changed to more contemporary view, i.e., post-positivist view. A similar outcome was also identified by Vacc and Bright (1999) in their study of math teachers. After the completion of a mathematics method course, the authors found that the 34 elementary math pre-service teachers significantly changed their conception regarding mathematics instruction. Conceptual change was also identified in mentoring. Wang and Odell (2003) examined how mentoring helped novice teachers develop their concept of

teaching. Based on a case study of two novice teachers and two mentors, they found that conceptual change occurred when opportunities were provided for “preservice teachers to construct and experiment with teaching strategies” (p. 169). Although we did not find any empirical studies addressing how NES teachers change their beliefs after their exposure to a new EFL context, we found a number of studies addressing Chinese English learners’ dissatisfaction with NES teachers and their English teaching. Rao (2010) surveyed 20 English majors in a Chinese college and their major dissatisfaction with NES teachers included the teachers’ insensitivity to the students’ linguistic problems, their inconsistency in addressing students’ learning styles, and unfamiliarity with Chinese culture and educational values. Li (1999) studied nine Chinese universities. He surveyed four groups of people, i.e., NES teachers, and Chinese university students, NNEST teachers, and administrators. His study identified some frustration the NES teachers in China encountered in the process of introducing Western teaching pedagogies. He concluded that conflicts existed between NES teachers and Chinese students because of their significant perceptual differences in language learning and teaching. With the purpose of investigating the compatibility between the NES teaching styles and Chinese students’ learning styles, Zhou and Fan (2007) surveyed 10 NES teachers and 51 English majors in a Chinese university. The authors found that the Chinese students preferred learning style characteristics of traditional Chinese educational culture such as “analytic, imaginal, concrete and reflective” while the NES teachers tended to be more “global, verbal, abstract and TEF (trial, error and feedback)” (p. 19). While this body of literature explored the discrepancies between NES teachers and Chinese students in the EFL context, the conceptual causes of such discrepancies from the part of NES teachers have seldom been explored. This study is designed to examine NES teachers’ belief system

which is regarded as a possible cause for such dissatisfaction in the EFL context.

The literature also demonstrated NES teachers' unique role compared with NNES teachers. For example, Reves & Medgyes (1994) identified four levels of differences between NES and NNES teachers in EFL contexts based on a self-reported teaching behavior survey with 325 teachers from 11 countries. They concluded that NES teachers used English in a more authentic and confident way while NNES teachers used English in a bookish and less confident manner. In general teaching attitude, NES teachers adopted a more flexible, innovative, casual, but less empathetic and committed approach, and they taught based on their perceived needs of students and had far-fetched expectations for them. However, NNES teachers adopted a more guided, cautious, empathetic, strict, but more committed approach. They attended to the real needs of students and had more realistic expectations of them. In teaching English, NES teachers focused more on teaching fluency, meaning, language use in context, and oral skills through small-group and pair activities. NES teachers were also more likely to use different materials, be more tolerant of student errors, used fewer tests, while paying little attention to students' first language, translation, and homework. In contrast, NNES teachers focused more on teaching accurate language forms, grammatical rules, printed words, and formal language but less on language use in context. They liked to use controlled activities, single textbooks, tests and students' first language, translation, and homework in teaching. In terms of teaching culture, NES teachers supplied more cultural information than NNES did.

Following Reves & Medgyes' research (1994), a number of other studies also identified the differences of teaching behaviors and their influences on student learning between NES and NNES teachers. Most of these studies compared NES and NNES teacher

behaviors and their strengths and weaknesses in teaching based on teachers' reports, classroom observations and surveying and interviewing students (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Maum, 2003; Moussu, 2006; Rao, 2010). While these studies were important in identifying the NES teachers' behaviors in the classroom and their consequences on student learning as compared with NNES teachers, they failed to capture the belief system in relation to how to teach, and how students learn that influenced not only their teaching practice but also their the concept of classroom teaching (Árva & Medgyes, 2000). To take a deeper look at the NES teachers, our study explores their belief system, its characteristics, function, and change (Borg, 1999; Borg, 2003; Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Participants and Context***

The participants of this study included 15 NES teachers selected on a voluntary basis from 30 American NES teachers who were invited to participate in a month-long oral English teaching program in a research-oriented Chinese University. These participants came from different parts of the United States, received ESL teacher training, and had 2 to 40 years ESL teaching experience in the United States. Four of them had bachelor degrees, nine had master degrees, and two had doctoral degrees. Ten were female and five were male. Nine of them had experience teaching English abroad including eight having taught in China (referred to as experienced teachers throughout the paper), while the other six had no experience of teaching outside the U.S. (referred to as inexperienced teachers throughout the paper). The variety of backgrounds allowed us to explore our research questions with participants who had ESL training and teaching experience. The

teachers who had experience were assumed to hold different initial beliefs from those had no such training and experience. On the other hand, the differences between those with and those without teaching experiences in China and abroad offered us an opportunity to examine whether or to what extent their relevant teaching experiences exerted influence on their initial beliefs and conceptual changes (Richardson, 1996).

The students in the oral English program included 800 undergraduate and graduate students who were selected according to their English teacher's recommendation from the Chinese university. The students registered for the program with various purposes, e.g., looking for a better job, preparing for graduate study or preparing to study in the U.S. or other English-speaking countries. The program offered 10 American social and cultural topics including the land and its people, sports, higher education, food, dining and restaurants, relationship between humans and nature, family life, entertainment and fads, music, travel and news and media. The reason for the program to choose topics about American culture and society was, in the organizers' words, that "learning a foreign language is to learn it within the target culture" (Li, Rowekamp, Echkart, 2008). The students selected were higher performing students in English. 95% of them passed the College English Test, a national mandatory English test composed of listening, reading and writing for all university students as one of the criteria for their graduation, while the national average passing rate is only 40%. Because of the pragmatic needs of learning English, the students were motivated to develop their English competence, especially oral competence. Most Chinese students are exposed to English only in their English classroom for four hours per week (Wu, 2001) delivered through a method of teacher lecture followed by drill and practice (Zhang, 2004). Such a teaching context is surely different from the ESL (English as a second language) teaching context in the United

States where students are exposed to authentic oral English every day in and outside school. The ESL context is the context that the participants in this study were trained for and are familiar with. For those who had no experience of teaching abroad, the difference between the two teaching contexts provided a situation in which the participants' initial belief system could easily become problematic---a necessary condition leading to conceptual discrepancies and change among them (Von Glasersfeld, 1995).

### ***Source of Data***

In order to capture the characteristics and changes of the participants' beliefs of what and how to teach, and how students learn in the EFL teaching context in China, we collected three kinds of data. The first was the pre- and post-program survey data. The surveys included ranking scale, multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey questions (see the appendix) were partly built on ESL/EFL theories (Gunn, 2003; Savignon, 1991; Kachru, 1985) and partly adapted from the questionnaire developed by The National Center for Research on Teacher Education which focused on a longitudinal study of teachers' belief and belief change (Kennedy & Ball, 1993). The questions were designed to capture the following four kinds of information from the participants: (a) professional experiences and EFL teaching and training experience, (b) beliefs of English language in general and in the EFL context, (c) beliefs of EFL teaching, and (d) beliefs of English learning and students in the EFL context. The second data source was observations of six lessons taught by three participants who had teaching experience in China and three who had no teaching experience in China. Each of these lessons was about 2.5 hours long and was videotaped with observational notes, which were analyzed to capture the characteristics of participants' teaching (Pajares, 1992; Putnam & Borko,

2000). The third data source was documents used by the participants. These documents included students' workbooks, handouts, decorations and posters the teachers hung up in the classroom, teaching aids, and video tapes used in teaching. We used these documents as resources to supplement and verify the results of our analysis of the survey and observation data.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data of this study were analyzed in three phases. First, each participant's answers to the ranking scale and multiple choice questions from pre- and post-surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics to capture the patterns and changes of beliefs across the two different groups of participants based on their relevant experience of EFL teaching. Secondly, the participants' answers to the open-ended questions from both surveys were coded for the themes and patterns as they emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then, these themes and patterns were categorized and analyzed for the reasons and interpretations about the participants' initial beliefs and their possible conceptual change. Thirdly, each videotaped lesson was transcribed and coded to capture its topical, sequential, instructional, and interactional patterns, which were compared across different lessons to establish similarities and differences (Eggan, 1965). Then, all the documents were reviewed to find evidence that could complement the results of the lesson analysis. The results of the three phases of analyses were compared to identify possible influences of the participants' initial beliefs on their teaching practice and possible changes of their beliefs.

Our study did not collect interview data that might allow us to analyze the reasons for belief change or the reasons to stick to initial belief. But we still feel confident about the

strength of our data partly because of the triangulation analysis of the present data (Patton, 2002) and partly because one of the authors was personally involved in the organization of the English summer training program. However, caution needs to be exercised when generalizing the findings from the 15 American NES teachers in one month teaching in the special EFL context to the large population of NES teachers in different EFL teaching contexts.

## **Findings**

### *Characteristics and Changes of Beliefs of English Knowledge in the EFL Context*

The replies to the pre- and post-surveys led to several findings related to teachers' beliefs and conceptual changes in terms of English competence in the EFL context.

First, in the teachers' initial beliefs, speaking was regarded as one of the most important English competences for the Chinese students. This belief became even more popular after their teaching in China. Based on the ranking order on Table 1 below, speaking was ranked as the most important English competence by seven out of the 15 participants on the pre-survey. By the end of the program, 11 participants ranked it as the most important area for their EFL teaching. However, we found that all those who selected speaking competence as most important in the pre-survey were the experienced teachers and they all still held the selection in the post-survey. Four inexperienced teachers changed their mind about the most important component of EFL English competence from other options to speaking. One inexperienced teacher was deeply impressed by the Chinese students' way of speaking English and she said "They actually translated from Chinese and often sought for a single word at the expense of fluent speech. They need to practice speaking as much as possible." Another teacher explained that she thought the Chinese

students needed more reading competence to gain information from international media sources, but she learned that the Chinese market demanded employees with more oral communicative ability.

**Table 1**

Important components of English competence (Ranking scale) (N=15)	Pre- survey	Post- survey
Speaking	7	11
Vocabulary	1	2
Reading	4	1
Writing	1	1
Grammar	1	0
Translation	1	0

The second question was concerned with oral English knowledge. Oral communication is “a complex and multifaceted language process” and consists of different components (Murphy, 1991, p. 51). It is also conducted “in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adjust itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic” (Savignon, 1972, p. 8). This indicates that meaning is conveyed with both verbal and nonverbal communication, e.g., gesture. In Table 2 we included the components that are considered to be closely related to oral communication. Among the components the most popular choices by the participants were American culture (9 out of 15) and pronunciation (11 out of 15), and such choices stayed the same throughout the program. The difference was in the order of the two in each survey for which some participants explained that talking about American culture was a comfortable way to practice English. They added that they knew the students would practice oral English

more fluently by talking about their own culture, but they personally felt helpless with Chinese culture. Four of the inexperienced teachers changed to American culture in the post-survey while most experienced teachers stuck to the same in both surveys. One of the inexperienced teachers explained, “If you want to get things done, you have to know how it is done ‘in Rome.’” Another gave a more personal reason: “I found myself tongue-tied without talking what I knew.” However, a couple of teachers cautioned against the exclusive use of foreign culture for oral English development, as one of the inexperienced teachers who was quoted above added: “I’d rather push the students to speak their culture because most of them won’t go to the States to live like us.” In addition, although gesture, cohesion, negotiation, and articulation also enjoyed substantial popularity, this popularity declined among the participants by the end of the program except gesture based on Table 2. In explaining how effective gesture was in communication, one of the teachers said, “Body language plays a huge role in second language acquisition and I cannot imagine how we can communicate without it.”

**Table 2**

Important knowledge for oral English learning (Multiple choice) ( <i>N</i> =15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
American Culture	9	15
Pronunciation	15	11
Gestures	8	8
Cohesion	8	5
Negotiation	8	5
Articulation	8	4
Illocutionary acts	5	3
Morphology	4	1

The third question was about what kind of English competencies the NES teachers viewed as being important when assessing their students' learning. In the study, the participants showed their strong initial focuses on fluency, vocabulary size, and correct grammar as effective assessment of EFL students' oral English competence. However, by the end of their program, accepted pronunciation and appropriate communication replaced grammar and vocabulary as the most popularly shared focuses of assessment while fluency was still the most popular focus of assessment. Their relevant answers to the open-ended questions in the survey revealed some reasons for such changes. Some of them explained that Chinese students' oral English was often "sociolinguistically inappropriate" due to poor knowledge of the correct use of English. Four of the participants shared the same impression that the Chinese students tended to use written and formal rather than conversational and informal English in speech, and some even translated Chinese directly into English. It is interesting to note that four of the six inexperienced teachers no longer selected grammar and vocabulary, as one of them said, "Their vocabulary size is gorgeous!" The experienced teachers' answers showed less fluctuation between our pre and post-surveys.

**Table 3**

Oral English competence to be assessed (Multiple choice) ( <i>N</i> =15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Fluency in expression	13	12
Accepted pronunciation	6	10
Appropriateness in communication	5	9
Vocabulary size	9	4
Correctness of grammar	9	4

Accuracy in expression	7	4
Comprehension	7	3
Facial expressions	5	2

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Fourth, to further capture their beliefs and conceptual changes, we also asked the participants to propose suggestions for the curriculum of the oral English program before and after the program. Among their initial suggestions based on Table 4, it was not difficult to see that the top three most frequently selected content areas were American culture, American daily life and listening comprehension. These findings echoed the teaching resources the American teachers brought to China for their teaching. The resources included pictures of American popular sports, videos about outdoor adventures, and posters showing the problems of obesity. In the post-survey, the participants, while still sticking to listening comprehension in the top three curriculum additions, replaced American culture and daily life with using language appropriately and using different speech acts in the top three rankings. Some participants explained that Chinese students heavily depended on textbooks for dialogues and were not familiar with English expressions, idioms and phrases. They argued that talking in an accepted way made more sense than knowing American culture and daily life. One inexperienced teacher who changed to using language appropriately in the post-survey explained that Chinese students should learn what turn-taking is. Another commented that they should learn to speak English instead of translating from Chinese out of context. In contrast to the inexperienced teachers, the experienced teachers held fast to listening comprehension, American culture and American daily life in both surveys. The experienced teachers viewed American culture from a broader perspective. For example, one of them

commented: “America is the melting pot of so many other cultures. We have unique American cultural aspects in our lives along with varied international events. This makes for a very interesting ‘stew’.” Throughout the program, the participants in the study still held the ideas that oral English competence was the most important competence for the EFL context and the role of pronunciation and listening comprehension was crucial to the development of this competence.

It should be noted that the inexperienced teachers’ attitude to American culture as a topic was rather contradictory. While most of them believed American culture was an important part of oral English, they considered it less important when they were asked for suggestions on the program. They became more focused on the elements that could directly enhance oral English and communication, such as fluency, pronunciation, and appropriateness in communication, as well as listening comprehension. We also found that in answering the questions in Table 4 the experienced teachers demonstrated less fluctuation compared with the inexperienced colleagues and their beliefs regarding EFL teaching resisted substantial changes.

**Table 4**

Proficiencies to be added to program (Multiple choice) ( <i>N</i> =15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Listening comprehension	8	10
Using language appropriately	5	9
Using different speech acts	7	8
American culture	10	6
American daily life	8	6
Business English	4	6
Gestures typical of Americans	4	5
Grammar and vocabulary	5	3

### *Characteristics and Changes of Beliefs of EFL Teaching Practice*

The analyses of the survey and document data also lead us to several findings in terms of the teachers' beliefs of how to teach oral English. First, the most popular role that participants initially perceived themselves in EFL teaching was as facilitators. As shown in Table 5, 11 participants ranked facilitators as the top role that they were going to play in the EFL teaching context. By the end of the program, such a role was still the most popular one among them (9 out of 15). As one of the participants summed up, "I'd rather be 'a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage'". However, more participants (from 1 to 5) started to see their role as instructors who needed to teach their students necessary knowledge and skills. Among the four teachers who changed their first choice, three were inexperienced teachers. One of them explained in the post-survey that, "The ESL teacher in this program must begin in the role as an instructor, and then working toward the role of a facilitator." Another added, "The students don't want to move unless they are guided to."

**Table 5**

EFL teachers' role (Ranking scale) ( <i>N</i> =15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Facilitator	11	9
Instructor	1	5
Advisor	0	0
Exemplar	3	1

Second, in terms of teaching approach shown in Table 6, the most popular choice by the participants throughout the program were students practicing, e.g., oral English practice and exercises according to the workbook assigned to the program. However, by the end

of program, pair work and presentation became more popular while small-group activities and free talk lost their popularity. Inexperienced teachers were mainly responsible for this shift. One of them explained that talking with each other is most effective, and another pointed out that when Chinese students were placed in small-group or free talk situations, they tended to speak Chinese with each other.

**Table 6**

Oral English teaching approach (Multiple choice) ( <i>N</i> =15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Students practicing	11	8
Pair work	5	7
Presentation	1	6
Small-group activities	4	2
Playing games	0	1
Students free talk	5	0
Grading students' response	1	0

Third, when it came to the effective way of measuring oral English competence, the participants favored feedback most while also paying substantial attention to portfolio in the pre-survey. As shown in Table 7, feedback and portfolio ranked first and second in the pre-survey. In the post-survey, while feedback was still ranked on the top, portfolio lost popularity. Pair and group assessment took second place. One of the teachers offered two reasons for such a belief change in the post-survey: “Pair or group assessment is verbal and would be more effective within a timely fashion and the students did not have enough time for a portfolio”. It is noticeable that three of the inexperienced teachers abandoned portfolio in the post-survey.

**Table 7**

Effective measurement in EFL teaching (Ranking scale) (N=15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Teachers' feedback of students' oral performance	9	10
Pair/Group-assessment	1	5
Portfolio	4	0
Self-assessment	1	0

Fourth, in response to the students' mistakes, participants initially thought that it was important to correct students' mistakes immediately after they finished their answers or presentations. By the end of the program, an increasing number of participants ranked correcting mistakes later as the top choice while immediate correction became less popular. One teacher said that she summed up all the common mistakes at the end of the class. But she admitted it was hard to remember all the mistakes because the students kept making mistakes while they talked in English. In the post-survey seven teachers changed their first choice to correcting mistakes later while in the pre-survey, only one teacher selected it. According to our observation in the class, we found when the teachers immediately corrected students' mistakes in the presence of their classmates some students felt out of place and would be less confident to answer questions again. As one of the teachers explained, "We don't want to discourage them to speak as much as they can." Three of the inexperienced teachers believed that asking other students to correct mistakes was most effective but they found it didn't work well for the Chinese students. In one of the teachers' words, either because, "They were too shy" or, "They didn't know what was wrong."

**Table 8**

Responses to mistakes (Ranking scale) ( <i>N</i> =15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Correcting later	1	7
Correcting immediately	7	5
Asking other students to correct	4	1
Ignoring	2	1
Telling student in private	1	1

In summary, the participants in this study strongly held the belief that their role as EFL teachers was basically as a facilitator. In EFL teaching, engaging students in practicing their oral English skills with teachers' feedback was the most popular teaching approach throughout the program. However, compared with experienced teachers, more conceptual changes were found for inexperienced teachers. For example, they increased their attention to their role as instructor, were more likely to use pair work, and less likely to use portfolios as a way to assess students.

### ***Characteristics and Changes of Beliefs of EFL Students and their Learning***

Our analysis of the survey and document data suggested several findings about participants' beliefs of EFL students and their learning. First, participants all agreed that being afraid of making mistakes was the top problem that the Chinese students had to overcome in order to learn English well, which based in Table 9, increased from initially 6 to 10 by the end of the program. Lack of confidence and interest shared the second place. For experienced teachers, they had a clear understanding of the Chinese students' specific weaknesses as one of them said in the pre-survey, "Chinese students have all the skills, but they don't use them in class because they are not so confident." The

inexperienced teachers found their initial understanding about Chinese students was not consistent with reality. To select the Chinese students' most serious weakness in learning English, four of the inexperienced teachers shifted from no interest to being afraid of mistakes. One teacher said, "The Chinese students were afraid of losing face and the teacher must make the classroom a 'safe zone' where the students become less fearful." Another commented, "Most Chinese students have an adequate amount of knowledge to speak but they are reluctant to. I guess they don't want their poor pronunciation to betray them."

**Table 9**

Weaknesses of EFL learners (Ranking scale) (N=15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Being afraid of making mistakes	6	10
Lack of self-confidence	4	4
No motivation	1	1
No interest	4	0

Second, the participants also ranked thinking critically as the most popular competence that the EFL students needed to develop in order to learn well throughout the program. They complained that Chinese students were too passive and reluctant to analyze teachers' questions before offering an answer. Many teachers noticed that Chinese students seldom challenged them. One teacher commented that his students' minds were closed. The second highest ranking on Table 10 was listening attentively. It should be noticed that the ranking of listening attentively as the top quality of EFL learners increased from three to six and the change was again made by inexperienced teachers, while those who favored self-discipline decreased from five to two throughout the program. One experienced

teacher who still kept self-discipline as number one complained, “There is definitely too much Chinese chatting, and too much chatting with classmates in general!”

