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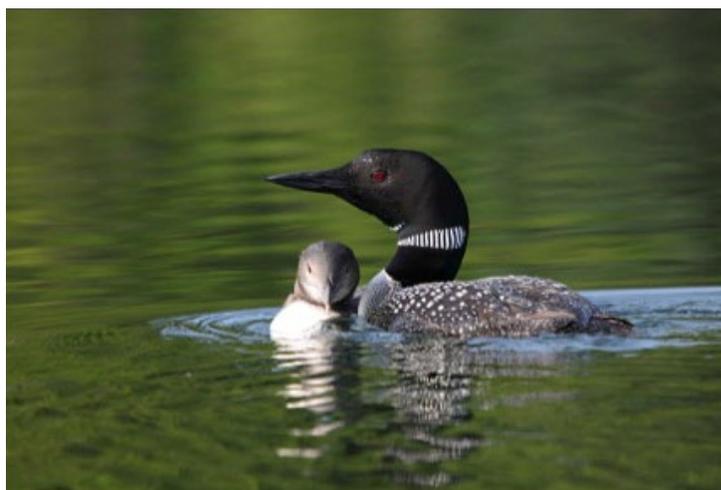
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Calendar

December 3–5	The Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA). http://www.cesba.com/events/#Conference
January 8–11	Modern Language Association (MLA). Vancouver, BC. http://www.mla.org/convention
January 23–24	National Online Forum for English as an Additional Language (EAL) / English as a Second Language (ESL) Professionals. Online. http://www.myenglishonline.ca/for-teachers/realize/
March 1–4	Languages Canada's Annual Conference, Gatineau, QC. http://www.languagescanada.ca/en/lc-2015-conference
March 18–20	Language Testing Research Colloquium. Toronto, ON. http://ltrc2015.wildapricot.org/
March 21–24	American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL). Toronto, ON. http://www.aaal.org/2015conference
March 25–28	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Toronto, ON. http://www.tesol.org/convention2015

Please, contact us (editor@teslontario.org) to let us know about upcoming events.



EDITOR'S NOTE

In this issue, along with our usual diverse mix of articles, we have two themed sections: one on learning phonology, and one on the effects of machine translation on our profession.

When we think “phonology”, we often think “accent”, and I’ve often been told by students that they like the Canadian accent. But—which one? The pronunciation of English, as of any language, is not fixed. Rebecca Roeder introduces us to two vowel changes that are in progress in Canada right now. Two papers on the sound system in this issue relate the ability to perceive speech sounds to their acquisition. John Archibald discusses the challenges that consonant clusters present to the learner and also the strategies the learner may use to overcome them. Perception is also central to the paper by Annie Tremblay, on how perceiving prosody correctly can help learners recognize words. In the fourth sound system paper, Alene Moyer lays out for us a number of individual factors that affect the acquisition of accent by adult language learners. One noteworthy finding here is that some learners are quite happy sounding “foreign”.

On the topic of machine translation, many language teachers are not happy with students using websites to translate things into or out of English. This issue includes three articles on machine translation and language teaching that should help us stop worrying and learn to love the machines. There is a good deal of potential there, the authors argue, that we may not have recognized. And language teachers are unlikely to be replaced by computers any time soon.

As usual, I’d like to thank all our contributors and strongly urge you, the reader, to become a contributor or at least let us know what you think of *Contact*, and what you’d like to see in future issues.

Brett Reynolds

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CONTACT

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EXTENSIVE READING FOUNDATION LANGUAGE LEARNER LITERATURE AWARD

The LLL Awards are given by the Extensive Reading Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that supports and promotes extensive reading in language education. Each year these awards are conferred on books that are selected for their outstanding overall quality and likely enduring appeal. The winning book in each of five categories is chosen by an international jury, taking into account the internet votes and comments of students and teachers around the world.

The 2014 Award winners were announced at the CLESOL conference, Wellington, New Zealand, in July. The Awards will be presented to the winners by Catherine Walter at the IATEFL Conference in Manchester, UK, 11-14 April 2015.

WINNERS 2014

Young Learners

Skater Boy

- By Maria Cleary
- Illustrated by Lorenzo Sabbatini
- Publisher: Helbling Languages (Helbling Young Readers)
- ISBN: 978-3-85272-526-0

Judges' comment

The book has a familiar story arc, but it invests it with energy and humor. It builds on adult disapproval of some activities that kids enjoy, even though the kids have good motives. The diction level is good, and sentence structures are nicely, but manageably, various. The illustrations are engagingly off-beat.