**Table 10**

Competences EFL learners are short of (Ranking scale)		
(N=15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Think critically	7	7
Listen attentively	3	6
Self-discipline	5	2

Third, regarding what competence the students need to improve, being unable to speak fluently and lack of vocabulary were first and second on the list in the pre-survey. By the end of their program, students’ poor pronunciation became the top choice while lack of fluency became the second. As shown in Table 11, in the pre-survey, the top two reasons were lack of fluency and lack of vocabulary which were eight and five respectively while in the post-survey, poor pronunciation and lack of fluency became the top two with scores of eight and six. Two inexperienced teachers were impressed by the Chinese students’ vocabulary size and grammar knowledge. However, because these teachers were less able to accommodate themselves to different pronunciations, they found it hard to communicate as one of them said, “Pronunciation difficulties comprise most of the Chinese student errors.” Another said, “I can understand a blabbermouth with poor grammar as long as the pronunciation is good.” Compared with the inexperienced teachers’ reaction to Chinese students’ poor pronunciation, experienced teachers seemed to get used to it and only two changed to poor pronunciation from lack of fluency. One of the experienced teachers stated that we cannot expect them to speak without accent and we have to tolerate their poor pronunciation.

**Table 11**

Reasons for EFL learners not speaking English well (N=15)	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Poor pronunciation	0	8
Lack of fluency	8	6
Lack of vocabulary	5	1
Weak Grammar	2	0

In summary, throughout the program, the participants generally saw being afraid of making mistakes and lack of confidence as important weaknesses, critical thinking as an important quality, and lack of fluency in speaking as the reasons for EFL students' slow progress. The program helped more of them to see listening attentively as an important quality and poor pronunciation as an obstacle to EFL student learning. When compared statistically, we found strong evidence that inexperienced teachers were more likely to change their position than experienced ones after their immersion in the Chinese context. According to Tables 9 to 11 inexperienced teachers made twelve changes while experienced ones only made five throughout the two surveys.

### ***Relationship between Initial Beliefs and Teaching Practices***

To better understand the influences of participants' beliefs on their teaching, we observed and video-taped six classes at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. Three of the classes were taught by experienced teachers and another three by inexperienced ones.

The teachers John, Chelsea and Anna had taught in China before. Although the three teachers taught three different topics, i.e., American land and people, American families, and America nature and environments, they showed some similarities in their teaching. First, because of their prior teaching experience in China, their behavior showed that their

beliefs had been adjusted in alignment with the Chinese context. They were able to associate their teaching topics with situations or the contexts that Chinese students could easily understand. For example, when introducing himself to the class, John showed his picture taken on the Great Wall and jokingly translated his American name into a typical Chinese pet name, which immediately aroused the students' laughter and caught their attention. Chelsea began her class with an American popular rhythm with words she composed based on the features of the Chinese university. She also associated her teaching with her own life and family by showing her family albums on the screen. After introducing her childhood, spent in the rural area, she asked her students to find a partner and talk about their own childhood. By talking about a familiar topic, the students were able to speak quite fluently and understandably. Anna decorated the classroom with colored paper strips hanging on the wall and written on each paper strip was a message such as endangered species, forest fire, protected animal and rain forest, etc. She also asked the students to contribute their ideas on how to protect the environments of their hometown. On the wall were hung cartoons and posters showing what students could do for a green world.

Second, they all seemed to have a better understanding about the interests of their students as EFL learners and used this understanding in their teaching. For example, when talking about the ethnic diversity of the United States, John used a chemical experiment as an example. He joked that when chemists added different elements, the good result was something like Coca Cola, but when it was not done properly, the result would be an explosion. He then used explosion as analogy for the racial clashes of the 1960's in the U.S.

Chelsea spoke clearly and slowly with a lot of gestures and examples. When

introducing Halloween, she elaborated it with a detailed example to make sure the students understood her. She liked to rephrase words in different ways and illustrated new words so that her students would understand them from different contexts. For example, when talking about the countryside, she also used the phrase ‘rural area away from the city’ interchangeably with countryside. After using the word *preposition*, she thought it might be a new word, and she used *on, from, after* as examples to illustrate what a preposition was. Anna used many simple words in her teaching and encouraged her students to use English as much as possible. She asked a lot of questions during her teaching. Instead of waiting for the students to answer voluntarily, and in order to break the silence, she called on them to answer. During pairs or small group discussions, she walked around and reminded them not to speak Chinese. In doing class presentations, she would first ask each of the students to talk with her in private and she corrected each student's grammatical mistakes, wrong pronunciation or misused words before the students presented their topic so that they would be less afraid of losing face.

The three experienced teachers' replies to the survey questions reflected their conceptions. For example, all the three teachers said that they adopted a more flexible teaching method to the Chinese students because teaching English in EFL context in China was not the same as they taught in their home country. They were also quite clear that a lack of confidence was a common weakness the Chinese students demonstrated, as Anna explained, “When we place them in the comfort zone, they do better”. The comfort zone, she added, is what the students were familiar with, e.g., their own life and the stuff they knew.

The other three teachers: Paula, Debbie, and Emma had never been to China. In their teaching, they showed some characteristics obviously different from those of John,

Chelsea, and Anna. First, they were unable to use the contexts or situation familiar to Chinese students. For example, when talking about energy waste, Paula told the class how Americans used the dryer that consumed a lot of heat, and she also mentioned that many US families had refrigerators with icemakers, which also used a huge amount of energy. She added that Americans liked to use hot water to wash dishes and then spin them dry. However, for most Chinese students, it was not easy to figure out and picture these household appliances because dryers, refrigerators with icemakers, and dishwashers were not commonly used in regular Chinese homes.

Debbie started her topic on American Travel with a video clip showing a man traveling along the Colorado River. After the video, she showed a series of pictures about outdoor activities such as rock climbing, canoeing, hiking, sunbathing on the beach, and driving recreational vehicles. She explained there were two kinds of outdoor activities, adventure and leisure. Later, she showed a picture and asked the students to name the activity in the picture but her question was greeted with silence. She seemed not to realize that none of these outdoor activities were the activities that Chinese students knew about. Emma introduced American Higher Education, a topic of how to apply for admission to American universities, in which many Chinese students had a strong interest. However, in her teaching, she spent a lot of time writing on the board and explaining literally the terms related to the college application process, such as application submission, dorm, undergrad, cover letter, and résumé instead of putting these terms in the real contexts to help the students understand the process of college application.

Second, the three inexperienced teachers had little understanding about Chinese students as EFL learners. For example, when talking about the environment, Paula asked the students to discuss a pollution footage video in pairs without knowing the students

actually knew few technical words related to the topic. Many students simply murmured in Chinese and translated their discussion into English. In a guessing game of a sports activity that Debbie played in her class, she used belay, anchor, karabiner, and harness as key prompts and expected her students would guess rock climbing. However, because all the words were beyond the students' vocabulary, she had to tell them the answer directly. Similarly, in Emma's class, the students were struggling to debate about how American students should spend their spare time, a subject about which Chinese students had little knowledge. Consequently, the students struggled for the right ideas to express proper argument to attack others, and as a result, the class lost its interest and meaning in the debate.

The three participants' answers to survey questions were also consistent with their class decisions. Debbie and Emma expressed their confidence that the methods they used in an American ESL context would work equally well in the Chinese context. Debbie said, "The ultimate goal of teaching oral English is to help students communicate like native people do." Emma said she believed that, "Chinese students have already partaken of American music, clothing, hair styles, idioms, slang," and so immersing them in American culture was an effective approach of learning oral English. Paula did not answer most of the open-ended questions but in the pre-survey her selection clearly demonstrated her limited knowledge of the Chinese EFL context.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study contributes the following understanding about our research questions and the issues related to the NES teachers' beliefs, belief changes, and functions of their beliefs in an EFL context. These understandings are reflected in the following areas:

First, they help develop the initial understanding about the kinds of beliefs that NES teachers bring into the EFL context and hold consistently over time. Our study shows that the most popular beliefs of English competence in the Chinese EFL context is oral English with the relevant competencies, such as pronunciation, listening, and some basic understanding of American culture. The NES teachers are more likely to see themselves as facilitators, engaging students in practicing their oral English skills with feedback as the most popular teaching approach. They often perceive students' fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence as obstacles, and regard critical thinking and fluency as effective ways to develop oral English competence. These findings about the NES teachers' beliefs echo the hypotheses and findings about NES teachers' self-reported and observed teaching behavior, such as the fact that NES teachers are more likely to focus on oral skills through small-group and pair activities and fluency, meaning and language use in context in their teaching (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). On the other hand, some of the findings such as taking accepted pronunciation and American culture as part of English competence confirm Crystal's (2008) critical notion that NES teachers perceive themselves as the judges of standard English advocating 'single monochrome standard form' (Quirk, 1985, p. 6) regardless of EFL students' cultural context.

Second, the study shows that the participants' beliefs undergo some changes through their teaching in the EFL program in several patterns. For example, by the end of the program, more participants see fluency, pronunciation, appropriateness in communication, and listening comprehension as being important for improving oral English in the EFL context. They also become more focused on their role as instructor and use of pair work in engaging student practice. In addition, more of them start to see attentive listening as

an important quality and poor pronunciation as an obstacle to EFL student learning. These findings suggest that the changes of NES teachers' conception are possible in a short but intense period of teaching in the EFL context, which is consistent with the findings of other studies in general teacher education literature (Palmquist & Finley, 1997; Vacc & Bright, 1999; Wang & Odell, 2003).

Third, the nature of participants' belief changes, as shown in this study, suggests three characteristics. Changes may be more likely to occur at the peripheral level of beliefs rather than core beliefs. For example, one item that remains unchanged as evidenced through the pre and post-surveys is the NES teachers' persistent belief of the role of American culture in teaching oral English. Such persistence confirms Phillipson's (1992) contention that the great facility for NES teachers is cultural familiarity in the inner circle. In Kachrus's words, the NES teachers still see 'the diffusion of English in pedagogical terms' instead of as a way of helping EFL learners use English for pragmatic purposes (1990, p. 194). In this sense, it is not difficult to see that most of the beliefs that they change are related to fluency, accepted pronunciation and appropriate oral communication. Our finding mirrors the theoretical assumption that teachers' beliefs work as a system which is difficult to change fundamentally (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992), especially when NES teachers ground their beliefs in the assumption that they are the owners of the English language (Widdowson, 1994).

Another characteristic is that belief changes are more likely to occur among the participants who have little direct experiences in an EFL teaching context. As shown in our analysis, participants with direct experience of teaching in China tend to hold their initial beliefs while those who do not have any teaching experience in China before are more likely to revise their beliefs. This finding confirms our assumption that NES

teachers may be able to update the beliefs about what and how to teach, and how students learn in the EFL context. Their beliefs may be more likely to become problematic in the EFL teaching contexts as these beliefs are often developed through teachers' personal experience in teaching and learning in their home country (Borko, 2004; Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992).

The last related characteristic is that conceptual changes often start with conflicts between initial beliefs and their new teaching contexts and students. As implied in the finding section, many participants relate their belief changes to the issues of their teaching context or students that they encounter during the program. This characteristic resembles the constructivist interpretation of teachers' conceptual changes as teachers' existing conceptions become problematic during their teaching practice. This leads to a conceptual discrepancy that opens the door for them to modify their ideas (Glaserfeld, 1995; Kennedy, 1991a).

Our study indicates that the NES teachers' beliefs of what and how to teach, and how students learn in the EFL context have a strong influence on their teaching practice, especially in their decision of how to choose their topic, engage students in learning it, and how to assess their learning. Our analysis of lessons taught by the two groups of participants in this study clearly supports this finding. This finding also confirms those studies in general teacher learning literature that effective teachers often modify their belief of what knowledge to teach, how to teach, and how students learn. (Kennedy, 1991b; Pajares, 1992).

Finally, in terms of the three concentric circles of English acquisition (Kachru, 1985), our study indicates that the change of NES teachers' beliefs serves as a bridge that connects NES teachers' home culture with the EFL students' culture. Although the

teachers in our study taught American culture because it was set as the topic of the oral English program, we still found that those teachers who accommodated their beliefs to the Chinese context intentionally merged the local cultural elements into their teaching. In discussing world Englishes and learning English for different purposes, Crystal (2008) contended that, ‘An important constraint on the criterion is that the language must be a culturally significant element’ (p. 4). Judging from this sense, when NES teachers teach English to EFL students from the expanding circle (Kachru, 1985), they need to cross the border of inner circle to the *third place* (Kramsch, 1993) to make efforts for the local culture to be represented in their teaching to EFL students.

The implications of this study for policy makers, teacher educators, and program developers are as follows. First, it is important and necessary to understand the nature and kinds of beliefs that NES teachers bring into their EFL teaching as these beliefs can shape their teaching behavior and thus, the result of EFL student learning. Second, the characteristics of EFL contexts play an important role in influencing NES teachers’ conceptions. Third, in an NES training program it is necessary to develop NES teachers’ awareness of varieties of English and a pluricentric attitude to EFL teaching. It is also necessary to add in the curriculum the contents that can reflect EFL learners’ own sociolinguistic and cultural reality. As a consequence of the short period of teaching time and small sample size of this study, our findings call for further studies with longer time periods and larger samples in order to generalize on larger populations in different EFL teaching contexts.

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## **Appendix**

### **NES teachers' beliefs about oral English teaching and learning in China**

1. Number of years teaching English to ESL/EFL students
2. Gender
3. The highest degree
4. Major
5. Experience of teaching English abroad
6. Please make an order of importance of the items related to English competence and give reasons.
  - Grammar
  - Reading
  - Speaking
  - Translation
  - Writing
  - Vocabulary
7. Please choose the items related to knowledge of oral English learning and give reasons.
  - American Culture
  - Articulation
  - Cohesion

- Gestures
  - Illocutionary acts
  - Morphology
  - Negotiation
  - Pronunciation
8. Please choose the items related to English competences that you view as being important when assessing students' learning and give reasons.
- Accepted pronunciation
  - Accuracy in expression
  - Appropriateness in communication
  - Comprehension
  - Correctness of grammar
  - Facial expressions
  - Fluency in expression
  - Vocabulary size
9. Please choose the items related to your suggested addition to the program curriculum and give reasons.
- American daily life
  - American culture
  - Business English
  - Gestures typical of Americans
  - Grammar and vocabulary
  - Listening comprehension
  - Using language appropriately
  - Using different speech acts
10. Please make an order of importance of the items related to EFL teachers' role in the classroom and give reasons.
- Facilitator
  - Instructor
  - Advisor
  - Exemplar

11. Please choose the items related to oral English teaching approaches and give reasons.

- Grading students' response
- Pair work
- Presentation
- Playing games
- Small-group activities
- Students free talk
- Students practicing

12. Please make an order of importance of the effective way of measuring oral English competence and give reasons.

- Pair/Group-assessment
- Portfolio
- Self-assessment
- Teachers' feedback of students' oral performance

13. Please make an order of importance of the items related to your response to the students' mistakes and give reasons.

- Asking other students to correct
- Correcting immediately
- Correcting later
- Ignoring
- Telling student in private

14. Please make an order of importance of the items related to weaknesses of Chinese students in learning oral English and give reasons.

- Being afraid of making mistakes
- Lack of self-confidence
- No interest
- No motivation

15. Please make an order of importance of the items related to the competence that the Chinese students need to develop and give reasons.

- Listen attentively

- Self-discipline
- Think critically

16. Please make an order of importance of the items related to the reasons for Chinese

students not to speak English well and give reasons.

- Lack of fluency
- Lack of vocabulary
- Poor pronunciation
- Weak Grammar

## **To Teach More or More to Teach: Vocabulary-Based Instruction in the Chinese EFL Classroom**

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### **Bio Data:**

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### **Abstract**

In the Chinese EFL classroom, explicit teaching of vocabulary is the dominant paradigm. While there are pragmatic and cultural reasons behind this teaching practice, the techniques used by teachers to fulfill the vocabulary requirement in the syllabus and textbooks have never been studied. In this descriptive research, an analytical framework of vocabulary teaching based on the work of Ellis and his co-researchers (1994; 1995; and 1999) and Tang and Nesi (2003) on the various types of oral input and output in promoting vocabulary learning of planned and unplanned words was adopted to study vocabulary instruction in English classrooms in Chinese universities. Six teachers from three universities of different categories were invited to take part in lesson recording. A total of 1,360 minutes of classroom data was collected, transcribed, coded and analyzed. It was found that Chinese teachers shared similar teaching patterns and required minimal participation from learners. They spent a substantial amount of time dealing with vocabulary. However, words which deserved more thorough treatment and recycling

were sacrificed in order to teach a larger quantity of new words within the assigned class time. The classroom data also suggests that the teaching method was monotonous, implying that teachers are unsure about exactly what to teach, how to teach, what types of knowledge are needed for the learners and what types of learning processes they adopt. When vocabulary-based instruction is indispensable in an EFL lesson and crucial in fulfilling the curriculum and textbook requirement, a good understanding of the prevailing teaching practices is essential for curriculum and textbook development and pedagogical research.

**Keywords:** Explicit teaching, vocabulary instruction, Chinese EFL classroom, teaching strategies

### **Introduction**

Some researchers have argued that most vocabulary must be learned incidentally, rather than with instructional intent. Learners can acquire knowledge of a great number of words incidentally and direct instruction helps little in the acquisition of word meanings (Hulstijn, 1992). Although Krashen (1985) alleged that “conscious learning” does not make a major contribution to competence, he did not undervalue direct teaching through involving learners in non-anxiety-provoking communication activities at an appropriate competence level. Ellis (1990) reviewed fifteen empirical studies that compared the effectiveness of instruction with that of exposure on the rate and success of L2 acquisition. The disparity of the results suggested that there is no clear evidence to show the superiority of instruction over exposure or vice versa. Ellis (1994) further alleged that explicit teaching can also constitute incidental learning.

There are arguments for and against explicit teaching of vocabulary (McCarthy, 2002). Some evidence suggests that those courses which involve direct attention to language features will result in better learning than courses which rely solely on incidental learning (Long, 1988; Ellis, 1990). Conversely, Nation (1990) argues that the explicit teaching and

learning of words, whether from a wordlist or textbooks, must be combined with rich instruction or substantial quantities of regular sustained reading. There are others who believe that there are too many words to teach and too much about the words to be learnt. Thus, when there is too little precious class time, explicit or direct teaching is simply not realistic.

Whatever the relative value of explicit and implicit instruction, it appears that a structured explicit or direct vocabulary teaching programme can help learners with the development of a systematic and progressive approach towards a variety of vocabulary. Such a programme also seems to help learners develop effective vocabulary learning strategies for better recall and retention of words. Moreover, explicit vocabulary teaching can give learners a quicker and more direct way to understand the many aspects of word knowledge. Teaching vocabulary can also result in the incidental learning of other words, especially when instructions are given in the target language.

Vocabulary instruction varies according to the theory and belief of how language is learned (Zimmerman, 1997). Thus, one should not ignore, neglect or dismiss any effective method. No matter what strategy or strategies are used in teaching vocabulary, there needs to be careful consideration and monitoring. Effective vocabulary instruction must incorporate systematic ways of presenting vocabulary for successive vocabulary growth. For example, it is generally agreed that there is a need to deal with high-frequency words although these may not be difficult to learn. At the advanced level, teachers should pay attention to rare words and complex lexical units that might appear more frequently in conversation (Arnaud & Savignon, 1997). Due to these factors, it may be difficult for classroom teachers to decide what to address at different levels.

In China, the number and types of words that a Chinese learner has to know at each

level of schooling are prescribed in the national English syllabuses by means of bilingual lists of words arranged in alphabetical order. The word lists represent the requirements for teaching and learning vocabulary, and this is particularly helpful in the Chinese context where standardization, homogeneity and a heavy washback effect are expected (Tang, 2009). These lists are intended for pedagogical purposes: It is the design initiative to have these words embedded in the texts by textbook writers and treated by the teacher in class. Word lists also serve as a reference list for test constructors to select words for assessment in public examinations (Huang & Yang, 1990; Yu, 1992).

For most Chinese educators and learners, word list learning of L1-L2 equivalents is positive and constructive (Zhang, 1997). Providing an L1 explanation is said to be the easiest, quickest and handiest way to give the meaning of a word and to teach/learn a large amount of vocabulary in a short time. Nevertheless, if teaching solely relies on L1 translation without a context, such de-linking of the word meaning from its context does not help with acquiring word knowledge (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Webb, 2007).

Drills and rote memorization are also popular in the Chinese classroom. Some argue that these methods only develop surface L2 fluency, and may not promote conceptual understanding. Drills, for example, are pure imitation and do not lead to active processing (McWilliam, 1998). Memorisation of word lists is sometimes regarded as an ineffective word learning technique because it fails to address assumptions about word knowledge (Richards 1976). However, memorization by repetitive learning is seen by researchers to have potential as an effective strategy to achieve understanding (Biggs, 1996; Marton et al., 1996).

Although studying lists of words out of context and rote learning may be criticized as meaningless and ineffective (Nakata, 2008), Nation (1990) has argued that list learning

can be helpful in acquiring vocabulary within a short period of time. Similarly, Richards (1976) asserted that some learners find rote memorization effective even though it might not be justifiable on theoretical grounds. In Sagarra and Alba's study (2006), rote memorization of L1-L2 equivalents was found to be more effective than semantic mapping but less effective than the keyword method among beginner learners of Spanish.

In recent years, there have been a growing number of studies on ELT in China, although researchers and educators seem to be more interested in reporting learning culture and English curriculum development than in discovering prevalent classroom practices. In the Chinese EFL classroom, explicit teaching of vocabulary is obvious and dominant, but the manner in which Chinese teachers satisfy the vocabulary requirement set in the syllabus and textbooks has not been determined. Up to now, there has been very little analysis of data recorded in the Chinese classroom (e.g. Tang, 2003). Such findings are of crucial importance to pedagogical research in China. In this descriptive research on vocabulary instruction, extracts of classroom data are quoted to illustrate an authentic teaching situation in the Chinese classroom.

### ***The Study of Explicit Vocabulary Teaching***

The analytical framework of vocabulary teaching in this study is based on the work of Ellis and his co-researchers (1994; 1995; 1999) and Tang and Nesi (2003). They illustrate a clear categorization of types of oral input and output in promoting vocabulary learning. Ellis' experimental design was based on the work of Pica, Young and Doughty (1987) who originally found that learners exposed to "premodified input" (i.e. the teachers' prepared explanations) were less successful at completing a task than learners with the opportunity to receive "interactionally adjusted input" (i.e. explanations provided at the

individual's request, as the need arose).

Ellis and his co-researchers (1995) isolated four experimental conditions under which their subjects had to complete a language task:

- i. "unmodified input" (UMI) - new words were introduced orally without any explanation of their meaning and use;
- ii. "premodified input" (PMI) - the researcher explained and repeated new words;
- iii. "interactionally modified input" (IMI) - subjects could ask the researcher to clarify meaning and repeat words;
- iv. "modified (or negotiated) output" (MO) - subjects worked in pairs, negotiating word meaning between themselves (Ellis and He, 1999).

In these experiments, the UMI group, which acted as a control, were the least successful learners, whilst the IMI group acquired more words than the PMI group, at least in the short term. The output condition (MO) proved most favorable for vocabulary acquisition leading Ellis and He to conclude that "dialogically symmetrical discourse seems to create better conditions for incidental vocabulary acquisition than interaction in teacher-controlled exchanges" (1999, p.299).

In Ellis and He's 1999 work (1999), the IMI group had more success than the PMI group. Nevertheless, the findings do not reflect the efficiency of the various vocabulary teaching treatments in terms of the number of words acquired per minute of input. As Ellis (1995; p. 424) points out, "although interaction led to more words being acquired, it also resulted in a conspicuously slower rate of acquisition". In Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki's experiment (1995), for example, the two premodified input groups took 10 and 20 minutes respectively to complete the task, whilst the two interactionally modified input groups took 45 minutes each.

Tang and Nesi (2003) applied the experimental results of Ellis and co-researchers to the study of vocabulary teaching in secondary schools in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. They found that, other than these four input/output types, another output type which involved unmodified substitution drills and spelling was observed in the Chinese classroom. Thus, in the present study, an extra category reflecting vocabulary teaching methods tied to substitution drills and spelling practice was added. These drill and practice treatments were categorized as “unmodified output” (UMO) to indicate the fact that there was no modification from the teacher.

So far, the optimum number of vocabulary items to be taught in a single lesson has not been decided. Gairns and Redman (1986) have suggested eight to twelve productive new vocabulary items per 60 minute lesson. In China, explicit vocabulary teaching is the usual practice and the transfer of new words is primarily done through textbooks. The rate of new words appearing in the textbook and the amount of recycling of words throughout the language syllabus are therefore very important factors, although decisions about these matters are usually made by the textbook writer rather than the teacher.

## **The Study**

Since vocabulary-based instruction is indispensable in the Chinese EFL classroom and crucial in fulfilling curriculum and textbook requirements, a good understanding of the prevailing teaching practices is essential for curriculum and textbook development and pedagogical research. Vocabulary teaching is of two kinds: planned vocabulary instruction (the teaching of words listed in the glossary and explained in the textbooks) and unplanned vocabulary instruction (Sanaoui, 1996). In this study, the teaching of all the glossed words in the textbooks is considered as the teaching of planned words. The

teaching of words which are not found in the glossary is taken to be the teaching of unplanned words.

This study set out to investigate:

- i) What kind of vocabulary instruction was adopted to promote learning of planned words in university English classrooms in China?
- ii) What kind of vocabulary instruction was adopted to promote learning of unplanned words in the university English classrooms in China?

## **Methodology**

A total of 1,360 minutes of classroom data from different categories of universities in China were studied to explore the practices of vocabulary instruction in the tertiary Chinese classroom. Six teachers with five to ten years of teaching experience from three universities were invited to make a one-week recording of their English teaching (see Table 1 below). They were teachers from a relatively new university in the special economic zone, a non-key university converted from polytechnic in a coastal province, and a prestigious key university in the capital. Their 12 two-hour lessons were transcribed and analyzed in order to describe the ways in which vocabulary was taught in class. According to the syllabus guidelines, teachers should be able to finish one unit in a week's class time [using the same extbook *College English: Intensive Reading (revised edition)*]. The recorded lessons were transcribed for qualitative analyses. All the words (planned and unplanned) that were explicitly treated by the teachers were identified and highlighted in the transcriptions. They were then coded according to the analytical framework suggested in this study. The coding was cross-checked by an inter-rater and the inter-reliability rate was 97%.

**Table 1***Background information of the study*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Recording Time (in minutes)</b>
A	new university	200
B	new university	200
C	polytechnic converted into university	240
D	polytechnic converted into university	240
E	prestigious university	240
F	prestigious university	240

***Teaching Paradigms***

In the long history of ELT in China, grammar has always tended to be the focus of language teaching (Suen, 1994). Although at the secondary school level the teaching of grammar is still the focus of each lesson, vocabulary teaching has become increasingly important at higher levels of study. This is because of the important role of reading in English syllabuses. At university level, the teaching of vocabulary is often the focus of the lesson, though a pilot has been launched in 2006 to remove the individual section “vocabulary and structure” from the national examination. While grammar items are also included in the textbook, teachers generally tend to ignore this area as they believe that learners should have acquired all the grammatical knowledge they need at secondary school. The teaching of structure no longer relies on the understanding of grammar items, but on the communicative meaning of expressions (see Example 1). Teachers do continue to provide some grammatical information, however. For example, while they are explaining the derivational structure of new words they also talk about word class (see Example 2).

Example 1: (Teacher E)

- 82 T: Now, Structure. Structure, we will pass it; just pay attention to two sentence structures. One is "it turned out", the other is "given". Er.... Actually it has two meanings. One is .....

Example 2: (Teacher B):

- 8 T: The young man masked his hatred under an appearance of friendliness. "**hatred**" is the noun form of "hate", means "dislike".

As observed, the English lesson often begins with the teaching of pronunciation, but more commonly with the teaching of vocabulary from the text. The vocabulary items are pre-selected by the textbook writers and glossed in a separate word list at the end of the text. The following excerpts show how six teachers began teaching a new unit of a lesson (see Example 3).

Example 3: Beginning a textbook unit:

(Teacher A)

- 1 T: Good morning, everyone.  
2 S: Good morning, Miss (A).  
3 T: Well, today we're going to talk about a new unit, Unit 9, "What Is Intelligence, Anyway". Now, look at the blackboard. What does these two words mean? What is "**intelligence**"? What is "intelligent"? "Intelligence" is, in Chinese, ..?

(Teacher B)

- 13 T: Please turn to page 187, note 1. The story first appeared in "New York Post" in 1971 [*This story first appeared in the New York Post. According to this story, a song was written. The Japanese produced a film based on this story and the scene was set in Japan.*] First of all, let's come to the vocabulary. The first one, **mysterious**, the adjective form of mystery .....

(Teacher C)

- 1 T: Today, we'll have a new lesson. Lesson four. Please turn to page 66. 66. Now. Please look at new words. New words. First we'll read, read those new words ok! So read after me. [*Let's read aloud the vocabulary first.*] So, please read after me.

(Teacher D)

- 1 T: O.K. Good afternoon. Yeah. Another name for **Movement**, hm? [*May Fourth Movement*].

(Teacher E)

- 1 T: I hope we'll have some oral report. Anyone? Volunteer? Yes!
- 2 (a student stands up)

(Teacher F)

- 1 T: Good morning, everyone!
- 2 Ss: Morning, Mrs. (F).
- 3 T: OK, Now, as usual, we are going to have our free talk first. Whoever already? Please come to the front, ok!

In the classroom data, Teachers A, B and D began the lesson with the teaching of vocabulary and Teacher C started with pronunciation. Conversely, Teachers E and F in an established key university began with a speaking activity. The shared approach to teaching within the same university or province is common because of the practice of collective lesson preparation among teachers (see Ng & Tang, 1997; Tang, 2009 for the description of lesson planning at secondary schools and universities in China). The deviation from the usual practice in the established key university is uncommon, particularly when a speaking activity is not prescribed in the textbook or exam syllabus. The change of emphasis may be a response to learners' requests for more speaking practice (Tang & Ng 2002) or to the social demand for more competent English speakers (Ma, 2000). Since the English textbooks do not provide task-types relating to speaking, teachers have to create opportunities for speaking themselves. Despite this, the speaking activity in Teacher E and Teacher F's classes remained a one-way delivery of prepared script and did not involve any interaction and spontaneous exchanges as in a real communicative environment.

When almost all of the recorded lessons began with the same approach, they also tended to end with the same type of activity - translation. Translation activities might be regarded as “comprehension tasks” rather than “generation tasks”. According to Griffin (1992), a “comprehension” task involves the production of an L1 item in response to an L2 cue, whereas a “generation” task elicits the production of an L2 item in response to an L1 cue. As pointed out by Stoddard (1929, as cited in Griffin, 1992), recall for comprehension is twice as easy as recall for generation, as the task type does not require any active processing of the target language. Example 4 below illustrates a typical classroom translation task.

Example 4: (Teacher B)

- 105 S: Number 14. The girl smiled **brightly**, as if she were free from all life’s troubles. [*The girl smiled brightly, as if she were free from all life’s troubles.*]
- 106 T: Very good. Good translation.

In English teaching, vocabulary is the major concern for most teachers. First of all, there is a large quantity of words to be covered within an assigned class time. Secondly, the vocabulary items prescribed by the syllabus will be assessed in the mandatory national examination. Last but not least, even though the prescribed vocabulary items are taught, learners “learn and forget”. As memorization is perceived as an important and effective learning strategy, teachers at all levels are desperately looking for ways to help learners memorize more and retain that information longer.

Although there is a wide variety of methods that could possibly be adopted, teachers rely heavily on L1 equivalents which are regarded as proof of knowledge of the L2 word. After providing the L1 translation or eliciting it from the class, the teacher will proceed to

the next new word (see Example 5).

Example 5: (Teacher A)

169 T: [*Here are two new words – new words to be learnt*], right? [*“devise”*],  
**devise**, [*and also “evaluate”*].

170 S: **Evaluate.**

This method has the advantage of being quick and efficient when teachers are facing a heavy teaching schedule. The positive impact of L1 translation on short-term and long-term retention is affirmed (Zhang, 1997; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Elliot & Tao, 1998). As Yang (1997) observed, the widespread practice of using conscious word translation strategies has enabled Chinese learners to develop word translation skills much more rapidly than pronunciation skills or discourse knowledge. In the Chinese classroom, L1 is not only used to explain new words, it is also the language for giving instruction and communicating with learners.

### ***The Teaching of Planned and Unplanned Words***

In this study, words are counted as unplanned if they are taught in the lesson but are not glossed in the unit. Still, unplanned words may be syllabus-designated or glossed in other units of the textbook series. All of the unplanned words recorded in the corpus were treated during the course of teaching planned words.

The classroom data revealed that a total of 639 words were glossed in these six units and were therefore expected to be taught in 1,360 minutes (Table 2). In other words, the textbook writers expected teachers to teach approximately 2.13 words in each minute of lesson time.

**Table 2***Proportion of explicitly treated glossed words*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Number of glossed words in the Unit</b>	<b>Number of explicitly treated glossed words</b>
<b>A</b>	110	46 (42%)
<b>B</b>	96	39 (41%)
<b>C</b>	105	54 (51%)
<b>D</b>	107	88 (81%)
<b>E</b>	88	15 (17%)
<b>F</b>	133	10 (7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>251 (39%)</b>

In reality, the six teachers taught less than 40% of the glossed words listed in the textbooks (Table 2). It is not clear how teachers chose the words to be taught in class, and whether their decisions were based on a consideration of the learners' language level, the importance of the words, the amount of class time, or the teacher's experience of past examinations. All of the planned words that were taught in the data were printed in bold in the students' book.

Teacher D taught the highest percentage of planned words (Table 3). Most of the teachers could not even cover half of the expected quantity. Teachers E and F, who were teaching in the established key university, taught the lowest percentage of planned words.

**Table 3***Proportion of treated and untreated planned words*

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Number of treated planned words</b>	46 (42%)	39 (41%)	54 (51%)	88 (81%)	15 (17%)	10 (7%)
<b>Number of untreated planned words</b>	64 (58%)	57 (59%)	51 (49%)	20 (19%)	73 (83%)	123 (93%)
<b>Total number of words glossed in the unit</b>	110 (100%)	96 (100%)	105 (100%)	108 (100%)	88 (100%)	133 (100%)

The difference in percentage could suggest a variation in the level of the learners and the beliefs of teachers. As seen earlier, the focus of teaching was sometimes made

explicit at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers A and B started with the text and, while going through the sentences, explained new words. Teachers C and D started their lessons by introducing the vocabulary items of the unit. They believed that their learners had a rather low standard of English, and that it would be impossible to teach the text if learners did not know the vocabulary. This explains why Teachers C and D taught the most words in class. As their students had passed the competitive national matriculation examination, had been selected to the key university and had a high level of English, Teachers E and F shifted their teaching approach, putting more emphasis on oral practice rather than vocabulary learning.

There seems to be some co-ordination among teachers in the same university on the teaching focus, and this appears to be directly related to the level of the learners and their perception of English teaching. The differences in vocabulary focus reveal a hierarchical pattern; the key university with better English learners taught fewer new words, while the non-key university with a lower standard of English taught more new words.

The six teachers combined taught 528 words, planned and unplanned, in 24 lessons (Table 4 below). Of all these words, 252 (47%) were planned (i.e. glossed and indicated as important in the Intensive Reading textbooks). While teaching these words, the teachers simultaneously introduced 276 (53%) other new words. As such, a new word was introduced about every 2.6 minutes. This rate of introducing new words coincides with the findings of a previous study of college English teaching (Tang, 2001a). The large number of taught words is enforced by the vocabulary requirement in the national syllabus, as well as the vocabulary requirement in the textbooks.

**Table 4**

*Proportion of explicitly treated planned and unplanned words*

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Number of treated planned words</b>	46 (49%)	39 (42%)	54 (76%)	88 (44%)	15 (31%)	10 (40%)
<b>Number of treated unplanned words</b>	48 (51%)	54 (58%)	17 (24%)	109 (56%)	33 (69%)	15 (60%)
<b>Total number of explicitly treated words</b>	94 (100%)	93 (100%)	71 (100%)	197 (100%)	48 (100%)	25 (100%)

The teachers were very efficient in their teaching of planned and unplanned words. However, some of the explicitly treated words looked familiar and seemed to have appeared at the secondary level. A cross comparison using WordSmith Tools 3.0 (Scott, 1998) showed that 20% of the 528 explicitly treated words were found in junior and secondary school word lists presented in the English syllabuses. Therefore, these words should have been acquired at secondary school. This raises the question of how these known words should be treated and whether any indication is given to the teachers about them.

***The Treatment of Explicitly Taught Words – Planned and Unplanned***

Among the six teachers, PMI was the most favored treatment type (Table 5). The results recorded in Table 5 are consistent with those of Tang and Nesi (2003) who reported on vocabulary instruction patterns in Chinese secondary school classrooms.

**Table 5**

*Overview of the input/output types of treatment*

	UMI	PMI	IMI	MO	UMO
<b>A</b>	7	78	19	0	48
<b>B</b>	0	103	1	0	63
<b>C</b>	59	35	3	0	0
<b>D</b>	90	168	11	0	254
<b>E</b>	2	49	5	0	2
<b>F</b>	0	24	4	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>372</b>

Note: UMI: unmodified input; PMI: premodified input; IMI: interactionally modified input; MO: modified output; UMO: unmodified output

**PMI**

PMI is a teacher-dominated delivery pattern which gives the teacher full control of the length and depth of the input and the quality and quantity of the vocabulary items. This

delivery pattern reinforces the teacher's authority. When the teacher tells learners the meaning of a word, it indicates his or her "expert-power".

Textbook writers' decisions about vocabulary presentation could also affect teaching as many teachers see the textbook as the syllabus starting point and the backbone of much teaching (Rixon, 1999). The simple L1 translation and the definitional meanings provided for the glossed words in the textbooks possibly encouraged the heavy use of PMI.

In Ellis and his co-researchers' experiments, PMI refers to definitional explanation. Similarly, in the classroom data presented in this study, teachers used a variety of explanation types. For example, the teachers gave concise explanations that involved L1 translation, synonyms or antonyms (Example 6). As the planned words were all glossed in the textbooks, learners in fact already knew their meaning. Some of the teachers mentioned in the conversation with the researcher that providing or getting the L1 translation, synonyms or antonyms was a sufficient and efficient way of checking learners' understanding of the word in limited class time and highlighting the importance of learning these words. Some said that they would choose this vocabulary teaching method when they found that the learners were poor at listening. In this case, they would use less English in terms of quantity and frequency.

#### Example 6: PMI

L1 translation (Teacher E):

75 T: **Mood** [*means "mood". Her mood is like the sky of Spring, which changes always.*] Sentence Three. We spent a very enjoyable evening talking about old times. **Enjoyable**, [*enjoyable*]. It is absolutely wrong to think that natural resources like aluminum and petroleum are not exhaustible. **Exhaustible**, [*exhaustible. ....*]

There were cases when teachers chose to elaborate on the PMI pattern (see Example 7) by providing examples and word associations. The extent of elaboration should not be

overlooked. In these cases, learners were provided with a wider picture of the word meaning, and the richer explanation made the meaning clearer. Unfortunately, no opportunities arose for learners to develop active processing and to demonstrate to the teacher that they had acquired word knowledge. The teaching process was regarded as complete when the learners successfully wrote down the explanation in their book.

#### Example 7: PMI

Definition with extended elaboration (Teacher E):

64 T: I wanted to ... very good **solicitor**". Lawyer actually is a general term, [*It is a general term.*] "Solicitor" is a lawyer who gives advice, appeals and prepare the cases for a barrister to argue in the hall. [*He is a junior lawyer.*] Barrister is a lawyer who has the right to speak and argue in the court. [*This is called court lawyer.*] If a person gets into trouble with the police, he will probably ask a solicitor to help prepare his defense and its offence is to be heard in the magistrates' court, he can ask a solicitor to appeal for him and argue his case. If the case goes to the higher court, the solicitor still advises him but he must get a barrister to appeal for him. Catch my meaning?

One might note that teacher talk is always identified as caretaker talk. Teachers tend to modify their speech to aid comprehension. Some simplify the vocabulary or syntax and some offer redundant information through repetition, paraphrasing or slower speech. Nunan (1991: 191) suggested that elaborated modifications have a more significant effect on L2 comprehension than linguistic simplifications.

#### UMO

UMO was also a frequent output type at university level, particularly in Teacher D's class. This suggested signs of learners' involvement and participation in the learning process. Example 8 below shows the spelling practice with the emphasis on productive knowledge of the written form of words.

### Example 8: PMI and UMO

Spelling (Teacher D):

- 36 T: Next one, **marvel**. That's what I say just now, marvelous, wonderful, right? **Marvelous**, how to spell marvelous?  
37 Ss: M-a-r-v-e-l-o-u-s.

The UMO treatment at university included eliciting L1 equivalents, synonyms, antonyms, spellings, and sentence translations from the learners with no modification from the teacher. Example 9 below shows the unmodified output with learners giving the L1 equivalents and synonyms of the new words.

### Example 9: UMO

L1 translation and synonyms (Teacher A):

- 3 T: Well, today we're going to talk about a new unit, Unit 9, "What is **"intelligence"**? Anyway, now, look at the blackboard. What does these two words mean? What is "intelligence"? What is "intelligent"? "Intelligence" is, in Chinese, . . . ?  
4 Ss: [*intelligence*]  
T: [*intelligence*] O.K. "intelligence" is [*intelligence*]  
And what about this word "intelligent"? It means. . . ? Give me other words to describe. . . an "intelligent person" means a . . . ?  
5 Ss: Wise.  
6 T: Wise.  
7 S: Clever, bright.  
8 T: Clever, bright. Any more?  
9 S: Smart.