Reader's comment

It is a great story, simply told and with a good message. My class loved it.

Adolescents & Adult: Beginner

The Tomorrow Mirror

- By Nicola Prentis
- Illustrated by Christian Bienefeld
- Publisher: Pearson Education Ltd (Penguin Active Reading)
- ISBN: 978-1-44793-805-7

Judges' comment

In this original fantasy/horror story set in a modern UK, a young boy finds out that the mysterious mirror in his home reflects what will happen the next day. The story grabs the readers right from the beginning, and keeps their interest all throughout the book, culminating with a surprise ending. The illustrations are a creative representation of the storyline.

Reader's comment

I like this book because the story is original and we are touched by Jason's life. This story takes us into the character's head. I love it!

Adolescents & Adult: Elementary

Anne of Green Gables

- By Lucy Maud Montgomery
- Retold by Michael Lacey Freeman
- Illustrated by Gaia Bordicchia
- Publisher: ELI (Teen Readers)
- ISBN: 978-88-536-1576-3

Judges' comment

This excellent book simply, but engagingly, retells the story of Anne and her relationships with Marilla, Matthew, and the community and environment around her. The cute illustrations are aimed at younger readers, but older readers will equally enjoy the story.

Reader's comment

Anne's feelings often go up and down. She makes many mistakes or does surprising things, so the story develops one thing after another. It is interesting for me. I can see Anne's kindness and childlike character. I also can see the process of building good relationships between Anne and many other people. This story makes my mind warm. This is a good story.

Adolescents & Adults: Intermediate

Bob Marley

- By Vicky Shipton
- Photo research by Pupak Navabpour
- Publisher: Scholastic (ELT Readers)
- ISBN: 978-1-908-35198-2

Judges' comment

This biography reads like a story bringing this 1970s iconic figure to life for all students who may not know reggae music. Students also learn about the history of Jamaica, Rastafari, and other famous Jamaicans. The images include a lot of personal family photos that really add to the book.

Reader's comment

This book is very well illustrated and describes Bob Marley's biography using easy vocabulary. In addition, this book gives us some information about the history of Jamaica. It is essential knowledge to understand about the background of the society and culture, especially when you don't know about other's history. Also, the self-study activities were very helpful to clarify what I've understood of this book.

Adolescents & Adults: Upper Intermediate & Advanced

A Dangerous Sky

- By Michael Austen
- Publisher: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge English Readers)
- ISBN: 978-1-107-69405-7

Judges' comment

Francesca, a young Swiss woman comes to England to pursue her dream of learning to fly a plane. Problems with her flying instructor cause her to lose her confidence and question his real motives. The language feels very natural and 'ungraded', and the story touches on many interesting modern themes.

Reader's comment

I thought this book was extremely well written, with lots of attention to detail. We can empathize with the main character in the first chapter, 'Now that the moment had arrived, she suddenly wondered if it was what she really wanted.' While the content might make readers feel rather uncomfortable, I think that the sexual harassment and stalking the main character experiences are important subjects, and I commend Cambridge for publishing

this book. I also like that the main character has doubts about whether she has really experienced sexual harassment, as I think this same question must go through the minds of many victims. There were so many other well-depicted scenes, such as the description of her first take off and solo flight. I do believe this is one of the most well-written graded readers I have come across at this level.

PROSODY AND ITS EFFECT ON AUDITORY WORD RECOGNITION IN ENGLISH

Insights for Second-/Foreign-Language Classroom Instruction

By Annie Tremblay, University of Kansas

Second-/foreign-language (L2) pronunciation courses often place a greater emphasis on the teaching of consonants and vowels, and how they combine to form words, than on the teaching of broader characteristics of speech such as prosody. Prosody is this aspect of spoken language that makes it somewhat similar to music: Just like music notes, syllables have different durations (or lengths), different pitches (or tonalities), and different intensities (or loudness). These prosodic modulations play a very important role in speech comprehension, in that they signal information at the word level (e.g., lexical stress, word boundaries), at the sentence level (e.g., syntactic constituents), and at a larger discourse level (e.g., given vs. new referents), each of which is used by native listeners to comprehend spoken language. For communication to be successful, L2 learners need not only to be able to pronounce the L2 in an intelligible way (assuming that very few will completely lose their foreign accent), but also to make rapid and efficient use of sound information, particularly prosodic information, in speech comprehension. In this short paper, I will demonstrate why prosody plays an important role in native English listeners' comprehension of spoken language, focusing on the role of lexical stress in auditory word recognition, and I will discuss the factors that have been shown to influence how easy or difficult it is for L2 learners of English to use stress in word recognition. I will conclude the paper with implications of this research for L2 classroom instruction. Specifically, I will discuss laboratory training methods that have been shown to enhance L2 learners' sensitivity to prosodic information in word recognition.