The UMO in Teacher D's class is particularly high as there were lots of pronunciation drills (Example 10). In the Chinese classroom, if the pronunciation drill is done at the beginning of a unit it is always accompanied by the teacher's input, and is therefore classed as UMI. Conversely, pronunciation practice at the end of the lesson is regarded as consolidation work and revision; I have classed it as UMO because no teacher input is provided.

### Example 10: UMO

Drills and Practice: (Teacher D)

- 646 T: Yes. **Apartment**?  
647 Ss: [*apartment*]  
648 T: **Latin**?  
649 Ss: [*Latin*]  
650 T: So let's read the words again.  
651 T: Apartment one two begin.  
652 Ss: Apartment.  
653 T: Once, once, once. Apartment, Latin.  
654 Ss: **Apartment, Latin**, quarter, overlook, presently, chat, means, modest attractive, charming, passion, impression, talkative, ....

Another form of UMO is the sentence translation task from L1 to L2 or from L2 to L1 (Example 11). The “comprehension task” of translating sentences from L2 to L1 is more common than the “generation task” of translating sentences from L1 to L2, as this is one of the national English examination formats.

### Example 11: PMI & UMO

Translation task (Teacher C):

- 142 T: Let's look at "**attach**" [*this word has different function ... first,*] attach something to something [*means “add”, “attach”, this is the first meaning*] The first meaning [*usually uses it for business correspondence..... for example: a sample is attached to this letter.*] a sample attached to a letter. [*Translated as: a sample is attached to this letter.*] Ok. [*Another fixed function, usually we said: “Attached please find...Please check.*] "Attached... you'll find. [*This is a convention in the business correspondence.*] The second meaning, "be attached to" [*which is* ] phrase.[*meaning your feeling is bound to ... usually we interpreted it as “admire”, “adore”.*] for example: [*She is deeply attached to her brother.*] how to say? [*The first column, the second one*] please.  
143 S3: She is deeply attached to her brother

### UMI

Although both Western and Chinese linguists take the spoken form as the primary form of language, the relationships between written forms, pronunciation and meaning are

perceived differently by Western and Chinese scholars (Parry, 1998). Western speakers treat the written form as a representation of the spoken form of the language as they can associate the sound with the form, at least to a certain extent. However, they may still be unsure about the correct orthography when writing, especially if they speak a language which has incomplete sound-spelling correspondence, such as English. Chinese speakers, on the other hand, are more likely to ask how a word should be pronounced, because the large majority of Chinese characters do not contain any clues to indicate the sound of the words. It is difficult for Chinese speakers to associate the sound with the form. Beliefs about how the L1 is learnt are transferred to learning the foreign language. This is probably the main reason why pronunciation practice and the reading aloud of individual words are common in the Chinese classroom. The teaching of phonological representation matches the findings about the mental lexicon of Chinese learners (Gui, 1993).

Nevertheless, the UMI method of teaching pronunciation was not common in this classroom data. Teacher C and Teacher D provided the most UMI with the teaching of pronunciation (see Example 12). In secondary school, it is the usual practice to teach pronunciation at the beginning of the lesson and revise it at the end of each unit. At the university level, the use of pronunciation drills depends greatly on the teaching style and the teaching philosophy of the individual teacher. As noted, the teaching of new words in the other classes did not involve the teaching of the aural representation of the words, although this is usually considered as a key factor in learning vocabulary according to the Chinese culture of language learning. In our casual conversation, some teachers pointed out that it is important to teach the aural representation of all planned words, foreseeing the increased emphasis on the speaking component in the syllabus and the greater

demand for fluent English speakers in the workplace. Nonetheless, some teachers believed that pronunciation drills were activities for secondary school level and were unsuitable for undergraduates.

#### Example 12: UMI

Pronunciation (Teacher C):

2 T: **apply**, apply

3 Ss: apply, apply

#### IMI

IMI, which involves negotiation of word meaning, is not a readily apparent part of the curriculum in most Chinese classrooms. The IMI observed did not contain the kind of interaction described by Ellis in his experimental studies. In the observed classrooms, IMI was a controlled interaction between teacher and learners which did not involve spontaneous exchanges or negotiation of meaning. IMI in the university classroom was minimal; the interaction between teacher and learners simply involved checking learners' comprehension and testing learners' memory. The interaction was unilateral with teachers posing controlled and closed questions (Example 13).

#### Example 13: IMI

Questioning (Teacher D):

452 T: So this is means. Next one, franc, franc. Next one, **modest**, not large in quantity, size, value. For example, in China, we usually, when we give somebody present, present, you know **present**, [*gift*], right? We usually say, please accept this modest present. Right? Please accept this modest present from our class, right? If you want to present a ... a ... a present to your T, you'll say...

453 T: [*little*]

454 Ss: [*present*]

455 T: [*what? what? and then?*]

456 Ss: [*not at all*]

457 T: [*not at all*], so that is modest, modest present, right?

Although there were situations in the data where extended elaboration of word meaning led to free interaction, such situations were very rare. Example 14 below shows how the teaching of “hammer” led to free interaction with the learners. Such interaction did not relate to the negotiation of word meaning though, as the learners already knew the L1 equivalent of “hammer”. This example also illustrates several further features of the Chinese classroom. First, we can see that the learners were willing to take part and communicate in the lesson, but that they could only use their L1 because they did not have the appropriate L2 language to talk in class. Although they knew a few thousand words of English, they had never previously had the opportunity and invitation from the teachers to use these words. Secondly, we can see that when the topic is expanded it allows exposure to more new words and the opportunity to teach unplanned words. When the explanation of “hammer” extended to the singing of El Condo Pasa, it simultaneously exposed the class to many new words. Thirdly, this shows that if teachers are willing to use the L2 more frequently, and in more varied ways, a more interactive and richer lexical environment can be created.

Example 14: PMI and IMI

(Teacher A)

- 147 T: ..... **"hammer"**, now, "hammer", [*hammer.....hammer. How to say "nail"?*]
- 148 Ss: Nail.
- 149 T: Nail. Nai...nail. I learned this word from a song, again. If you can sing that song, you can remember this very, for a very long time. [*It's true. The song is called*] EL CONDOR PASA. [*You must have heard of it.*] (singing" I'd rather be a hammer than a nail. Yes I would..."
- 150 T&Ss: (singing together) "... if I could, I surely would,..."
- 151 T: "hammer", "I'd rather be a hammer than a nail." Means what? The song is talking about what? Freedom, freedom. [*The last line says:*]“Mm---a man gets tied up to the ground ", and he envied the bird, who can fly freely. "hammer", [*We all know the difference*

- between “hammer” and “nail”, don’t we?]*
- 152 S : [One hits, one is being hit.]
- 153 T : [Hammer can. What is “hammer”? --- It is equivalent to “active”,  
nail is being hammered into it.]
- 154 S : [reverse action!]
- 155 T : (laughing) [reverse action? You shouldn’t think of that.]
- 156 S : [It’s the truth.]
- 157 T : Basically...[We are now talking about] some basic principles。  
[Don’t think of the other things. The only function is reverse action.  
It, but the position that the nail goes is decided by the hammer. How  
it is hammered is also determined by the hammer, right
- 158 S : [Hammer is controlled by us.]
- 159 T: [It’s just a] metaphor .O.K, don't be so serious.

Of all the explicitly treated words in the above examples, *enjoyable*, *apartment*, *apply*, *modest*, *present* and *hammer* are known words to the learners, i.e. they are words stipulated in the English curriculum for secondary school. However, there was no observable difference in handling these known words. It seems likely that the teachers themselves did not know that these words have had already been acquired at secondary school level as there was no information about this in the textbook or teacher’s book.

It is not unusual to find teachers spending as much time teaching a high frequency word as a less frequent one or an academic word. It is also not unusual to find teachers using similar treatments when dealing with various types of words.

### ***The Multiple Treatments of Planned and Unplanned Words***

Lee (1994) examined the effectiveness of the use of a variety of explanation types (multi-type explanations) or a single explanation type (mono-type explanation) in vocabulary teaching, with or without the presence of a text. She found that the clarity and lucidity of vocabulary explanation was influenced by the adopted teaching method, availability of L1 equivalents and abstractness of the vocabulary item. Her observation suggested that if

learners could have a higher level of involvement and if teachers allowed more redundancy in explanation and more repetition in subsequent lessons, learners would be able to understand and remember better. Also, if the words were less abstract and had L1 equivalents, learning would be less demanding and the learning load would be reduced.

Tang and Nesi (2003) noted that secondary school teachers treated planned vocabulary much more thoroughly and intensively than unplanned vocabulary. They explained the meanings of planned words and made learners practice their spelling and pronunciation, using substitution oral drills. On the other hand, when teaching unplanned words, the teachers usually only provided the L1 meaning.

At university, teachers also tended to adopt an intensive treatment when teaching planned words. The majority of planned words were treated with only one or two input/output types (Tables 6a and 6b).

**Table 6a**

*Percentages of the treatment of planned words (total)*

	<b>Planned words</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1 type of input/output treatments	115	46
2 types of input/output treatments	83	33
3 types of input/output treatments	50	20
4 types of input/output treatments	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6b**

*Percentages of the treatment of planned words (individual teachers)*

<b>Single treatment</b>		<b>Multiple treatments</b>	
1 type of input/output treatments	2 types of input/output treatments	3 types of input/output treatments	4 types of input/output treatments

<b>A</b>	25	18	3	0
<b>B</b>	21	18	0	0
<b>C</b>	37	15	2	0
<b>D</b>	16	24	44	3
<b>E</b>	11	4	0	0
<b>F</b>	5	4	1	0
Total	115	83	50	3

The following examples show how multiple treatments were realized in the teaching of planned words.

Example 15: PMI and IMI

(Teacher A)

122 T: "**devise**", "devise" here means " think out, or plan", [*think out, design. "Design" usually we will think of which word?*]

123 Ss: Design.

124 T: **Design**. [*but here it means...*],"design" [*usually it refers to ..... a writing kind of thing ..... for example*] device a set of exams. [*setting exam paper, it can be said as "devising a set of exam"*] "design" can be many other , many other aspects. [*for example*] design dresses, dress designing, or design some constructions. Right? [*architectural type, for example*]. "carpenter", now "**academician**". .....

Example 16: PMI and UMO

(Teacher F)

87 T: .....Ok, now ,the second word I want to ,to know which is very important is the word "**exhaust**", it is a verb, and it is as a verb in the text, right? [*It is also used as a verb in the text.*] When it is a verb, it means.....

88 S: Tire out.

89 T: Tire out, tire out means [*very tired, exhausted*]. OK, [*It's really tired today. I am very tired. I felt very tired today.*] here you can say "what an, what an exhausting day, what an exhausting day", [*I, I am completely exhausted.*] I'm completely exhausted, Yes, use the word exhorts in two ways, one is present participle, the other is past participle, when it's a present participle, that means something ,make you exhausted, when you use the past participle, the participle, that means you feel very exhausted, right? You feel very tired, that's the first meaning as a verb, when it is as a verb, the second meaning means

- is “use up completely” “use up completely” and often in passive voice, [usually, it is passive,] can you make a sentence with the word exhaust when it means “to use up completely” [use it as this meaning, make a sentence with this word.] Wangbin.
- 90 S: He has exhausted all his money,
- 91 T: Yes, he has exhausted all his money given by his father right ? [spend all his father’s money], yes ,If I say [I can’t bear it anymore.] do you know how to say, [I have exhausted my patience.]
- 92 S: I have exhausted my patience.
- 93 T: I have exhausted my patience, I think you should better use it in the passive voice, [usually in passive form], you can say, here you can say “My patience is exhausted”. My patience is exhausted, [usually in passive form, here is passive. This is better.] Ok, now what I want to tell you is that the word exhaust can be, is also a noun, [a noun also], when it is a noun, it also, yes, means what.....
- 94 S: .....In an engine or machine steam ..... has done it.
- 95 T: Yes.
- 96 S: [exhaust gases]
- 97 T: Yes, Yes, [“exhaust gases” means, car exhaust]. How do you say?
- 98 S: Car exhaust.
- 99 T: Car exhaust, There’s a sentence, [The main cause of air pollution in this city is car exhaust. In other words, car exhaust is the main cause of air pollution in this city.] How do you say? [car exhaust, car exhaust]. How do you say?
- 100 S: The main reason of the pollution of this city is exhaust.
- 101 T: Is car exhaust, or you can say “car exhaust is the main reason of the, sorry, not of , for the city’s air pollution. Car exhaust is the main reason for the city’s air pollution, ok, that’s all for this word.

As with planned words, the six teachers used one or two input/output types to treat unplanned words (Tables 7a and 7b). Since class time was limited and there were a large number of target words to be taught before the national examination, the majority of the non syllabus-designated words tended to be dealt with only briefly. This suggests that there was a difference of emphasis; most unplanned words were dealt with more briefly than planned words. A brief explanation solved the lexical problems of the learners while at the same time expanding their lexical inventory.

**Table 7a***Percentages of the treatment of unplanned words (total)*

	<b>Unplanned words</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1 type of input/output treatments	210	76
2 types of input/output treatments	57	21
3 types of input/output treatments	9	3
4 types of input/output treatments	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 7b***Percentages of the treatment of unplanned words (individual teachers)*

	<b>Single treatment</b>		<b>Multiple treatments</b>	
	1 type of input/output treatments	2 types of input/output treatments	3 types of input/output treatments	4 types of input/output treatments
<b>A</b>	29	16	2	0
<b>B</b>	39	15	0	0
<b>C</b>	13	3	1	0
<b>D</b>	85	19	6	0
<b>E</b>	31	2	0	0
<b>F</b>	13	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	210	57	9	0

Examples of the teaching of unplanned words are given below (Example 17 to Example 19). No matter what the teachers were teaching – confusing words, collocations, prefixes, synonyms, antonyms, roots or suffixes, the main focus was always on the teaching of planned words. Other words were introduced incidentally.

Example 17: The teaching of “sign” – an unplanned word (Teacher D)

- 38 T: OK, next one, **sign**. You know sigh, sigh? You know **sign**?
- 39 S: [*sigh*].
- 40 T: Sign, [*sign*]; sigh, [*sigh*]. Remember? For example, listen, listen, listen carefully. Er, she put down the phone sighed and shook her head sadly. [Ke xia ming], she put down the phone sighed and shook her

41 S: head sadly.  
[put down the phone].

Example 18: The teaching of “sore” – an unplanned word (Teacher D)

56 T: OK, that’s right. **Throat**. That’s OK, throat. [*Good. We say sore throat is*] **sore** throat. Remember sore? S-o-r-e, sore throat, remember? S-o-r-e. [*You have learnt it in secondary school*], right?  
57 S: Sore throat.  
58 T: I have a sore throat, right?

Example 19: The teaching of “commit-” and “counter-” unplanned words (Teacher E)

44 T: “**Commit**”, do something bad or unlawful. [*make mistakes, how to say?*]  
45 Ss: Commit mistakes.  
46 T: **Commit mistakes**. [*commit crime*], **commit crime**. [*commit suicide*] , **commit suicide**, [*murder*], **commit murder**. And the next word is “**counterculture**”, [*anti-culture*]. The word is created in 1960s for the attitude and life style of many young people who rejected conventional social values and demanded more personal freedom. The counterculture first rose in the U.S. during the 1960s. And soon spread to Britain, France and other Western countries. The young people dissatisfied with the existing states of affairs in this society. Yet they were not able to find more constructive way of struggling against the existing states of affairs in their society. They indulged themselves in sex, drugs, alcohol and rock music, and took great pride in wearing long hair and unusual clothes and they took up anything that was unconventional. “Counterculture” declined in the late 1970s. Actually, the movie, Forrest Gump. This movie just talks about many historic things that happened in American history. Jenny belongs to a number of countercultures. [*We still remembered that she always carried her guitar, followed others like a hippie.*] And “**counter-**”, what’s the meaning of this prefix? It means in opposition to. For example, **counteract**, [*counteract*]. The second meaning is in return. For example, **counterattack**, [*counterattack, counterattack*]. And also, it means corresponding, [*corresponding*]. **Counterpart**, [*corresponding to a person, a thing or another*]. So I will use some words. Guess the meaning. **Counterclockwise**, [*anti-clockwise*], **Clockwise**, [*clockwise*]. **Counterargument**, [*counterargument, arguing a point. How to say “countermeasure”? anti-measure?*] **Countermeasure**. **Counteroffer**, [*counteroffer*]. [*The seller and the buyer counteroffer*]. **Countercharge**, [*counter-complain*]. OK. The next word “**confirm**”.

A closer look at the contexts in which the unplanned words are taught indicates that these words tend to be pre-determined by the teachers in their lesson preparation. Moreover, when teachers decide in advance which unplanned words they will teach in class, they also decide on the number and type of unplanned words they will teach.

***Recycling of Planned and Unplanned Words***

Researchers have not reached a consensus regarding the number of exposures necessary for successful vocabulary acquisition. Nagy, Herman and Anderson (1985) claim that the likelihood of truly knowing a word after a single encounter is only about ten to fifteen percent. In light of this claim, it seems to be important that learners encounter new words on more than one occasion. In my data, input/output treatments for taught words were traced across the entire week of lessons. Each treatment was counted and separately listed.

As shown in Table 8 and Table 9, the majority of the explicitly taught words – planned and unplanned, did not receive a cyclical treatment. Most of the explicitly taught words were treated only once in the whole week of teaching.

**Table 8**

*Occurrence of planned words in the one-week lessons*

	<b>Single occurrence</b>		<b>Multiple occurrences</b>				
	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times	6 times	> 6 times
<b>A</b>	44	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>B</b>	21	6	6	2	2	1	1
<b>C</b>	48	5	0	0	0	0	0
<b>D</b>	14	12	6	17	17	7	14
<b>E</b>	14	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>F</b>	9	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	150	27	12	19	19	8	15

**Table 9***Occurrence of unplanned words in the one-week lessons*

	Single occurrence		Multiple occurrences				
	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times	6 times	> 6 times
<b>A</b>	47	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>B</b>	53	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>C</b>	17	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>D</b>	97	8	2	0	1	2	0
<b>E</b>	30	3	0	0	0	0	0
<b>F</b>	15	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	250	12	2	0	1	2	0

The following examples show how some words were recycled at different stages of the lessons. Examples 20 and 22 show the recycling process and the recurrence of the planned vocabulary items. In Example 21, the consolidation was a comprehension task which required learners to respond to L2 with L1. The checking of learners' memory of word meaning suggests the practice of rote learning. It has to be noted that the rote learning activity is facilitated and, in a way, promoted by the teacher.

Example 20: (planned)

The teaching of "apartment" and "Latin" (Teacher D)

UMI at introduction stage

- 23 T: **Apartment**  
 24 Ss: Apartment  
 25 T: Apartment  
 26 Ss: Apartment  
 27 T: **Latin**  
 28 Ss: Latin  
 29 T: Latin  
 30 Ss: Latin

UMO at presentation stage

- 365 T: OK. So look at me first. Look at me. You know **apartment**,  
 apartment?  
 366 Ss: [*apartment*].

PMI at presentation stage

396 T: **Latin**, [*Latin*].

UMO at practice stage

548 T: **Apartment**, one, two, three.

549 Ss: Apartment, apartment

550 Ss: Latin, Latin

UMO at consolidation stage

646 T: Yes. **Apartment?**

647 Ss: [*apartment*].

648 T: **Latin?**

649 Ss: [*Latin*].

650 T: So let's read the words again.

651 T: Apartment, one, two, begin.

652 Ss: Apartment.

653 T: Once, once, once. Apartment, Latin.

In Example 21, the word “chat” is not a syllabus-designated word, but “chatter” is. In teaching the word “chat”, the teacher recycled it six times in one week. Repetition allows learners to be familiar with lexical items, making them available for productive use in encoding tasks.

Example 21:

The teaching of “chat” (Teacher D)

[Lesson 1 – first hour]

UMI at introduction stage

43 T: **chat**

44 Ss: Chat

45 T: Chat

46 Ss: Chat

PMI at presentation stage

- 421 T: Next one, **chat**, chat. I think maybe you are familiar with this word--- chat, especially in nettalk. You know, right? Chat, right? Right?
- 422 T: But chat is different from conversation, right? You know, chat is informal, informal, right? Yes. An informal conversation. Now for example, we will have a longer chat next time we meet. We will have a longer chat next time we meet. We will have a longer chat next time we meet. What means?
- 423 Ss&T: [*We will have a longer chat next time we meet.*]
- 424 T: [*We will have a longer chat next time we meet.*], right?

UMO at practice stage

- 554 Ss: **Chat**, chat.

UMO at closing stage

- 654 Ss: Apartment, Latin, quarter, overlook, presently, **chat**, means, modest, attractive, charming, passion, impression, talkative, attentive, startle, fare, reassure, generous, generous, nowadays, menu, chop, overload, digestion, hospitable.

[Lesson 1 – second hour]

UMO at introduction stage – revision

- 1 Ss: Overlook, overlook; presently, presently; **chat, chat**; means, means; modest, modest; attractive, attractive; charming, charming; passion, passion; impression, impression; talkative, talkative; inclined, inclined; attentive, attentive; startle, startle; fare, fare; reassure, reassure; generously, generously; generous, generous; nowadays, nowadays; menu, menu; chop, chop; overload, overload; digestion, digestion; hospitable, hospitable.

[Lesson 2]

UMO at introduction stage – revision

- 2 Ss: Apartment, apartment; Latin, Latin; Quarter, quarter; overlook, overlook; presently, presently; **chat, chat**; means, means; modest, modest; attractive, attractive; charming, charming; passion, passion; ....

IMI at consolidation stage – cloze exercise

- 141 T: Good, soon, soon. I received from her another letter saying that she was passing through Paris and would like to have a **chat**---a chat?

- 142 S: talk  
 143 T: Chat?  
 144 S: talk, conversation.  
 145 T: Conversation, informal conversation, right? .....

### *Unplanned*

Example 22 shows how unplanned words were recycled in lessons during the course of one week. The word “board” is not glossed in the textbook. It is, however, a syllabus-designated word and is therefore considered important for the examination. Although it is an unplanned word in this lesson, the teacher placed a lot of emphasis on it. Multiple treatment and multiple turns were observed.

Example 22: (unplanned)

Teaching of “board” (Teacher B)

[Lesson 1]

UMO, PMI and IMI at presentation stage

- 141 T: Here, what does **board** mean?  
 142 Ss: get on.  
 143 T: Get on. [*Get on the car. Get on the boat. Get on the plane.*]  
 144 T: Board [*can be used as noun. For example:*] “on board” what’s meaning?  
 145 Ss: [*on the deck*]  
 146 T: [*on the boat or on the plane but don’t mix up with*] “**abroad**”. “Board” [*originally means “board”. There is another*] American slang “welcome aboard”  
 147 Ss: [*welcome to another country*]

[Lesson 2]

UMO at consolidation stage

- 189 S: The whistle is blowing. Let’s board the train now. [*The whistle is blowing. Let’s board the train now.*]  
 190 T: [*Here*] **board**, what’s the part of the speech?  
 191 S: [*noun*]

As noted, the cyclic treatment of the new words, planned and unplanned, was very much influenced by the structure of the lesson. All explicitly treated words occurring in more than one turn were treated according to a clear presentation-practice-consolidation structure. In spite of this, lessons were not usually very clearly staged, except by Teacher D. One possible reason for this is that the teaching procedure is not provided by the teacher's book. Instead, the focus of the teacher's book is to help the teachers to understand background information relating to the reading texts, and preparing vocabulary explanations.

With the exception of Teachers E and F, the first lesson in my data usually began with the introduction of the text or of certain vocabulary items. The delivery style of the lesson was teacher-centred throughout. Since there was a tight teaching schedule that required them to finish a unit within four hours, teachers usually taught as many vocabulary items as they could in the first two-hour lesson while they explained the passage at the same time, and the remaining vocabulary would be taken care of in the second two-hour lesson on the other day. The last part of the second lesson was normally spent checking answers to exercises. Unlike the three-stage mode which allows cyclic treatment of new words, this method of presenting and checking exercises minimised the chance of word recycling.

## **Discussion**

In the Chinese EFL classroom, explicit teaching of vocabulary is obvious and dominant. As predicted, teachers taught more planned words than unplanned words and teachers would use multiple treatments to handle planned words, which were assumed to be important words for the public examination. The majority of the unplanned words were only treated once in most of the lessons recorded.

The proportion of input/output types among the six teachers followed a similar pattern. Although Ellis and He (1999) found that MO had a positive effect on comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, this output type was not found in the Chinese classrooms at all. The participation of the learners was confined to UMO which involves no negotiation. The degree of participation and the quality and quantity of output were all controlled by the teacher through the questions posed to the learners.

Researchers have claimed that IMI promotes long term retention of L2 vocabulary (Pica, 1987; Ellis, Tanaka. & Yamazaki, 1995), however, this treatment was not practiced in the Chinese classrooms either. IMI and PMI have a similarly positive effect on comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, but PMI is believed to have a higher acquisition rate (Ellis, 1995). For this reason, PMI could be regarded as a more appropriate treatment type in the Chinese tertiary classroom. The pragmatic significance of speed and quantity of teaching, therefore, justifies the pedagogical choice.

The teaching style used does not require learners' participation, which would be a way to stimulate more lexical output and lexical variety for acquisition. Although IMI was not prized in the Chinese classroom, its potential should not be neglected. As seen from the examples of IMI above, this input type is capable of enriching teacher talk in terms of variety and quantity. It allows learners to have more exposure to the language through oral input and, to some extent, compensates for the "input-poor" environment as observed in Tang (2003).

As seen in the examples above, the multiple treatment of words involving more than one input/output type characterizes vocabulary instruction in the Chinese classroom. The teacher, as the authority on the subject, transmits knowledge of the meaning and audio representation of the words, while learners demonstrate their attentiveness and respect by

answering the teacher's questions. Unfortunately, communication with the teacher is non-interactive and the output from learners is unmodified; this lack of opportunity for free negotiation and production does not encourage active processing and hypothesis testing.

Lee and Low (1999) studied the perception of effective teaching strategies among secondary school teachers and learners in Hong Kong. Their results show that there was a mismatch of expectation between teachers and learners. Similarly, a study by Tang and Ng (2002) showed that learners in China did not desire more teaching, but more exposure to the language through listening and speaking, despite the fact that teachers provided a lot of input in their teaching. The classroom corpus of this study shows that there were minimal classroom activities at tertiary level, limited to presentation, mimicking the words from the teachers and reading out the answers of exercises. The possible change in learners' expectations cannot be ignored.

Another finding from the analysis of the classroom data is that new words are rarely recycled. Multiple encounters are extremely important in helping learners to remember and recall new words, especially when the textbook does not provide a favorable recursive environment for vocabulary acquisition. Yet, recycling only occurred in classroom data when the teachers adopted a clear three-stage approach to vocabulary teaching. This is certainly not the only way to promote word retention and recall. At present, the sole means of teaching and learning words is through the texts in the textbooks, and this seems to be rather restrictive. Perhaps an appropriate way to improve teaching in the Chinese classroom would be to assign a greater number of reading tasks and production tasks that allow repeated exposure to taught words.

There is a heavy emphasis on L1 translation. The role of L1 translation in explaining L2 words assumes a lexical transfer, meaning the teacher and even the learner have

established that there is a semantic correspondence between the L1 word and the L2 word. Lexical transfer may lead to successful acceptance of the word, but it does not necessarily lead to successful use of the word and could lead to lexical transfer errors. This is particularly the case for culturally-biased lexical items.

The vocabulary teaching load is extremely heavy and the teaching strategy is monotonous. Teachers fail to use a variety of methods to teach diverse types of word, e.g. high frequency word and academic words, and to aid the acquisition of numerous types of word knowledge, e.g. productive and receptive. We learn from the other research findings that i) the vocabulary needed for reading and speaking differ; ii) acquiring the form does not lead to the acquisition of function; and iii) knowing the visual representation of the words does not necessarily lead to knowing their aural representation. The many aspects of word knowledge seem to have neglected in the instruction.

Since vocabulary-based instruction is indispensable in the Chinese EFL classroom because of the curriculum requirement, a greater variety of teaching methods should be introduced to enhance learning and allow systematic vocabulary development. Mnemonic methods, such as imaging and keyword mediations, are said to be effective in promoting vocabulary learning and acquisition (see Cohen & Aphek, 1980; Lenko-Szymanska, 1996; Sagarra & Alba, 2006; Wyra, Lawson, & Hungi, 2007; Barcroft, 2009). Semantic mapping, which links a new word to a network of known words in a lexical semantic set, is also proven to be effective in vocabulary acquisition and expansion (see Ayala, 1984; Pittelman, Levin & Johnson, 1985; Suberviola & Mendez, 2002; Mukarto, 2005).

If innovations in curriculum and textbook writing have been considered to be an advancement in EFL in China, policy-makers, curriculum developers and researchers seem to have neglected the prevalent and prevailing practices that require a more

understanding, enlightening and instructive re-engineering for any curriculum and textbook reform.

## **Conclusion**

Due to the specific vocabulary requirements in the teaching and examination syllabus, the limited class time, and the greater number of glossed words in the textbooks, it is not surprising that Chinese teachers spend a substantial amount of time dealing with vocabulary. Although teachers are well prepared, the quality of teaching is sacrificed for quantity. Words that deserve more thorough treatment have to be sacrificed in order to teach a larger quantity of new words within the assigned class time. The classroom data also suggests that teachers are unsure exactly what to teach, how to teach, what types of knowledge are needed for the learners and the types of processing that they are using. There are no criteria to help teachers to judge if a more elaborated or more simplified approach should be adopted. They are also not informed if explicit or implicit knowledge is needed by the learners and how the learning process proceeds from explicit and controlled to implicit and automatic. In spite of this, decisions regarding how to teach should be made on the grounds of the learners' needs and learning style.

As Tang (2009) put it, "the commonly held opinion is that the teacher in China is in control of knowledge and delivery, while learners listen and remember, and that examinations are of crucial importance, the ultimate goal for teachers and learners". The enduring Chinese culture of teaching and learning seems to result in abundant similarities and minimal differences in instruction style.

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## **Thematization in Romantic and Criminal Short Stories in English and Persian: Implications for Second Language Reading**

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**Keywords:** Theme, rheme, thematic organization, thematic progression, benefits of short stories, second language reading

### **Abstract**

Some teachers may believe that EFL/ESL students will be able to read and write in the target language if they focus on linguistic elements only, but other teachers who integrate short stories in the curricula have found out that stories add a new dimension to the teaching of reading. Also, they have realized that in order to read and comprehend stories more effectively, thematic organization and progression have enormous importance. Despite its appeal, however, thematicity has not been treated sufficiently in the Iranian educational context. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to compare different thematic types and thematic progression patterns in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian. Following Hallidayan categorization of theme (1985, 1994) and revised model of thematic progression patterns proposed by McCabe (1999), 10 criminal and 10 romantic short stories in both languages were analyzed in order to determine the possible differences in the textual organization of the two languages. The analysis

showed overall similarities across the stories in both languages. These similarities were attributed to the same genre family. Moreover, the results confirmed that the theme/rheme construct could be a powerful and down-to-earth method for analyzing texts, including stories, and that it contributes to reading and comprehending stories with ease of text processing.

## **Introduction**

Short stories are woven into every stage and minutiae of life. Martin and Rose (2007) state that “stories are central genres in all cultures” (p.49). Among stories, criminal and romantic short stories have attracted the attention of most people especially adolescents and young people. Also, according to Martin and Rose (2007), they are the most widely studied family of genres, and are told and read by all social groups and in all cultural contexts all over the world. Also according to Pinnacchio (2007, p.2) "short stories continued to be written in the world". As Pinnacchio (2007) argues, reading is a substantial component of any given curriculum, and many EFL / ESL students are faced with both writing stories as well as reading them. Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) believe that reading in second language is not a monolingual event, and second language learners have access to their first language as they read. In addition Whittaker (1995) claims reading is an interactive process with the reader bringing different kinds of knowledge and expectations to the text. Therefore, in order to improve writing and reading skills, readers/students need to be aware of organizational patterns of text in stories. As mentioned by Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo (1998, p.15) "organization of information is highly useful in the comprehension as well as production of texts". Erkaya (2005) points out that short stories reinforce four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In reading stories, the organization of information in the sequential way of events happening in those stories is of considerable importance. In this case, thematic organization and progression play very important roles in understanding, interpreting, comprehending as well as reading these narratives. The notion of theme/rheme constructs, as stated by Wang (2007), can show students how to read effectively by paying attention to the first paragraph and theme of a clause. Also these constructs are considered as valuable instruments in enabling students to discover the intended meaning of stories. Whittaker (1995) points out that “reading has more to offer in the support of the importance of thematization in text as well as story comprehension” (p.108). Jianghong, Hairong, and Xiangfeng (2005) believe that “thematization is manifested not only in the sentence, but also in paragraphs and in whole texts, and helps readers accelerate their reading speed” (p.18).

Over the last few years, there has been a great interest in studying the theme-rheme construct at the level of discourse, and it has been considered by many researchers as an important element in the organization of information as well as text cohesiveness (Jianghong, Hairong & Xiangfeng, 2005; Li & Liu, 2005; Whittaker, 1995). Brown and Yule (1983) point out that theme is not only the starting point of the message, but it also has a role in connecting what has already been said. Pérez (1999) states that "from the point of view of textual meaning, clauses consist of two segments, theme and rheme. Theme is recognized grammatically by the initial element in the clause" (p.165). Also, he considers two functions for theme: Firstly it acts as a point of orientation of the sentence by connecting back to previous stretches of discourse (theme or rheme) and thereby maintains a coherent point of view. Secondly theme acts as a point of departure by presenting the second segment of the sentence, the rheme.

Theme has been widely studied in English articles, scientific, literary and other texts. According to Hutchins (1977), a characteristic of all texts (stories and histories) is that the sentences are linked by some kind of *thematic progression and organization*. However, little attention, especially in the Persian context, has been paid to the study of theme and thematic organization in different genres and their effect on the reader. Therefore, this study hopes to contribute to research in EFL/ESL contexts, especially in the Persian context, from which similar contexts would take note, in the teaching/learning of reading skills.

### **Literature Review**

A number of studies have been carried out to investigate thematic structures in various texts, and these constructs have been considered an important element in the organization of information (Fontain and Kodratoff, 2003; McCabe, 1999; Zhou, 2006). Brown and Yule (1983, p.133) state that “thematization is discorsal rather than simply a sentential process. What the speaker or writer puts first will influence the interpretation of everything that follows”. Halliday (1985, 1994) considers theme as the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say and as the clause initial element. McCabe (1999) considers theme at the point where the grammar of the clause meets the surrounding text and also relates to the thought in the speaker's mind.

Martin and Rose (2007) conducted genre analysis on stories in English. They investigated various types of stories in terms of textual organization and text structure. They concluded that each story type has the same genre, and they refer to this genre as the ‘story family’ of which news, anecdotes and narratives are its members.

McCabe (1999) conducted a study on theme and thematic organization in Spanish and English history texts. Using Halliday's (1994) categorization of theme, she analyzed 20 texts: 10 from various history textbooks published in the U.S. and 10 from various history textbooks published in Spain. The overall results of her study confirmed similarities between history texts in two languages with respect to thematic content, and thematic organization patterns. Also she found out that these texts belong to the same genre. In addition, she concluded that choosing theme and rheme for analyzing texts are very useful in genre characterization.

Zhou (2006) investigated the interpersonal meta-function and theme in English and Chinese advertisement texts. For this purpose, 15 texts from two Chinese journals and 15 from two English journals were selected. The results showed that advertisement texts did not engender similarities in interpersonal meta-function across the two languages. Also, it was interesting to find that English and Chinese corpora showed great similarity in the amount of modality as theme except for the fine difference in finite modal operators. The most interesting finding was the overall similarity across the two languages in under-use of modality.

Fontain and Kodratoff (2003) analyzed two types of text structure in scientific research articles written by native and non-native writers of English. They studied thematic progression and textual structure of English research articles written by English scientists and French scientists who write their research papers in English. They pointed out some of the specific difficulties that non-native writers face in managing the structure of their texts. The results showed that the authors in the francophone corpus have less dexterity in dealing with the textual construction from two points of view: thematic progression and concept texture.

Another study was conducted by McCabe and Belmonte (2001). They explored a cognitive approach to thematic selection and investigated whether a cognitive approach to the theme notion can contribute to different fields. They selected Spanish and English texts to investigate thematic progression. The results showed that the same global spatial strategy of thematization was chosen by writers both in English and Spanish when dealing with place relations in descriptive texts. Also they concluded that theme selection is indeed influenced by the way in which a speaker perceives reality and by the way in which the speaker attempts to transmit that cognitive perception to readers.

The above mentioned studies show that although many studies have been carried out to investigate thematic organization in various texts, little attention has been paid to this construct in different genres, especially in short stories

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to analyze romantic and criminal short stories in English and Persian thematically in order to see the differences and similarities between them and also to investigate the effect of each short story on the reader in terms of thematic organization. Moreover, it tries to find direct answers to the following questions, all in regards to criminal and romantic short stories written in both English and Persian:

- 1) What types of theme are used?
- 2) What types of thematic progression are used?
- 3) Are there any differences in terms of theme/rheme organization and thematic progression?
- 4) Is there any relationship between thematic organization?

## **Methodology**

### ***The Corpus***

The materials of the present study consisted of 20 short stories: 10 romantic stories (5 in English and 5 in Persian) and 10 criminal stories (5 in English and 5 in Persian). The rationale for the selection of these stories was three fold: 1) they were representative of the criminal and romantic subgenres; 2) these stories were available on the internet and accessible to the researcher; and 3) all students come across stories, especially romantic and criminal short stories, all over the world, and these stories have the power to attract the attention of adults as well as children.

### ***Instrument***

The instruments used for analyzing and comparing the materials were Halliday's (1985) classification of theme (topical, interpersonal, and ideational) and McCabe (1999) revised model of Danes' thematic progression patterns. Halliday (1985) categorizes the elements which occur in the initial position as follows: textual, interpersonal, marked, unmarked, simple, and multiple. McCabe (1999), in her revised model of Dane's thematic progression patterns, proposed four patterns: constant theme, linear theme, split theme, and split rheme.

The rationale for the selection of the above mentioned categorization of theme is that, as stated by Martinez (2003), Halliday's categorization of theme is preferred in many studies on thematic analysis because:

i) It provides obligatory (ideational) and optional (textual and interpersonal) elements.

The optional element constitutes a key for understanding sentence construction from a

thematic perspective, and the ideational element carries the *aboutness* of the message.

ii) It relates theme to other meta-functions (ideational and interpersonal), thus integrating the ways of materializing the three types of meanings in a clause.

iii) It relates theme to sub-categorization provided by systemic functional theory such as connections for textual theme, and this makes the categories comprehensive, and the analyst does not need to provide ad-hoc sub-categorization.

In addition, a further rationale for the selection of the above mentioned thematic progression (TP) patterns was that, according to Martinez (2003), they were more plausible, attestable and complete than the other categorizations used for analyzing theme and TP patterns in texts

### ***Procedure***

In order to conduct the study, 10 romantic short stories and 10 criminal short stories were collected. Since access to electronic versions was easier, work was carried out on the electronic versions of English texts, while Persian short stories were selected randomly from available books. Moreover, the English stories were authentic and original, and they were among popular stories written by famous writers such as Doyle (2003), Jenkinson (2001), McFalls (2004).

In order to control the author's preference or style, these stories, especially English stories, represented a variety of authors. Also in order to ensure that the length of these stories are equal quantitatively, they were scanned and converted into Rich Text Format, and a word count was run on them. Afterwards, the data was carefully read and analyzed in order to determine theme types (textual, interpersonal, and topical) and patterns of

thematic organization based on the revised model of Danes thematic progression proposed by McCabe (1999). In order to ensure the coding reliability of the research, an experienced researcher, faculty member and university professor, scrutinized two sample texts - one in Persian and one in English - for the same thematic features and agreement was made on the method of analysis (see appendix A and B).

The choice of unit of analysis for this study was the independent conjoinable clause complex. This is also referred to as "T-unit" by many analysts and researchers (Berry, 1995; Coulthard, 1994; Cummings, 1995; Fries, 1995, 1983; McCabe, 1999; North, 2005; Ventola, 1995; Yan, McDonald & Musheng, 1995). McCabe (1999) believes that the optimal unit of analysis for thematic progression is the independent conjoinable clause complex, namely, the T-unit. Also, Coulthard (1994) believes that "the theme of a t-unit provides a framework within which the rheme of the t-unit can be interpreted" (p.230). Therefore, this was the unit analyzed consistently throughout this study. Finally, the results of the analysis were announced in terms of frequencies of thematic progression and theme types in every 1000 words. Then, percentages as well as chi-square analyses were administered to see the sub-generic relationships and the differences between the subgenres in focus.

## **Results**

Considering t-unit as the unit of analysis, the researcher calculated the number of words and t-units in the short stories in both languages. The tables below list the short stories and provide information on the number of words and t-units.