Lexical Stress

Syllables within words do not all have the same prosodic prominence. This relates to the well-known concept of lexical stress, which exists in some but not all languages. Languages such as English, German, Dutch, and Spanish all have lexical stress, in that at least one specific syllable within any multisyllabic word must be stressed (e.g., in English, *MYStery* vs. *misTAKE*, where the capitalized syllable is stressed), and which syllable is stressed changes from word to word depending on phonological and lexical factors (e.g., whether the syllable is simple or complex, whether the word is a noun or a verb, etc.). In spoken language, stressed syllables tend to have longer duration, higher pitch, and higher intensity than unstressed syllables. This prosodic information is useful for listeners, in that it can help them recognize the word faster by eliminating potential "lexical competitors". For

example, when hearing the syllable *MYS-*, from the consonant and vowel information alone, English listeners can temporarily activate words such as *mistake*, *Mister*, *mysterious*, and *mystery* (among others), because all of these words begin with the same three consonants. However, if English listeners take into consideration the prosodic realization of stress, fewer words should compete for activation, in that only some of these words have their initial syllable stressed (*MISter*, *MYStery*). Because prosodic information can help reduce the number of lexical competitors, it results in faster recognition of the intended word (the fewer the lexical competitors, the more rapid the word recognition).

Notice that none of these example words form minimal pairs. This means that prosodic information can be useful even if the lexical ambiguity that would otherwise arise is temporary. Admittedly, if listeners wait a few syllables longer, they will eventually hear the correct word and recognize it. However, in highly proficient listeners, the speech comprehension system does not wait for the input to disambiguate before committing to a particular analysis or interpretation; instead, it uses all the information it has (e.g., from context, from sentence structure, from the prosodic realization of stress) in a predictive manner in order to reduce the number of lexical competitors that are compatible with the input. The anticipatory nature of the speech comprehension system is what makes word recognition so efficient and seemingly effortless in the native language (L1).

When the L1 Has Lexical Stress

Studies have shown that native English listeners indeed use prosodic cues to English stress (i.e., longer duration, higher pitch, and higher intensity) to recognize English words (Cooper, Cutler, & Wales, 2002). Whether or not adult L2 learners of English can do the same depends at least in part on the L1 they speak. Cooper and colleagues have shown that proficient Dutch-speaking L2 learners of English are in fact better than native English listeners at using prosodic cues to stress in the recognition of English words. That is to say, if Dutch L2 learners of English hear a neutral sentence that ends with the fragment *MYS-*, they are better than native English listeners at picking *mystery* over *mistake* to complete the sentence. This finding has been attributed to the lesser use of prosodic cues to stress in English as compared to Dutch. In English, unstressed syllables tend to contain a reduced vowel, usually a schwa (/ə/) (e.g., *REcord* vs. *reCORD*). The occurrence of such a reduced vowel is much more frequent in English than in Dutch. Of the test words that were used in Cooper et al.'s study, none had vowel reduction as a means to disambiguate between words: The fragments that ended the sentences (e.g., *MYS-/mis-*) contained identical consonant(s) and vowel(s) and differed only in their duration, pitch, and intensity. The enhanced performance of the Dutch listeners as compared to the English listeners makes perfect sense if L2 learners directly transfer their L1 listening strategies to their L2. In this case, Dutch listeners rely more heavily upon prosodic information in the L1, so they also try to use it in English, with good success.