**Table 1***Word Counts and T-units in English Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	S <sub>1</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>2</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>3</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>4</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>5</sub> (T-unit)	Total (T-unit)
English Criminal	6758 (594)	6497 (609)	6228 (480)	4957 (377)	7036 (511)	31476 (2571)
English Romantic	6720 (550)	6285 (660)	6414 (531)	6302 (532)	6195 (625)	31916 (2898)
Total	13478 (1144)	12782 (1269)	12642 (1011)	11259 (909)	13231 (1136)	63392 (5469)

**Table 2***Word Counts and T-units in Persian Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	S <sub>1</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>2</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>3</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>4</sub> (T-unit)	S <sub>5</sub> (T-unit)	Total (T-unit)
Persian Criminal	7265 (633)	6204 (492)	5420 (491)	6597 (654)	6081 (490)	31567 (2760)
Persian Romantic	6901 (848)	6377 (509)	7121 (573)	4971 (640)	6174 (778)	31544 (3348)
Total	14166 (1481)	12581 (1001)	12541 (1064)	11568 (1294)	12255 (1268)	63111 (6108)

*Theme Types in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian*

The corpus was analyzed for the frequency and percentage of different types of theme. Comparing textual and interpersonal themes showed that both corpora were replete with textual themes. The percentage of textual themes in English romantic and criminal short stories was slightly higher (33.62%) than their Persian counterparts (27.89%). This is similar to the studies conducted by a number of researchers, though in other genres (Ghadessy, 1995; Martinez, 2003; McCabe, 1999; North, 2005; Whittaker, 1995).

In the present study, topical themes were analyzed in terms of marked and unmarked themes. It was found out that, in both corpora, the great majority of themes were unmarked, in the sense that the theme of the clause extended up to include the subject of the clause. Also, as the results show, the percentage of unmarked themes was higher in Persian criminal and romantic short stories than English, and this difference indicated that Persian short story writers showed greater tendency to thematize the subject of the clause. Results of this study are again compatible with studies conducted by other researchers in their analysis of different texts (Belmonte & McCabe-Hidalgo, 1998; Berry, 1995; Brown & Yule, 1983; Gomez, 1994; Martinez, 2003; North, 2005). Moreover, although marked themes were kept in lower profile in both corpora, the tendency of English writers to include marked themes was greater, and this showed that English writers had a greater tendency to thematize something rather than subject, in other words, they may intend to thematize adverbials or complements such as fortunately or moreover, and in this case, they made thematic choices that manifested their efforts to persuade readers, and also help develop the structure of discourse. The following tables show the total frequency and percentage of different types of theme in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian.

**Table 3**

*Frequency and Percentage of Themes in English Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Textual (%)	Interpersonal (%)	Marked (%)	Unmarked (%)
English Criminal	972 (17.77)	200 (3.65)	298 (5.44)	2273 (41.56)
English Romantic	867 (15.85)	133 (2.43)	356 (6.50)	2542 (46.48)

**Table 4***Frequency and Percentage of Themes in Persian Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Textual (%)	Interpersonal (%)	Marked (%)	Unmarked (%)
Persian Criminal	931 (15.24)	199 (3.65)	168 (2.75)	2592 (42.43)
Persian Romantic	773 (12.65)	133 (2.43)	92(1.50)	3256 (53.30)

*Textual Theme*

The corpus was analyzed for the frequency and percentage of textual themes in terms of conjunctions, conjunctive adjuncts, and continuatives. It was found out that in both corpora, English and Persian criminal as well as romantic short stories, conjunctions and coordinators were more prevalent than conjunctive adjuncts and continuatives. Native speakers of English showed a comparatively greater inclination for conjunctions and coordinators. At any rate, these differences are not so great, and these relative similarities can be attributed to the nature of both genres. The findings, especially those of conjunctions and coordinators, were similar to the findings of McCabe (1999), in the analysis of history texts in English and Spanish.

In the present study, it was found that the percentage of conjunctive adjuncts was identical in both corpora. Moreover, as the results showed, continuatives appeared in higher percentage in English criminal and romantic short stories (1.73% and 1.01% respectively), and this shows that English short story writers explicitly signal that a new move, such as a new dialogue between the characters/speakers, is beginning in the stories. Again the differences can be attributed to the nature of story genre. The following tables demonstrate the frequency and percentage of textual themes in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian.

**Table 5**

*Frequency and Percentage of Textual Themes in English Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Conjunction (%)	Conjunctive adjunct (%)	Continuative (%)	Total
English Criminal	803 (14.68)	74 (1.35)	95 (1.73)	972 (17.76)
English Romantic	718 (13.12)	77 (1.40)	72 (1.31)	867 (15.83)
Total	1521 (27.80)	151 (2.75)	167 (3.04)	1839 (33.59)

**Table 6**

*Frequency and Percentage of Textual Themes in Persian Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Conjunction (%)	Conjunctive adjunct (%)	Continuative (%)	Total
Persian Criminal	803 (13.14)	64 (1.04)	62 (1.01)	929 (15.19)
Persian Romantic	602 (9.85)	80 (1.30)	93 (1.52)	775 (12.67)
Total	1405 (22.99)	144 (2.34)	155 (2.53)	1704 (27.86)

### *Interpersonal Theme*

In the present study, the interpersonal theme was analyzed in terms of modal adjuncts, vocatives, finites, and WH-interrogatives. Comparing English and Persian criminal short stories showed that the percentage of the interpersonal theme was identical in both corpora. And the same was true for romantic short stories. This seems to be similar to the study of Whittaker (1995). She analyzed interpersonal theme in a set of linguistics and economic texts in English, and found a very similar percentage of interpersonal themes in English economic and linguistic texts (8.5% and 8.8% respectively). The following tables show the frequency and percentage of interpersonal theme in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian.

**Table 7**

*Frequency and Percentage of Interpersonal Themes in English Criminal and Romantic Stories*

Short Stories	Modal adjunct (%)	Vocative (%)	Finite (%)	WH-Interrogative (%)	Total
English Criminal	79 (1.44)	37 (0.67)	56 (1.02)	28 (0.51)	200 (3.64)
English Romantic	28 (0.51)	40 (0.73)	40 (0.73)	25 (0.45)	133 (2.42)
Total	107 (1.95)	77 (1.40)	96 (1.75)	53 (0.96)	333 (6.06)

**Table 8**

*Frequency and Percentage of Interpersonal Themes in Persian Criminal and Romantic Stories*

Short Stories	Modal adjunct (%)	Vocative (%)	Finite (%)	WH-Interrogative (%)	Total
Persian Criminal	57 (0.93)	71 (1.16)	21 (0.34)	50 (0.81)	199 (3.24)
Persian Romantic	90 (1.47)	15 (0.24)	37 (0.60)	34 (0.55)	176 (2.86)
Total	147 (2.40)	86 (1.40)	58 (0.94)	84 (1.36)	375 (6.10)

As the results show, in both corpora, modal adjuncts were more frequent than other themes. Moreover, comparing WH-items in questions showed that Persian short stories revealed higher percentage of the questions (0.81% and 0.55% respectively) than English criminal and romantic short stories (0.51% and 0.45% respectively), and this difference shows that Persian writers used questioning for emphasis. Also they had a greater tendency to express the missing parts of conversations in the form of questions.

### ***Marked and Unmarked Themes***

In the same vein, the stories were analyzed for topical themes in terms of marked and

unmarked themes. Comparing marked and unmarked themes in the short stories showed that, in both corpora, unmarked theme occurred at a higher percentage. This seems to be similar to the studies conducted by Gomez (1994). He found that, in English BBC news reports, unmarked themes were more prevalent.

Comparing marked theme in English and Persian criminal short stories showed that marked themes were employed more in English romantic stories (6.50%). This difference indicated that writers of English romantic short stories utilized more diversity in their thematic choices in representing marked themes. The following table depicts the frequency and percentage of marked and unmarked themes in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian.

**Table 9**

*Frequency and Percentage of Marked and Unmarked Themes in Criminal and Romantic Short Stories in English and Persian*

	English criminal short story (%)	Persian criminal short story (%)	English romantic short story (%)	Persian romantic short story (%)
Marked theme	298 (5.44)	168 (2.75)	356 (6.50)	92 (1.50)
Unmarked theme	2273 (41.56)	2592 (42.43)	2542 (46.48)	3256 (53.30)

Moreover, in both corpora, unmarked themes appeared at a higher percentage in Persian (95.73%) than in English (88.04%), that is, in Persian stories, themes show a greater tendency to occupy the subject position. This shows that Persian short story writers are less likely to choose a marked theme, and as stated by Halliday (1994), it is as if much of the energy of the first position in the clauses of Persian stories has already been used up.

According to Halliday (1994), “choosing marked or unmarked theme depends on the unfolding of the discourse” (p.51).

***Themes in Imperatives***

Following Halliday's (1985) categorization, imperative clauses were analyzed under the category of an implied theme. Comparing implied themes in English and Persian stories indicated the English short story writers' great tendency for implied themes. Moreover, another form of imperative, *let's*, was analyzed in the present study. McCabe (1999) also investigated *let's* in his analysis, but included it in interpersonal themes. Comparing *let's* in both corpora showed Persian corpus showed higher percentage of *let's* (0.50%) than English corpus (0.05%). This difference shows that Persian short story writers show a greater tendency to use *let's* when there is an offer or a change of addressee in these stories. The following tables mark the frequency and percentage of implied themes in criminal and romantic short stories in both languages

**Table 10**

*Frequency and Percentage of Implied Theme in English Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Implied theme (%)	Let's (%)	Total
English Criminal	58 (1.05)	0	58 (1.05)
English Romantic	76 (1.38)	3 (0.05)	79 (1.43)
Total	134 (2.43)	3 (0.05)	137 (2.48)

**Table 11**

*Frequency and Percentage of Implied Theme in Persian Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Implied theme (%)	Let's (%)	Total
Persian Criminal	54 (0.88)	22 (0.36)	76 (1.24)
Persian Romantic	48 (0.78)	9 (0.14)	57 (0.92)
Total	102 (1.66)	31 (0.50)	133 (2.16)

### *Chi-square Statistics in Different Theme Types*

In this study, statistical analysis of chi-square was carried out to compare the frequencies of different types of themes in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian.

The results are shown in the following tables where  $X^2$  stands for *chi*-square amount, *df* shows degree of freedom, and *S* refers to level of significance.

**Table 12**

*Results of Chi-Square Test for English and Persian Criminal Short Stories*

Theme types	Total words	Total t-units	Total themes (%)	$X^2$	df	S
Textual in English Criminal	63392	5469	972 17.76	0.007	1	0.93
Textual in Persian Criminal	63111	6108	929 15.38			
Interpersonal in English Criminal	63392	5469	200 3.64	0.00	1	0.99
Interpersonal in Persian Criminal	63111	6108	199 3.24			
Marked in English Criminal	63392	5469	298 5.44	0.169	1	0.68
Marked in Persian Criminal	63111	6108	168 2.75			
Unmarked in English Criminal	63392	5469	2273 41.56	0.009	1	0.92
Unmarked in Persian Criminal	63111	6108	2592 42.43			

Implied theme in English Criminal	63392	5469	58	1.50	0.037	1	0.84
Implied theme in Persian Criminal	63111	6108	76	1.24			

**Table 13**

*Results of Chi-Square Test for English and Persian Romantic Short Stories*

Theme types	Total words	Total t-units	Total themes	(%)	X <sup>2</sup>	df	S
Textual in English Romantic	63392	5469	867	15.83	0.001	1	0.97
Textual in Persian Romantic	63111	6108	775	12.67			
Interpersonal in English Romantic	63392	5469	133	2.42	0.039	1	0.84
Interpersonal in Persian Romantic	63111	6108	176	2.86			
Marked in English Romantic	63392	5469	356	6.50	0.064	1	0.30
Marked in Persian Romantic	63111	6108	92	1.05			
Unmarked in English Romantic	63392	5469	2542	46.48	0.031	1	0.86
Unmarked in Persian Romantic	63111	6108	3256	53.30			
Implied theme in English Romantic	63392	5469	79	1.43	0.054	1	0.81
Implied theme in Persian Romantic	63111	6108	57	0.92.			

As is shown, the critical value of X<sup>2</sup> with 1 degree of freedom was 3.84 for 0.05 level of significance. Since the values of *chi-square* obtained for different types of themes were less than 3.84, and the obtained value of significance was greater than 0.05, it was concluded that the differences were not meaningful. In other words, there were no significant differences between English and Persian criminal or romantic short stories.

***Thematic Progression Patterns***

All T-units were analyzed to determine different types of Thematic Progression (TP)

patterns. It should be mentioned that in order to observe the textual binding of the texts in stories, these four types of patterns, as stated by McCabe (1999), were analyzed in not more than three T-units. That is, the themes for which the reader has to go back more than three units to find the links were not considered as thematic progression patterns. The results of this analysis have been shown in the following tables.

**Table 14**

*Frequency and Percentage of Thematic Progression Patterns in English Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Linear (%)	Constant (%)	Split theme (%)	Split rheme (%)	Total
English Criminal	470 (8.59)	357 (6.52)	2 (0.03)	6 (0.10)	835 (15.24)
English Romantic	459 (8.39)	459 (8.39)	1 (0.01)	3 (0.05)	922 (16.84)
Total	929(16.98)	816 (14.91)	3 (0.04)	9 (0.15)	1757(32.08)

**Table 15**

*Frequency and percentage of thematic Progression Patterns in Persian Criminal and Romantic Short Stories*

Short Stories	Linear (%)	Constant (%)	Split theme (%)	Split rheme (%)	Total
Persian Criminal	245 (4.01)	236 (3.86)	6 (0.09)	1(0.01)	488 (7.97)
Persian Romantic	226 (3.70)	116 (1.89)	3 (0.04)	2 (0.03)	347 (5.68)
Total	471 (7.71)	352 (5.75)	9 (0.13)	3 (0.04)	835 (13.65)

As the results show, in both corpora, simple linear progression was more prevalent than other patterns. Differences were significantly noticeable vis-à-vis romantic stories. The same findings were obtained by Fontaine and Kodratoff (2003), and McCabe (1999). Fontaine and Kodratoff (2003), in their analysis of scientific texts in Francophone and

Anglophone corpus, found out that, in both corpora, linear thematic progressions were the most frequent patterns.

Comparing simple linear progression in English and Persian criminal short stories showed that this pattern doubled in English criminal short stories (8.59%) compared to Persian criminal stories (4.01%). Constant progression patterns revealed higher percentage (14.91%) in English. This is similar to the studies conducted by Fontaine and Kodratoff (2003), and McCabe (1999). The other patterns - split thematic and split rhematic chains, were significantly underestimated in both corpora, possibly implying the generic nature of short stories.

One important point to be mentioned is that there were cases in which themes could not be analyzed in terms of thematic progression patterns; in other words, they did not fit into these patterns. Therefore, such themes were analyzed under the category of miscellaneous patterns. The following table reveals the results of these miscellaneous patterns.

**Table 16**

*Frequency and Percentage of Miscellaneous Patterns in Criminal and Romantic Short Stories in English and Persian*

	English Criminal	Persian Criminal	English Romantic	Persian Romantic
Miscellaneous Patterns	258 (4.71)	367 (6)	214 (3.91)	703 (11.50)

As the results show, miscellaneous chains appeared more often in Persian stories than in English stories which might be indicative of the fact that most of thematic progression patterns do not fit into Persian stories, that is, these patterns are mostly English-oriented.

### *Chi-square Statistics for Total Thematic Progression Patterns*

In order to compare the total frequency of thematic progression patterns in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian, *chi*-square test was carried out. The results are shown in the following table.

**Table 17**

*Results of Chi-Square Test for English and Persian Criminal Short Stories*

Pattern types	Number of patterns	Percent	X <sup>2</sup>	df	S
Simple Linear in English Criminal	470	8.59	0.22	1	0.63
Simple Linear in Persian Criminal	245	4.01			
Constant in English Criminal	357	6.52	0.08	1	0.76
Constant in Persian Criminal	236	3.86			
Miscellaneous in English Criminal	258	4.71	0.06	1	0.80
Miscellaneous in Persian Criminal	367	6			
Total patterns in English Criminal	1093	19.98	0.03	1	0.86
Total patterns in Persian Criminal	855	13.99			

**Table 18**

*Results of Chi-Square Test for English and Persian Romantic Short Stories*

Pattern types	Number of patterns	Percent	X <sup>2</sup>	df	S
Simple Linear in English Romantic	459	8.39	0.26	1	0.60
Simple Linear in Persian Romantic	226	3.70			
Constant in English Romantic	459	8.39	0.23	1	0.63
Constant in Persian Romantic	236	3.86			

Miscellaneous in English Romantic	214	3.91	0.79	1	0.37
Miscellaneous in Persian Romantic	703	11.50			
Total patterns in English Romantic	1136	20.77	0.003	1	0.95
Total patterns in Persian Romantic	1050	17.19			

According to the obtained results of chi-square, it was concluded that there was no meaningful difference between English and Persian criminal or romantic short stories, in terms of thematic progression patterns.

### **Discussion**

In the present study, the analysis of English and Persian criminal and romantic short stories revealed a number of interesting points with regard to research questions. The results of chi-square test showed that there was no significant difference between English and Persian criminal and romantic short stories in terms of different types of theme and thematic progression patterns. This shows that although these short stories reveal themselves differently in different languages such as English and Persian, they belong to the same genre, and that the authors of these short stories follow the acceptable generic patterns as revealed in these short stories. In this case, Martin and Rose (2007) believe that “stories are the most widely studied family of genres, and they consider the stories as central genres in all cultures” (p.49). Also, they claim that each story type has the same genre, and they refer to this genre as the 'story family' of which narratives, anecdotes, as well as the analyzed short stories of the present study are its members.

### *Theme Types*

The analysis of criminal and romantic short stories, in both languages, showed that different types of themes such as textual, interpersonal, marked and unmarked themes, have been used in these stories. Also the results of chi-square revealed that there was no significant difference between these stories in terms of thematic organization. Therefore, it can be claimed that these short stories represent the same genre in terms of different types of themes. Halliday and Hassan (1985) believe that “texts belonging to the same genre represent a similar contextual configuration, that is, they show common characteristics in terms of field, mode, and tenor of discourse” (p.46). Therefore, these short stories, presenting the same family of genre, have similar characteristics in terms of field, mode, and tenor of discourse. According to Halliday and Hassan (1985), the field of discourse recognized in the culture refers to the kind of activities such as happenings and events in these stories, and can predict experiential meaning. Alternatively, the tenor of discourse involved in the creation of texts refers to participants such as characters or the interaction of their roles in these stories and can predict interpersonal meaning. In addition, the mode of discourse associated with the rhetorical channel refers to the parts, particular functions, as well as the channel including spoken or written language and can predict textual meaning. In other words, field, tenor, and mode of discourse are realized in topical, interpersonal, and textual meanings. In this case, theme is considered as one of the textual choices that provides interesting insights in establishing similarities within and between genres.

Moreover, an important point is that, the writers of these stories used textual themes to a greater extent than interpersonal ones. In this way, by choosing the textual features, writers help readers to follow the organization of events in these stories. This type of

intervention by the writers turns out to be a feature of all stories. In addition, these thematic choices by writers help readers to interpret, understand, and also to read short stories, and it provides a base to help readers to be aware of the generic nature of stories. Also by providing textual information, the writers intervene to influence the readers of the stories. Therefore, in reading short stories, familiarity with genre plays an important role in interpreting these stories. So the researcher argues that thematic organization has an important role in reading and comprehending stories, and the choice of theme influences the reader's comprehension of short stories. Whittaker (1995) claims that the more readers know of the conventions of genre, the better they will understand and comprehend the text, including short stories.

An important feature of English and Persian criminal and romantic short stories is the high frequency of textual themes, and as stated by Whittaker (1995), this kind of information in thematic position helps the reader to follow the organization of texts. Also this type of theme gives information about the organization of events happening in these stories, and expresses logical relations between the ideas and events. For instance, by using *but* as a logical connector, the writer prepares the reader for a change in the direction of events and happenings in the story. Another important feature of these stories is that interpersonal themes occurred in lower frequency vis-a-vis textual themes. As stated by Martinez (2003), this suggests the higher impersonality in these stories. Also this can be related to the nature of these short stories in terms of genre.

### ***Textual Theme***

In English and Persian criminal and romantic short stories, the most frequent type of textual theme was the conjunction. The total frequency of conjunctions was more in the

English corpora, that is, the English short stories show a greater tendency to use connectors and conjunctions in their texts. McCabe (1999) states that coordinators and conjunctions are used mainly to reinforce the relationships that are often explicit lexically. Also McCabe (1999) points out that this logical lexical relationship in English picks up something already mentioned in a previous clause, and thus adds content to the mental schema of the text which the reader builds. Therefore, one difference between English criminal and romantic stories, compared to the Persian ones, is the reader's ability to make logical relations between ideas presented in the stories and relate them to preceding ideas. In addition, North (2005) suggests that conjunctions indicate the relationship of a clause to a preceding text, and also provide more explicit guidance to the reader in construing a coherent interpreting of the text. Therefore, it can be claimed that, due to the high frequency of coordinators and conjunctions in English short stories, the reader can easily decode the organization of events happening in the stories by making logical relations explicitly which have a linking or connecting function, while in Persian stories, the relations are not explicit, so textual themes are not as prevalent in these stories. Note the following example from the story of *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton* by Doyle (2003): (1) ‘I've had to do with fifty murderers in my career, *but* the worst of them never gave me the repulsion which I have for this fellow. *And yet* I can't get out of doing business with him’.

Also note the following example from the Persian story of *The Other Side of Coin* by Hedayat (2007): (2) /dær hæmIn væght wærner kælämeje nä mäfhuml æda kærd væll pajæš söst šod væ beh zæmin khord. Gorest væ færiman u: ra ruje nimkæt khabandænd./ (At this time, Warner uttered vague words, *but* his legs became feeble, *and* he fell down. Gorest and Fariman put him on the bench to sleep).

The stories were also similar in terms of conjunctive adjuncts in both languages. McCabe (1999) states that conjunctive adjuncts, like conjunctions, express the logical relationships between ideas; moreover, conjunctive ties tell the reader how the writer relates the information in one clause to that given in a previous clause. Also Halliday (1994) believes that conjunctive adjuncts are different from conjunctions in that they set up a semantic relationship with what proceeds, while conjunctions set up a relationship that is not only semantic but also grammatical. Therefore, it is important to mention that conjunctions are more important in not only reading and comprehending these stories but also in cohesion of the texts in short stories.

Another type of textual theme was continuatives. The results showed that continuatives revealed an almost identical frequency in the English and Persian corpora. One of the important points in analyzing short stories was that continuatives were revealed in the examples of colloquial language of the participants and characters of these stories. According to Halliday (1994), “continuatives are discourse signalers showing a new move is beginning in speech, or they show a movement to the next point” (p.92). Therefore, continuatives are signalers of spoken discourse rather than of written discourse. Moreover, according to Halliday (1985, 1994), the continuatives do not express a speech action and have no place in mood structure. Note the following example from the story of *My One Great Love* by Gardiner (1997): (3) ““It likely wouldn't be much," I countered. "Well, it sounds like a good opportunity," my Dad said. "Oh, I know, Dad," I answered. "I've thought about that."”

Also note the following example from the Persian story of *The East of The Violet* by Mandanipour (1998): (4) /sedäje jek pærændeh umad. *Oh*, sedäje jek pærændeje bozorg bud. Tu tarîkI nemîdîdämeš./ (It was the sound of a bird. *Oh*, it was the sound of a big

bird. It could not be seen in darkness).

### ***Interpersonal Theme***

The results showed that, in both corpora, interpersonal themes occurred in lower proportion than textual themes. McCabe (1999) states that the low frequency of interpersonal theme, compared to textual theme, indicates the lack of symmetry between two participant roles involved in act of communication. Therefore, it can be claimed that, in the above mentioned short stories, there was an asymmetrical relationship between reader and writer. In other words, through this asymmetrical relationship, the author's voice in stories is usually one of authority over the reader, one who is in a position to know; that is, writers of these stories use declarative statements to narrate what events took place where and when, what certain individuals did and so on.

Also, it can be claimed that the writers of these stories use more impersonal clauses to express their views on the events, so impersonal forms are more usual in these stories, and this is the case that events are more important than character relations. Note the following example from the story of *The Adventure of the Three Students* by Doyle (2002a): (1) ‘It was in the year '95 that a combination of events caused Mr. Sherlock Holmes to spend some weeks in one of the great university towns, and it was during this time that the small but instructive adventure befell us. It will be obvious that ...’

In the above example, the writer used impersonal clauses to move the story on. Also, in this way, he tried to express and narrate the events. In addition, McCabe (1999) points out that interpersonal meta-function is concerned with social relationships as they are realized in text, and there can be interaction between the authors and readers. In the case of the analyzed short stories, there is an interaction not only between the reader and

author, but also between the characters of the stories and readers. This interaction is social and emotional in romantic short stories while it is social and unkind in criminal short stories. Brown and Yule (1983) note that one characteristic of interactional speech, such as interactional speech occurring between the characters of the mentioned stories, is that the interaction aspect is frequently thematized through personal pronouns such as *I* and *you*. Note the following example from the story of *My One Great Love* by Gardiner (1997): (5) ““Do *you* like to read?” I asked. “*I* don't read much” She admitted. “Maybe *I* can change that” I said.”

Also note the following example from the Persian story of *One Who Is Expelled* by Mohagheghi (1992): (6) /*mæn* zænæm ra tælägh nemİdæhæm. *Mæn* æz In zæn seh bæçeh daræm. *Mæn* çetor mİtævanæm mädær ra æz seh bæçehæš doda konæm./ (*I* can not divorce my wife. *I* have three children from this woman. *I* can't separate a mother from her three children).

Also the results showed that among the subcategories of interpersonal theme, modal adjuncts were used more frequently in English stories vis-a-vis Persian stories. McCabe (1999) states that, “by means of modal adjuncts, the writer can interpolate their commitment to proposition, and they are considered as one of the main realizations in interpersonal theme” (p.230). Also she points out that modal adjuncts are flexible as to their placement in the clause. In analyzing the short stories, it was found out that, in the English short stories, the authors had a greater tendency to place the modal adjuncts at the beginning of clauses. In this way, by placing them in the beginning as the point of departure, the English short story writers express their own angle of judgments on the events, and also this makes the stories intuitively much more colloquial. In this case, Fries (1983) claims that placing theme at the beginning makes the information and

statement seem more important and less tentative. Moreover, placing modals at the beginning or in the last section of the clause depends on the stylistic preferences of the writer. Therefore, it was natural for the authors of these English stories to thematize them at the beginning, so the frequency of modal adjuncts was greater in English short stories. Moreover, analyzing these short stories in terms of vocatives showed that, in both corpora, characters mostly addressed each other directly with their personal names. In this way, the reader will explicitly be informed that there is an exchange between the characters or a change of addressee. McCabe (1999) believes that “vocatives are clause initial, but are not part of the grammar of the clause” (p.231).

In the case of finite operators, it was found out that they occurred in higher frequency in English criminal and romantic short stories. English short story writers try to make the events of the stories more elaborate, arguable, and challenging, and a good way to do this is to give the story a point of reference here and now, and this is what the finite operator does, and these operators relate the proposition to its context. Therefore, English short story writers use a wide variety of finite operators. Halliday (1994) claims that “finite elements relate the proposition to its context in the speech event, and bring the proposition down to earth so that it is something that can be argued about” (p.90). Therefore, it seems that English criminal and romantic short stories are more elaborate and challenging, while in Persian short stories, writers use fewer finites in describing events; therefore, the events of these stories seem less challenging.

By comparing WH-interrogatives in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian, it was observed that they were more frequent in Persian short stories. The important point is that, in these stories, these questions are not in the form of question and answer, but rather they were used for other functions such as emphasizing. In addition, in

these stories, questions imply a sort of interaction between the reader and writer. McCabe (1999) claims that “the questions signal a textual shift, and serve to direct the reader's attention to a shift in focus” (p.261). Note the following example from the story of *Dracula's Guest* by Stoker (2002): (7) A:

““What is unholy?” I enquired. B: "The Village". A: "Then there is a village?" B: "No one lives there hundreds of years.”

Also note the following example from the Persian story of *One Who Is Expelled* by Mohagheghi (1992): (8) A: “væghti bærgæšti ,dære äpartemän ra Çeguneh bäs kærđi?” B: “dær bäs bud.” A: “dær bäs bud?” B: væli bæhäreh beh khuneh najumædeh bud.”( A: When you returned, how did you open the door? B: The door was open. A: The door was open? B: But Bahareh had not been come back home).

### ***Marked and Unmarked Themes***

Comparing marked theme in terms of frequency in these short stories showed that marked theme was used more frequently in English corpus, while in the case of unmarked themes, they were more frequent in Persian criminal and romantic short stories. Therefore, it seems that the writers of Persian stories showed a greater tendency to place the theme as the subject of the clause, i.e. as the participant in the transitivity system that is concerned with ideational themes, and unmarked themes are associated with this system. Moreover, according to Halliday (1994), the authors use unmarked theme if there is no prior context leading up to it, and there is no positive reason for choosing anything else (p.33). In Persian short stories, the authors mostly used pronouns as unmarked theme. Martinez (2003) states that marked themes organize the text explicitly in terms of time, place, etc. For instance, in terms of time, they emphasize the chronological sequencing of the events.

In addition, Martinez (2003) considers marked themes as the usual markers of transition. The important point to mention here is that, in the short stories analyzed in the present study, marked themes were not used to signal transition, but rather they were mainly used for emphasis, particularly to focus on the purpose of actions and events carried out, or on the relevance of the sequence of time and events. Note the following example from the story of *The Adventure of the Three Students* by Doyle (2002a): (9) “*Today, about three o'clock, the proofs of this paper arrived from the printers. I had to read it carefully, as the text must be absolutely correct. At four-thirty, my task was not yet completed, so I left the proof on my desk.*”

### ***Thematic Progression Patterns***

The analysis of short stories in both languages showed that different types of thematic progression patterns (simple linear, constant, split thematic, and split rhematic progression) were used in the English and Persian short stories. These patterns, as stated by McCabe (1999), provide continuity in discourse, and organize the text.

The results showed that thematic progression patterns were used more frequently in English criminal and romantic short stories than in Persian ones. Therefore, it can be claimed that English short stories contain more text connectivity and discourse continuity. In addition, comparing simple linear progression in criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian showed that this pattern was more frequent in the English corpus, and it occurred in higher frequency than constant progression. McCabe (1999) states that, "by using simple linear progression, authors can ensure that the readers are constantly interacting with theme in terms of points of departure, thus elaborating on concepts in a way which allows readers to optimally build up the conceptual framework" (p.190).

Moreover, the higher frequency of simple linear progression in English short stories indicates that these short stories, as stated by Wang (2007), have a more dynamic effect on the reader, and also there is more cohesion between the ideas and sentences in English short stories, and this has a positive influence on the reader. In addition, since the simple linear progression predominates in English criminal and romantic short stories, this indicates that there is asymmetrical relationship between the reader and writer, and, this asymmetrical relationship indicates that there is a shared knowledge between the reader and writer; therefore, in choosing the point of departure, the writer selects the information contained in the rheme of the preceding context to which the reader and the writer have shared knowledge. Also in English short stories, there is a greater tendency towards casual explanation of events in these stories which is associated with their narrative nature. Also, McCabe (1999) attributed the higher frequency of simple linear progression, compared to constant progression, to the pedagogical nature and purpose of texts, including stories. Moreover, the results showed that constant progression occurred again in a higher frequency in English short stories. The reason is that in English short stories, especially in English romantic short stories, the author, as stated by McCabe (1999), assumes a considerable amount of shared knowledge on the part of the reader, and therefore, it is not necessary for the author to continually draw on information in the previous rheme, so the author tries to keep some elements constant in a series of clauses that results in constant thematic progression. According to Fries (1983, p.124), “when constant progression pattern is used, it tends to relate sequence of events happening in the stories and involve a common character or set of characters, or has, as the point of departure, a setting of time or place”.

The last important point that should be mentioned here is that not all of the themes fit

into the thematic progression patterns. In the present study, they have been considered as miscellaneous patterns. This does not mean that these patterns are unimportant, because in fact they do have an important role in discourse organization. Such patterns, as stated by McCabe (1999), allow writers to insert them without necessarily providing a specific link to an immediately preceding clause. Also they reflect the writer's underlying concept for duration of texts in stories. Comparing English and Persian criminal as well as romantic short stories showed that miscellaneous patterns occurred in a higher frequency in the Persian short stories rather than the English ones. The interesting point is that, according to the obtained results, it can be claimed that these patterns are mostly English-oriented.

In addition, it should be pointed out that although these patterns are more frequent in the English than the Persian stories, this does not imply that the Persian texts are less cohesive; rather, they keep cohesion through other ways. Persian short story writers try to keep cohesion by using other structures and patterns; for instance, centralized progression pattern was found in these stories. According to Wang (2006), in this pattern, each clause has got different theme but the same rheme. Note the following example from the story of *The Other Side of Coin* by Hedayat (2007): (10) /mi:danæm keh æz khodæm bædæm mlajæd. Räh mlrævæm æz khodæm bædæm mlajæd. fekr mikkönæm æz khodæm bædæm mlajæd./ (I know that *I hate myself*. When I walk, *I hate myself*. I think that *I hate myself*.). Therefore, considering the above mentioned points, it is claimed that thematic progression patterns have important roles in the organization of texts at the level of discourse, and improve cohesion between the sentences and ideas. Also they have a positive effect on the writers and readers.

## **Conclusion**

By analyzing criminal and romantic short stories in English and Persian, this study has revealed that different types of themes were used in short stories in both languages. The most interesting point was that the overall results of the present study confirmed similarities with respect to thematic content and thematic progression patterns in both languages. Therefore, it is concluded that these short stories represent the same family genre as a whole. Thus, the results of this study provide support for genre influence on theme choice. In addition, since these stories had the same genre, they also show similarities in terms of field, mode, and tenor of discourse in terms of textual and contextual features. Moreover, the present study confirms that theme/rheme construct could be a valuable instrument for teachers when it comes to helping students read these stories effectively by paying attention to the way the writer organizes the information, and the way s/he makes thematic choices. Generally, it is confirmed that thematic organization and progression patterns provide the cohesiveness of the texts, and allow students to focus on these stories at the level of text, and this helps them understand, interpret, comprehend and read short stories more effectively.

## **Implications for Second Language Reading**

Short stories are woven into every stage and minutiae of life, and every one comes across stories. Erkaya (2005) states that “short stories help students learn and reinforce language skills” (p. 1). Moreover, as stated by Erkaya (2005), when students read stories, they interact with the text, but they should know how to interpret and read the stories. Therefore, in order to improve their reading comprehension, they need to be aware of the organizational patterns of the text. In this case, thematic organization and thematic

progression play a very important role. Jianghong, et. al (2005, p.19) and Wang (2007) claim that the notion of theme and rheme patterns are very valuable in teaching reading and showing students how to read effectively by paying attention to the theme of a clause. Also in their view, the theme forms a context for interpreting stories. The writer chooses an element as theme in order to give prominence to it, and to convey some implicit meaning behind it.

Broadly speaking, Jianghong, et. al (2005) have discussed the implications of theme-rheme theory on the teaching of EFL/ESL reading and have mentioned the following implications and applications in order to improve the students' reading comprehension:

- 1) By analyzing thematic structure in the texts, readers can not only identify the important information but also track the writers train of thought;
- 2) Due to short term memory, following the themes of a sentence enables readers to remember the most important information;
- 3) Moreover, drawing upon thematic progression patterns, readers can infer implied messages in a text and gain insight into a writer's underlying concern;
- 4) Finding themes of the text is a very effective method for fast reading and keeps the students aware of the central information.

Therefore, considering the above points, as stated by Wang (2007), writers must be able to control the flow of information in the texts, and by paying attention to the writers' way of choosing themes, readers can detect special effects in the style and also the intended meaning, and in this way they can predict what will happen next. Besides, the non-native reader should be aware of the differences in the rhetorical structure of stories in both languages.

Now that we see that theme-rheme theory plays very important roles in reading

comprehension, the following steps are suggested for reading instruction in the classroom: Firstly, students should be aware of the importance of theme-rheme theory in reading comprehension. Therefore, its importance should be explained to students. Secondly, thematic structure organization in a text should be explained to students, and they should be shown how to organize and use each pattern to improve their comprehension of stories. Thirdly, practice is very important. Practice can be followed by (a) highlighting themes and determining different types of theme; (b) drawing a diagram of the passage to help student understand how the writer organizes his/her ideas, and what the key information is; (c) identifying thematic progression patterns; (d) discussing these patterns in order to help students be aware of the distribution of information in the text of stories.

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## **Texts Analyzed**

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## Appendix A

### A sample of analyzed text in English from the story of *Lady With Lapdog* by Chekov (2001):

(1) Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov had begun to take an interest in new arrivals. (2) He saw walking on the sea-front, a fair-haired young lady of medium height, wearing a beret; (3) a white Pomeranian dog was running behind her. (4) And afterwards he met her in the public gardens and in the square several times a day. (5) She was walking alone, always wearing the same beret; (6) no one knew her, (7) and every one called her simply “the lady with the dog.” ” (8) If she is here alone without a husband or friends, (9) it wouldn't be amiss to make her acquaintance," (10) Gurov reflected. (11) He was under forty, (12) but he had a daughter already twelve years old, and two sons at school.(13) He had been married young, (14) and by now his wife seemed half as old again as he... .

(1) Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov	had begun to take an interest in new arrivals
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(2) he	saw walking on the sea-front, a fair-haired young lady of medium height, wearing a beret
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(3) a white Pomeranian dog	was running behind her
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(4) and	afterwards	he	met her in the public gardens and in the square several times a day
textual (conjunction)	Textual (conjunctive adjunct)	ideational (marked)	Rheme
Theme			

(5) She	was walking alone, always wearing the same beret
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(6) no one	knew her	
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme	

(7) and	every one	called her simply “the lady with the dog.”
textual (conjunction)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(8) if	she	is here alone without a husband or friends
textual (structural)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(9) it	wouldn't be amiss to make her acquaintance	
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme	

(10) Gurov	reflected	
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme	

(11) He	was under forty	
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme	

(12) but	he	had a daughter already twelve years old, and two sons at school
textual (conjunction)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(13) He	had been married young	
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme	

(14) and	by now	his wife	seemed half as old again as he
textual (conjunction)	textual (conjunctive adjunct)	Ideational (marked)	Rheme
Theme			

## Appendix B

### A sample of analyzed text in Persian from the story of *One Who Is Expelled* by Mohagheghi (1992):

/(1) bæhäreh mæšghule neveštæn mišævæd (2) væ mä beh möajeneje mæhæl væ pændzere mišævæd. (3) Bæhäreh In êenIn mišævæd: (4) mæn væ pærväneh khähære jekdigær nišim. (5) Væ mä beh khähære hamsajeha u: ra khähære mæn moærefi kærdim. (6) Dær vägheh pærväneh dokhtæri bud særgardan væ randeh šodeh æz dämäne khänevædeh. (7) šohæræm bæräje dzologiri æz enheräf væ enhedämæš u: ra tæhte hemäjæte khi:š ghærär dad. (8) æmma pærväneh äšegh bud. (9) Khänevædeje pærväneh khänevædeje mohtæræmi hæstænd (10) væ pærväneh khäri bud dær mišævæd äm golestæn. (11) Pesæri pærväneh ra gu:l mišævæd (12) væ zäheræn änhä äšeghe jekdigær mišævæd....

(1) bæhäreh	mæšghule neveštæn mišævæd
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(2) væ	mä	beh möajeneje mæhæl væ pændzere mišævæd.
textual (conjunction)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(3) bæhäreh	In êenIn mišævæd
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(4) mæn væ pærväneh	khähære jekdigær nišim.
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(5) væ	mä	beh khähære hamsajeha u: ra khähære mæn moærefi kærdim.
textual (conjunction)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(6) Dær vägheh	pærväneh	dokhtæri bud særgardan væ randeh šodeh æz dämäne khänevædeh.
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textual (conjunctive adjunct)	Ideational (marked)	Rheme
Theme		

(7) sohæræm	bæräje <u>d</u> zologiri æz enheräf væ enhedämæs u: ra tæhte hemäjæte khi:s ghærär dad.
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(8) æmma	pærväneh	äseghe bud.
textual (conjunction)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(9) Khänevädeje pærväneh	khänevädeje mohtæræmi hæstænd
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(10) væ	pærväneh	khäri bud dær mlane än golestän.
textual (conjunction)	ideational(unmarked)	Rheme
Theme		

(11) Pesærl	pærväneh ra gu:l mlzænæd
Theme (ideational-unmarked)	Rheme

(12) væ	zäheræn	änha	äseghe jekdigær mlzævænd
textual (conjunction)	Interpersonal (modal adjunct)	ideational(marked)	Rheme
Theme			

## **Book Review**

*Neurolinguistics. An Introduction to Spoken Language Processing and its Disorders*

J. C. Ingram. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xxii + 420.

**Reviewed by Francis A. Andrew**

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*Neurolinguistics: An introduction to spoken language and its disorders* by J.C. Ingram with five multi-chapter parts is intended as an introduction for students of cognitive science, linguistics, and speech pathology.

The first section (chapters 1-4) examines foundational concepts and issues on the nature of language, language processing, and brain language disorders (aphasiology). The author explains that these chapters can compliment many “standalone introductory courses in linguistics, psychology or neuroanatomy.” In chapter 1 the author examines the theory of the coevolution of the human brain, a theory which contends that language developed out of a need for a representational system. He then treats upon an alternative to this theory which holds that language ability is based upon inherent neurological wiring. After dealing with the structural aspects of neuroanatomy, the author then proceeds to chapter 2 to look at language forms and meanings, phonology, syntax, semantics and various other design features of language which fall within the domain of the linguist. Ingram then devotes chapter 3 to relating language to neuroanatomical areas and explains the tools

and methods employed by the neurologist in imaging these areas. In the final chapter of this section, the author examines the modularity versus integration debate and explains the two theories of modularity as expounded by Chomsky and Fodor.

In the second part (chapters 5-8) the author deals “with successively 'higher' levels of language processing and their respective manifestations in brain damage: speech perception.” Ingram considers the main three aspects of speech recognition in chapter 5. Here he explains how input signals are processed by the human auditory system, how words are stored in the speech recognition lexicon, and how these can be retrieved by human neurological processes. In chapter 6 he considers how speech perception differs from other forms of auditory perception and what the experimental evidence is for this. And in chapter 7, he explores lexical retrieval systems and how the human brain recognizes larger semantic units from basic phonological segments. The author concludes the section with a chapter that provides a framework for evaluating clinical processing disorders which affect the ability of an aphasiac patient to perceive single words.