When the L1 Does Not Have Lexical Stress

By that same token, native speakers of languages that do not have lexical stress should have great difficulty in learning to use the prosodic realization of stress to recognize English words, in that stress is not used in these languages to distinguish words. French is a prime example of a language that does not have lexical stress: In spoken French, the most prominent syllable is the last syllable of the phrase, such that words do not have a prominent syllable if they are not the last word of the phrase (e.g., *le chagrin FOU* ‘the crazy heartbreak’) and words that end the phrase have their final syllable prominent (e.g., *le chat grinCHEUX* ‘the cranky cat’). For this reason, prosodic information does not help distinguish French words of the same length like it does in English. In a similar study as that of Cooper et al. (2002), I found that French Canadian listeners at different proficiencies in English had great difficulty in using the prosodic realization of stress to recognize English words (Tremblay, 2008). There was a great deal of individual variability in the results, however: Although proficiency in English did not predict the L2 learners’ accuracy in selecting the right continuation of the sentence (e.g., *mystery* vs. *mistake*), time immersed in an English-speaking environment did, and so did their knowledge of stress placement, as assessed by an oral production task. Importantly, L2 learners were able to use the prosodic realization of English stress in word recognition only if they knew which syllable in these English words was stressed. This suggests that learning where stress should go in the word is a prerequisite to using this information successfully in word recognition, something that makes intuitive sense but that does raise some questions (e.g., it is unclear how this prosodic information is learned at all if listeners do not initially attend to it when recognizing words).

Similar difficulty in using the prosodic realization of stress in word recognition has also been reported by Dupoux, Sebastián-Gallés, Navarrete, and Peperkamp (2008) for French L2 learners of Spanish. This group of researchers has even claimed that French listeners are “stress deaf”. Despite what the term “stress deaf” evokes, French listeners’ difficulty with stress appears to be at the level of word recognition and not so much at the level of acoustic perception: When asked to perceive prosodic differences among auditory English-sounding nonsense (i.e., made-up) words that differed in stress placement (e.g., *DUshum* vs. *duSHUM*), the same French Canadian L2 learners of English I tested performed quite well (Tremblay, 2009); it is in the use of stress information in word recognition that these listeners have the most difficulty. That is to say, French listeners have difficulty using stress information for the purpose of suppressing (non-intended) lexical competitors and recognizing the correct word. These results make sense insofar as French does have prosody and listeners do attend to it, though they do so for other purposes (e.g., to segment speech into words, to locate syntactic constituents in the sentence, etc.). Similar findings have been reported for Korean listeners, whose L1 also does not have lexical stress (Lin, Wang, Isard, & Xu, 2014).

Role of Acoustic Cues in the Perception of Stress

Whether or not L2 learners use prosodic information in the form of lexical stress to recognize English words in speech is not strictly a function of whether or not the L1 has lexical stress, however. Ultimately, L2 learners may be successful at using the prosodic realization of English stress in word recognition even if the L1 does not have lexical stress, so long as prosodic information contributes an important piece of information to word identity in the L1. Tonal languages such as Mandarin Chinese provide a case in point. In Mandarin, the same combination of consonants and vowels can result in different words depending on the tone associated with it (e.g., *mā* “mother” [level tone]; *má* “hemp” [rising tone]; *mǎ* “horse” [dipping tone]; *mà* “to scold” [falling tone]). Tonal information is realized primarily with pitch modulations. Importantly, Mandarin dialects differ such that Standard Mandarin has been claimed to have stress (e.g., *DONGXI* ‘west and east,’ where both syllables are stressed, vs. *DONGxi* ‘stuff,’ where only the first syllable is stressed), whereas that same contrast does not exist Taiwan Mandarin (e.g., *DONGXI* ‘west and east’ and ‘stuff’). The primary cue to this stress contrast is duration, where stressed syllables are longer than unstressed syllables.

Based on stress alone, one would predict that L2 learners of English who speak Standard Mandarin as L1 dialect would outperform L2 learners of English who speak Taiwan Mandarin as L1 dialect in their ability to use stress in English word recognition. However, in both these dialects, lexical tones are realized with prosodic information, primarily pitch. In Qin and Tremblay (2014), we found that when stressed syllables are higher in pitch (but not longer) than unstressed syllables, both Standard Mandarin and Taiwan Mandarin listeners can keep auditory English-sounding nonce words that differ in stress placements (e.g., *SIVvy* vs. *siVEE*) in short-term memory and recall them. However, when stressed syllables are longer (but not higher in pitch) than unstressed syllables, only Standard Mandarin listeners can do this (for similar results with Standard Mandarin listeners, see Lin et al., 2014). In other words, even though Taiwan Mandarin does not have lexical stress, Taiwan-Mandarin-speaking L2 learners of English can use stress information to distinguish between English words as long as stress is realized with a prosodic cue that they use to recognize words in the L1 (here, pitch). This means the L1 may not need to have lexical stress for L2 learners to be able to use it in word recognition, as long as stress is realized with a prosodic cue that is also used to recognize words in the L1.