Part three of the book offers a discussion of word structure and meaning (lexical processing and its disorders). The author begins this unit by examining in chapter 9 how the meanings of words are represented in the human mental lexicon and how lexical meanings are assigned to words within sentence structure. The following chapter considers theories dealing with the semantic meanings of words and how these are related to wider structural contexts in which they are embedded. The final chapter of the section then deals with aphasic disorders in which word retrieval and word recognition pose a problem for the patient.

In part four, the author explores syntax and syntactic disorder (agrammatism; chapters

12-14) and discourse and the language of thought disorder (chapters 15-16). In the opening chapter to this part of the book, Ingram looks at the problems patients with brain damage have in utilizing the grammatical rules of language and then goes on to explore the connection between loss of syntax and sentence comprehension. In the following chapter he takes a close look at the two opposing theories (the modular theory and the interactive theory) which concern the role syntactic processing plays in the comprehension of sentences. And in the final chapter of the section, chapter 14, Ingram takes another look at the problem of agrammatism in patients suffering from Broca's aphasia and makes a critical evaluation of the theories related to receptive agrammatism.

And in the final part, part 5, the author speculates on unsolved problems and possible ways forward. The opening chapter deals with discourse, which Ingram describes as "the highest and most complex form of linguistic representation" and one where there is interaction with non-linguistic concepts and structures. The author states that the precise nature of a discourse model with regard to neurological representation is still an area into which a lot of research will have to be conducted. In the following chapter, Ingram examines discourse within the clinical context of discourse breakdown, a condition which occurs in patients suffering from Broca's aphasia. And in the final chapter of his book, the author considers the direction in which the theories of language are heading and the changing types of metaphor employed in explaining this uniquely human phenomenon. He additionally emphasizes that the current trend is veering away from analogies with the digital computer and towards what neurophysiologists term "embodied cognition."

What makes *Neurolinguistics: An introduction to spoken language and its disorders* by J.C. Ingram so interesting is its attempt to get to the very roots of language itself by delving inside the human brain. Ingram's book is significant in the field of English

language teaching in that it serves to heighten awareness in the English language teacher of the neurological roots of language. Those involved in the areas of curriculum design and teaching methodology could well profit from this book by developing course materials and instructional techniques which take into account the neurological aspects of second language learning.

## **Book Review**

### *Practicing Theory in Second Language Writing*

Tony Silva & Paul K. Matsuda (Eds.). Parlor Press, 2010. Pp. vii + 313.

### **Reviewed by Hyun-Joo Oh**

*State University of New York at Buffalo, New York, U.S.A.*

*Practicing theory in second language writing* edited by Silva and Matsuda explores what theory in second language (L2) writing means, how it works, and how to practice it in a way that makes the text a resource book which can be used by L2 writing specialists such as language teachers, researchers, graduate school students as well as administrators.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I (The Nature and Role of Theory in Second Language Writing) addresses the role of theory in L2 writing, and Part II (Reflections on Theoretical Practices) offers reflections of practice and a look at current issues in the field.

The first part, The Nature and Role of Theory in Second Language Writing, contains four chapters. In the first chapter, “Between Theory with a Big T and Practice with a Small p: Why Theory Matters,” Atkinson explains theory in L2 writing and education and develops a way of thinking about theory and practice which differs from dominant approaches. Chapter 2, “Theories, Frameworks, and Heuristics: Some Reflections on Inquiry and Second Language Writing” by Cumming, explores the place of theory in data-based descriptive research. And in chapter 3, “Multicompetence, Social Context, and

L2 Writing Research Praxis,” Ortega and Carson focus on linguistic and cognitive dimensions of L2 writing and explore interfaces between L2 writing and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The final chapter in this part, Goldstein’s “Finding ‘Theory’ in the Particular: An ‘Autobiography’ of What I Learned and How about Teacher Feedback,” articulates the principles of feedback and revision to help teachers understand how feedback is used in classroom situations.

Part II is much longer than the first and contains ten chapters which reflect on theoretical practices and present the issue of theory in L2 writing. In chapter 5, “Practicing Theory in Qualitative Research on Second Language Writing,” Harklau and Williams review the uses of theory in L2 writing research literature and emphasize the role of it in qualitative research. Chapter 6, Tardy’s “Cleaning up the Mess: Perspectives from a Novice Theory Builder,” describes the author’s qualitative research as a means of showing how’s and why’s of genre knowledge development and addresses the process of qualitative research to be a theory builder. And in chapter 7, “A Reconsideration of Contents of ‘Pedagogical Implications’ and ‘Further Research Needed’ Moves in the Reporting of Second Language Writing Research and Their Roles in Theory Building,” Flahive presents trends in L2 writing research and suggests the need for change in conventions. Chapter 8, “Beyond Texts: A Research Agenda for Quantitative Research on Second Language Writers and Readers,” then discusses Reynolds’s finding that there is a balance between qualitative and quantitative studies through a survey of research studies published in applied linguistic and composition journals.

With chapter 9, the book breaks from theory and moves towards current issues and concerns among L2 instructors. Canagarajah, in chapter 9, “Ideology and Theory in Second Language Writing: A Dialogical Treatment,” challenges stereotypes about

ideologies and demonstrates the writing teacher's dilemma and the theory/ideology connection through the dialogues of a writing teacher, author, and critic. And chapter 10, Kubota's "Critical Approaches to Theory in Second Language Writing: A Case of Critical Contrastive Rhetoric," indicates different theoretical and political orientations within critical approaches.

In chapter 11, "Theory and Practice in Second Language Writing: How and Where Do They Meet?" Zhu explores the conception of theory-practice relationship and describes the relationship as bi-directional and interdependent. Chapter 12, "Theory-and-Practice and Other Questionable Dualisms in L2 Writing" by Hedgcock, focuses on the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice in L2 writing. And in chapter 13, "Assess Thyself Lest Others Assess Thee," Crusan examines the pedagogical effects and the politics of assessment and proposes a theory of L2 writing assessment.

In the last chapter of the book, "'Do I Need a Theoretical Framework?' Doctoral Students' Perspectives on the Role of Theory in Dissertation Research and Writing," Belcher and Hirvela raise the issue of theory for doctoral students writing their dissertations and present guidelines and advice for future dissertation writers or researchers.

Overall, readers will find that the book offers essays from eminent scholars in L2 writing, and some chapters suggest research questions or provide specific suggestions regarding L2 writing research. Well-written and organized, the book also helps readers critically view theoretical perspectives in qualitative and quantitative research. Additionally, readers can see an overview of different conceptions and applications of theory related to L2 writing. The only criticism, if any, is that it is not written in an accessible and friendly style because the book focuses on research-based

monographs; thus novice teachers or researchers may be unfamiliar with content or terminology. Nevertheless, this volume will make a valuable addition to the field of L2 writing.

## **Book Review**

*Writing in the Devil's Tongue: A History of English Composition in China*

Xiaoye You. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010, Pp. xi + 237.

**Reviewed by Jamie Elizabeth Marko**

*State University of New York at Buffalo, New York, U.S.A*

English instruction has long been part of a global love-hate relationship, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in China. Colonialism, Maoist thought, national pride, economic growth, and deep-rooted education traditions have perpetuated the pro- and con English movements to the present day. Xiaoye You details this contentious affair in *Writing in the Devil's Tongue*, a valuable resource for historians, linguists, educators, or those simply seeking to understand part of the complicated cultural dynamics of two world powers.

Divided into six chapters and arranged chronologically, You guides the reader from the initial hostility against the “foreign devil’s tongue” (p. 15) to the current attitudes that see English as a necessary tool for international competition. Through an in-depth analysis of traditional pedagogical principles, historical context, and concrete artifacts, You shows the ever-changing attitudes, influences, techniques, and consequences of formal English instruction in China.

The exploration opens with chapter 1, “Encountering the Devil’s Writing,” set just after

the Chinese ports were taken over by Great Britain following the 19<sup>th</sup> century opium wars. English education was introduced in Chinese universities, much to the disdain of prevailing intelligentsia. Seen as the language of the foreign devils, English composition was considered lacking in the discipline and refinement of traditional Chinese rhetoric. At the time, Chinese composition was based on Confucianism, and good writing adeptly applied Confucian philosophy to everyday life. Original self-expression was irrelevant. Since English was originally and continuously taught through direct translation, Confucian structures appeared awkward and disjointed.

Such direct translation was abandoned in favor of full English instruction, as is detailed in the second chapter, “Writing and Decolonization.” English schools proliferated throughout decolonization as the Chinese embraced English to modernize and liberate themselves from the traditional mindset that had previously contributed to defeat.

This idea of liberation from foreign, or Western, influence contributed to the Cultural Revolution, and English was increasingly depicted as the antithesis of such liberation. Russian became the important foreign language, and English was demonized as poisonous to Maoist thought. Chapter 3, “Writing and the Proletarian Revolution,” depicts the near-extinction of English instruction as fewer students were permitted to study English, and those who did were limited to translating the treatises of Mao Zedong without personal interpretation.

Due to the revolutionary goals of Maoist China, English instruction remained stagnant until the death of Chairman Mao, as detailed in the fourth chapter, “Writing and the Four Modernizations.” China was already in the process of loosening restrictions, and foreign language education was quickly reintroduced as a tool for global competition. French, English, and German were all taught in universities as China sought to prepare to

compete in the global market. Western ideologies were welcomed, and students were encouraged to compose more personal narratives instead of the regurgitations of Marx, Zedong, and Confucius.

This push for globalization is furthered in chapter 5, “Writing and Socialism in Chinese Characters,” as the digital age exploded. Once tightly-closed and monitored, China’s triumphs (Beijing Olympics) and tragedies (Tiananmen Square) were suddenly broadcast around the world. Increased global visibility gave China the opportunity for major economic reform. Education took center stage as university enrollment ballooned. English instruction logically changed as well to accommodate China’s push to become a world power.

China’s ambitions are becoming reality, and its economic might has drastically changed political dynamics. “Writing in Our Own Tongue,” chapter 6, explores the theme of English as no longer being the restrictive tongue of others; it can be useful, but it is no longer dominating. English has evolved into a global language and pedagogical practices have similarly changed to accommodate all of its speakers in all of its countries.

Dr. You’s book is an important contribution to the understanding of Sino-Anglo relations. By focusing on composition and education, he provides us with a section of history that might otherwise have remained unknown. There are, however, points through the text in which more context would be helpful. While the Cultural Revolution is certainly addressed, its devastating effects are not discussed until further in the text and then only to show how English was a useful means of expression for traumatized survivors. It may be assumed that readers are familiar with the effects of the Revolution, but we should not underestimate the book’s appeal to a broader audience. *Writing in the devil’s tongue* is a fascinating and informative read that will serve a wide readership well.

## **Book Review**

*New Password 4: A Reading and Vocabulary Text* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

L. Butler. White Plains, New York: Pearson Longman, 2010. Pp. xii + 268.

**Reviewed by Tamatha A. Roman**

*Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan*

*New Password 4: A Reading and Vocabulary Text* is the fourth book in a five-level series designed to help English language learners develop their reading skills and expand their vocabularies. To do this, it follows two central ideas: that the best way for students to improve their reading skills is “to read at an appropriate level of difficulty” and that “textbooks should teach vocabulary that is most useful to learners” (p. vii).

The book is aimed at helping students with a 1,200-word vocabulary level reach a 2,000-word one and is comprised of five exciting, theme-based units: (1) “Into the World of Business,” (2) “Health Matters,” (3) “Exploring Technology,” (4) “The Environment,” and (5) “Economics,” each of which is divided into four efficient chapters and unit wrap-ups full of activities and self-tests to gauge learners’ progress.

The units themselves are similarly organized. Unit three, “Exploring Technology,” is a good example. When students approach the unit, they see the first chapter of the unit, chapter nine, “A History of Telling Time.” This chapter is separated into six sections. This first section “Getting to Ready to Read,” prompts students to discuss clocks and

telling time with their peers. And the second provides a thought provoking non-fiction passage, which contains the same title as the chapter. Accompanying this section are several comment bars and pictures in the margins that help explain unfamiliar vocabulary and a “Quick Comprehension Check” which asks students a series of true and false questions about the passage.

The third section, “Exploring Vocabulary” provides two subsections related to the reading: The first, “Thinking about the Target Vocabulary,” has students divide the bolded words in the text into their subsequent lexical categories, and the second, “Using the Target Vocabulary,” involves filling in sentence blanks with key vocabulary. The fourth section, “Developing Reading Skills,” then prompts students to study how the text is organized, scan the text for specific information, and examine the use of reference words.

The fifth section, “Expanding Vocabulary,” has students use the target words in new contexts by filling in sentence blanks and creating new sentences. And the last section, “Putting it all Together,” concludes the chapter by providing group discussion questions about the text and inviting students to write a paragraph based on their opinion about the passage.

After the students finish this chapter, they move on to three other similarly organized ones: (a) “Out with the Old, In With the New?” (b) “Appropriate Technologies,” and (c) “Technology in Science Fiction.” And then they move on to a unit wrap-up chapter, which includes three subsections: “Reviewing Vocabulary,” which asks students to fill in the phrases with the correct vocabulary word; “Expanding Vocabulary,” which has students fill in sentence blanks with the appropriate antonym; and a “Puzzle,” which prompts students to fill in a crossword puzzle based on given definitions.

The book also has several ancillaries: a comprehensive index of all the key vocabulary covered throughout the book; a CD which contains mp3 files of the entire Student Book audio program, and a teacher's text that contains the answer keys for all student exercises, unit tests, and a "Quick Oral Review" for vocabulary drills.

In addition to the book's well-organized units and chapters and many ancillaries, *New Password 4* has many positive features that will appeal to EFL teachers. The chapters are well illustrated with a plethora of pictures that help activate schematic knowledge. Second, numerous types of scaffolding tools are included: activities in chapter one, for example, are carefully explained with clear directions and examples, while activities in later chapters challenge the reader to become more autonomous by recalling their previous knowledge. And third, the book incorporates thematic content that reflects an international focus. Chapter 14, "Your Trees, My Trees, Our Trees," for example, addresses the topic of disposable chopsticks in Vietnam, Malaysia, and China.

EFL teachers and learners alike will certainly find *New Password 4* (as well as other titles in this series) to be a clear and manageable textbook for exposing learners to academic vocabulary and as a foundation for building the skills and strategies necessary for academic success.

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## **Guidelines for Submissions**

### **Submissions for the Quarterly Issue**

#### **Submissions guidelines**

The *Asian EFL Journal Quarterly* is a fully peer-reviewed section of the journal, reviewed by a team of experts in EFL from all over the world. The *Asian EFL Journal* welcomes submissions written in different varieties of world Englishes. The reviewers and Associate Editors come from a wide variety of cultural and academic backgrounds and no distinction is made between native and non-native authors. As a basic principle, the *Asian EFL Journal* does not define competence in terms of native ability, but we are a strictly reviewed journal and all our reviewers expect a high level of academic and written competence in whatever variety of English is used by the author. Every effort will be made to accept different rhetorical styles of writing. The *Asian EFL Journal* also makes every effort to support authors who are submitting to an international journal for the first time. While major revisions may be requested, every effort is made to explain to authors how to make the necessary revisions.

Each submission is initially screened by the Senior Associate Editor, before being sent to an Associate Editor who supervises the review. There is no word minimum or maximum.

#### **There are two basic categories of paper:**

\* Full research papers, which report interesting and relevant research, try to ensure that you point out in your discussion section how your findings have broad relevance internationally and contribute something new to our knowledge of EFL.

\* Non-research papers, providing detailed, contextualized reports of aspects of EFL such as curriculum planning. Very well documented discussions that make an original contribution to the profession will also be accepted for review. We cannot accept literature reviews as papers, unless these are "state of the art" papers that are both comprehensive and expertly drafted by an experienced specialist.

When submitting please specify if your paper is a full research paper or a non-research

paper. In the latter case, please write a paragraph explaining the relevance of your paper to our *Asian EFL Journal* readership.

Authors are encouraged to conform to international standards of drafting, but every effort will be made to respect original personal and cultural voices and different rhetorical styles. Papers should still be fully-referenced and should use the APA (5<sup>th</sup> edition) format. Do not include references that are not referred to in the manuscript. Some pieces submitted to the quarterly issue may be reclassified during the initial screening process. Authors who wish to submit directly to the Teaching Articles section should read the separate guidelines and make this clear in the submission e-mail.

**Referencing:** Please refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) – Contributors are also invited to view the sample PDF guide available on our website and to refer to referencing samples from articles published from 2006. Due to the increasing number of submissions to the *Asian EFL Journal*, authors not conforming to APA system will have their manuscripts sent back immediately for revision. This delays publication and taxes our editorial process.

Format for all submissions (Please read this before submitting your work)

All submissions should be submitted to: [asian\\_efl\\_journal@yahoo.com](mailto:asian_efl_journal@yahoo.com)

i) The document must be in MS Word format.

ii) Font must be Times New Roman size 12.

Section Headings: Times New Roman (Size 12, bold font).

Spacing: 1.5 between lines.

iii) 'Smart tags' should be removed.

iv) Footnotes must not 'pop up' in the document. They must appear at the end of the article. Use the superscript font option when inserting a note rather than the automatic footnote or endnote option.

iv) Citations - APA style. (See our website PDF guide)

Use the APA format as found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 5th Edition, for headings, citations, reference lists and in text referencing. Extra care should be taken for citing the Internet and must include the date the site was accessed.

About APA Style/format: <http://www.apastyle.org/aboutstyle.html>

APA Citation Style: <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/CWP/library/workshop/citapa.htm>

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v) Keywords: All articles must include Keywords at the beginning of the article. List 4-6 keywords to facilitate locating the article through keyword searches in the future.

vi) Graphs and Charts - either in the body of the document or at the end. In certain cases, a graphic may not appear in the text of the web version of the *Asian EFL Journal* but a link to the graphic will be provided.

vii) Paragraphs. Double space between paragraphs. Indent the beginning of each paragraph with three strikes of the space bar except those immediately following a heading, quotation, example, figure, chart or table. Do not use the tab key.

viii) Keep text formatting (e.g., italics, bold, etc.) to the absolute minimum necessary. Use full justification. All lines to be against Left Hand Side Margin (except quotes - to be indented per APA style).

ix) Abstract

The abstract should contain an informative summary of the main points of the article, including, where relevant, the article's purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, types of data analysed, subject information, main findings, and conclusions. The abstract should reflect the focus of the article.

x) Graphs – to fit within A4 size margins (not wider)

Thank you for your cooperation. (asian\_efl\_journal@yahoo.com)

**Please include the following with your submission:**

Name

School affiliation

Address

E-mail

Phone number

Brief Bio Data noting history of professional expertise

Qualifications

An undertaking the work has not been published elsewhere

Abstract

Any questions regarding submission guidelines, or more detailed inquiries about less common citation styles, may be addressed to the Editorial Board.

**Book Reviews:**

The *Asian EFL Journal* currently encourages two kinds of submissions, unsolicited and solicited. Unsolicited reviewers select their own materials to review. Both teachers and graduate students are encouraged to submit reviews. Solicited reviewers are contacted and asked to review materials from its current list of availability. If you would like to be considered as a solicited reviewer, please forward your CV with a list of publications to the Book Review Editor at:

[asianefljournalbookreviews@yahoo.com](mailto:asianefljournalbookreviews@yahoo.com).

All reviewers, unsolicited and solicited, are encouraged to provide submissions about materials that they would like to suggest to colleagues in the field by choosing materials that they feel have more positive features than negative ones.

**Length and Format:**

1. Reviews should be prepared using MS Word and the format should conform to 12 pica New Times Roman font, 1.5 spacing between lines, and 1 inch margins.
2. The reviewer(s)' full names including middle initial(s), title, school affiliation, school address, phone number, and e-mail address should be included at the top of the first page.
3. The complete title of the text, edition number, complete name(s) of author(s), publisher, publisher's address (city & state), and date of publication should be included after the reviewer(s)' identifying information.
4. Reviews should be between 500-700 words.

5. A brief biography of the author(s) should be included after the review.
6. A statement that the submission has not been previously published or is not being considered for publication elsewhere should be included at the bottom of the page.

**Organization:**

Reviewers are encouraged to peruse reviews recently published in the quarterly PDF version of the Journal for content and style before writing their own. While creativity and a variety of writing styles are encouraged, reviews, like other types of articles, should be concisely written and contain certain information that follows a predictable order: a statement about the work's intended audience, a non-evaluative description of the material's contents, an academically worded evaluative summary which includes a discussion of its positive features and one or two shortcomings if applicable (no materials are perfect), and a comment about the material's significance to the field.

**Style:**

1. All reviews should conform to the Journal's APA guideline requirements and references should be used sparingly.
2. Authors should use plural nouns rather than gendered pronouns such as he/she, his/her him/her and adhere to the APA's Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language, which can be found at: <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/texts/nonsexist.html>.