Implications for L2 Classroom Instruction

These findings have important implications for determining how much emphasis to place on the use of prosodic cues to English lexical stress in the L2 classroom. The L1 of the participants appears to be the single most predicting factor of ultimate success in L2 learners’ sensitivity to the prosodic realization of English lexical stress. If prosody

contributes important information to word identity in the L1, there is a good chance that L2 learners will be sensitive to this information in the L2. Populations of L2 learners whose L1 does not make use of prosodic information in word recognition (e.g., French, Korean, Taiwan Mandarin (for duration cues)) are therefore those who are in greatest need of training. The first step in this training is of course to teach L2 learners the phonological and lexical rules that govern stress placement in English, as this knowledge is a prerequisite for L2 learners to be able to use this information successfully in word recognition (Tremblay, 2008). Because stress placement is far from regular or transparent in English, this learning may also entail memorizing the stress placement of several English words.

Then, to help L2 learners use the prosodic realization of English stress in word recognition, it would be useful to expose them to multiple words uttered by multiple talkers (males and females, of different ages). That is to say, L2 learners should listen to audio recordings of different voices speaking different words that differ in the critical phonological property to be learned.¹ This laboratory training technique has been deemed best to enhance L2 learners' development of perceptual representations, because the phonetic variability in this type of training (from the different words and voices) enables L2 learners to ignore the individual quirks of each word and speaker, and focus on the relevant acoustic and phonetic details. This, in turn, allows them to create more robust perceptual representations (i.e., stronger, more consistent memory traces). The benefits of such perceptual training has also been shown to extend to oral production (e.g., Bradlow, Pisoni, Akahane-Yamada, & Tohkura, 1997). For the learning of English lexical stress, this perceptual training would help L2 learners develop sensitivity to the combination of prosodic cues (i.e., longer duration, higher pitch, higher intensity) that, together, make one particular syllable more prominent relative to others, and use this information to choose among competing words.

Such a multi-talker training technique has been shown to enhance L2 learners' perception of lexical tones in Mandarin Chinese (e.g., Wang, Spence, Yongman, & Sereno, 1999), but it is only beginning to be implemented for the use of lexical stress in English word recognition (with Korean listeners; Shin & Iverson, 2013). Because English has few minimal pairs without vowel reduction (e.g., *TRUSty* vs. *trusTEE*), such a prosodic training could use word fragments in sentences such as those used in Cooper et al. (2002) and Tremblay (2008) (e.g., *MYS-/mis-*) and ask L2 learners to select the correct word (*mystery* vs. *mistake*). Another type of training would be to ask L2 learners to hold English-sounding nonsense words that differ in stress placement in short-term memory and recall them, as has been done in Dupoux et al. (2008), Lin et al. (2014), and Qin and Tremblay (2014). Such training methods, if carried out with auditory stimuli from multiple talkers, provide a promising avenue for improving L2 learners' use of prosodic cues to English stress in word recognition, and they can potentially also enhance L2 learners' production of English stress.

1. This is the approach taken, for example, by [English Accent Coach](#), but for individual phonemes rather than prosodic patterns.

Ultimately, enabling L2 learners to use the prosodic realization of English lexical stress in word recognition is very important for these listeners to make rapid use of sound information in L2 speech comprehension, as this will in turn affect the efficiency of their communication with native English speakers.

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HOW DOES EXPERIENCE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE SHAPE ACCENT?

By Alene Moyer, University of Maryland

In the language acquisition literature, and by countless anecdotal accounts, there is an oft-cited truism: younger is better. Nowhere is this cited more than for phonology. Do we really expect adult learners to end up sounding like near-native speakers? (Whether that is realistic or necessary is another question.)

Scores of empirical studies verify the negative influence of age on L2 accent, yet we do not fully understand the nature of its influence. Age is inherently confounded with many social and cognitive factors. For example, it may partially explain why some L2 learners seek out feedback, develop strategies to improve their accent, or want to sound native, while others do not. Accent is certainly “psychologically loaded” for many adult language learners. We know that younger immigrants more easily incorporate the target language into multiple aspects of their lives (through school, friendships, etc.), and as a consequence, the target language takes on great interpersonal significance over time, allowing for real connections to community and playing a role in future careers. Indeed, the critical-period literature predicts that most children exposed before the age of nine or 10 years will end up sounding native-like, and this is due in no small part to these circumstantial advantages. For adult immigrants, the picture is usually less rosy.

Success in phonological attainment has been shown to relate to taking an active, reflective role in one’s own learning; using opportunities for social interaction, reflecting upon personal goals and motivations vis-à-vis the target language, and reorienting oneself to changing conditions, including both achievements and setbacks (Moyer, 2013, p. 174). For example, in Moyer’s (2004) study of immigrants to Berlin, interview data revealed two starkly contrasting pictures of learner orientation. The first was a Polish female who refused to be deterred by shyness and a lack of social contacts: her goal of becoming native-like remained constant despite some personally discouraging experiences with native speakers, and she was rated as sounding native-like according to a range of speaking tasks. An American male in the same study stridently embraced his “foreign sounding” accent in German as an outward symbol of his refusal to acculturate. Interestingly, both had similar career goals that would have relied on near-native fluency, yet their different approaches to accent led to widely disparate outcomes.

A more learner-centered view of language learning acknowledges the agency of individuals. Looking beyond simplified explanations such as “younger is better,” a more comprehensive

perspective takes into account the individual's affective orientation to the language itself and to its culture, as well as the kinds of practice and feedback available. In that vein, this paper briefly summarizes a previously published empirical study of immigrants to the U.S., taking an approach that prioritizes learner engagement and the quality of L2 experience and use, both of which relate to age of arrival (Moyer, 2011).

Before getting into the study, it is useful to think about *quality* of L2 experience in contrast to *quantity*, or time on task, which is often measured in terms of hours of language use per week (e.g., time spent using the target language vs. the mother tongue). Duration of residence in-country is another common measure of quantity, but has produced somewhat mixed statistical results. *Quality* of L2 experience implies access to complex and varied sources of linguistic input and practice, beyond conducting day-to-day business or managing brief tasks. Deeper social contacts encourage greater opportunities to build proficiency over time by connecting the individual to a community of native speakers. This is particularly important for accent (see Levelle & Levis, 2014; Lybeck, 2002).

Evidence shows that even so-called receptive activities such as watching television and listening to radio correlate to accent; that using L2 at home and among friends is significant for syntactic and listening comprehension abilities as well as pronunciation (Flege & Liu, 2001; Moyer, 2004); and that the more time spent using L2 the better for the overall “flow” and automaticity of speech (Derwing, Thomson & Munro, 2006; Flege & Liu, 2001). Experience clearly makes a difference for many aspects of language fluency, but interactive experience is particularly significant for accent, as the study described below shows.

A Comparison of Quality vs. Quantity in L2 Experience: Which Matters More?

I recently reported results from a study examining the importance of both quantity and quality of L2 experience (Moyer, 2011). There, 42 adult learners of English at a U.S. Mid-Atlantic university completed a survey on language use and completed a series of tasks, including read-aloud and free speaking items. Eight native speakers participated as controls (i.e., baseline measures). Four native-speaker raters listened to randomized speech samples and rated each for degree of accent on a five-point scale. They noted influential features, allowing me to verify that pronunciation (rather than vocabulary, syntax, etc.) was the primary criterion for their ratings. Indeed, 93% of their comments addressed segmental features (vowel and consonant level accuracy) or suprasegmentals (pitch, intonation, rhythm, pause patterns, etc.). Ratings were then correlated with various aspects of learners' backgrounds and language use.

The primary goal was to discover whether certain aspects of experience pertaining to either *quantity* or *quality* were most significant for accent. For these learners, the *total numbers of modes for weekly L2 use* was significant for accent. In other words, language use

that reaches across speaking, listening, reading and writing in the target language made a difference for pronunciation. This was not a simple measure of time on task, rather it reflected the reach of L2 into everyday life. As one skill area after another shifts toward L2 as the primary language, it takes on greater significance in the learner's life. In addition, using L2 across a variety of contexts has benefits, no matter what the mode. Another significant measure was hours spent using the mother tongue(s): Those who reported more weekly hours using L1 sounded less native-like (see also Yeni-Komshian, Flege & Liu, 2000). And as may be obvious, the shorter the residence in the target language country, and the older the learner, the more likely he or she was to rely on the mother tongue. These quantitative measures also provide some insight on the quality of L2 use by indicating how extensively the learner relies on the new language in everyday life, for a variety of purposes.

The transition toward a greater reliance on L2 relates to *quality* of experience in specific ways, in particular, the extent to which L2 overtakes the personal sphere. At some point, certain individuals adopt the target language in functionally meaningful ways, coinciding with the development of a new L2 identity¹. In this study, a range of formal-to-familiar domains were included in the survey in order to gather evidence of this phenomenon. Respondents reported on the frequency and duration of service or store/business interactions; classroom and academic interactions with professors and classmates; home-based socializing (with either roommates, spouses, or a host family); and socializing among close friends. Using L2 at home was highly significant, but most significant by far was language use with native-speaker friends. Why would this be so? Through authentic communicative practice, the learner may receive immediate feedback and have opportunities to try out and refine phonological patterns in real time, leading to a level of knowledge restructuring and eventual improvement. Moreover, it is in these personally meaningful, unstructured realms that one's psychological investment in linguistic fluency is arguably greatest.

Language Dominance as a Predictor for Accent

A shift in language dominance is key to understanding both how the individual establishes social networks (and all that implies psychologically), and how she acquires fluency in language processing (see Moyer, 2013). This casts a new light on the relationship between age of arrival and actual years spent in-country. Those who arrive earlier and reside longer make social and cognitive "room" for the target language in fundamental ways, which benefits language processing, language performance, and eventual attainment. Let us consider two learners from this study: One had an overall accent Mean of 1.17 (in the native speaker range for all tasks combined) and scored a "native" 1.0 for three of the five tasks; another learner had an overall accent Mean of 1.33, but also scored a 1.0 for three

1. See Moyer, 2007 for psychological and social findings on the same group of learners.

tasks out of five. The first had arrived in the U.S. at age 4 years, with 13 years length of residence; the second arrived at age 5 years with 15 years in-country. Both early arrivers reported a very high current number of weekly hours using English across various contexts. In fact, neither reported more than a few hours per week of L1 use, indicating that both had become English-dominant. Where along that continuum of residence did language dominance make a decisive turn in their lives?

Another set of findings offers some possible insight here: the group with the fewest years in residence showed the greatest variation in accent. Steady improvement was apparent for groups with longer residence, and the greatest gains appeared after about five years. By 10 years' residence, individual variation was relatively minimal. In other words, the cross-sectional data allow us to extrapolate a continued improvement between two to nine years. We therefore need to understand how learners take charge of their own acquisition process during those years, possibly shifting to L2 dominance as they adopt certain social and cognitive strategies like self-monitoring and practice, and seeking out social contact with native speakers. The classroom implications are that accent takes years to build, requiring patience, motivation, and access to plenty of authentic interaction with native speakers. Over time, and with a number of strategic forms of practice, phonological authenticity is within reach for many learners (see Moyer, 2013, Ch. 3).

Not surprisingly, older learners were rated as more foreign-sounding than their younger counterparts. Age of arrival in the U.S. was significant as well, but neither marriage to nor co-habitation with a native speaker were. Half of those who lived with a native speaker reported no desire to sound native, an important reminder that some wish to hold on to their own heritage language identity, with accent being the most easily recognizable aspect of that identity (see Moyer, 2013).

Classroom Implications

The question of whether, and how, L2 experience influences phonological attainment is best addressed among those with a rich language use profile, both in and out of the classroom. While very few studies attest to the effectiveness of classroom pronunciation work (see Moyer, 2013, Ch. 6), interaction clearly helps the learner to restructure new knowledge and push toward native-like levels of fluency. It may be that those who sound more native-like feel more comfortable speaking, and even seek out more social contact than those with a strong foreign accent. These kinds of interconnections are key to understanding why some learners strive to sound more native-like while others do not.

Classroom teachers can devote group and whole-class activities to interactive situations that learners are bound to encounter in real life, helping them to identify both the linguistic and sociolinguistic features they struggle with. And as a consciousness-raising activity, students may reflect openly on how it feels to use language beyond their comfort zone (Levis & Moyer, 2014: 286). In this way, they can draw a clear connection between the role

that intelligibility plays in authentic interaction, and the role that interaction plays in long-term phonological attainment.

These study participants admitted that phonetic/phonological and grammatical aspects of English continue to present a challenge (e.g., consonant clusters, intonation, lexicon, and morphology). Still, they view their time in an English-dominant country as an opportunity for personal transformation: linguistically, culturally, and professionally. They cited the opportunity to live and study abroad as key to learning effective self-expression in the interpersonal sphere. As they reported, the “textbook” English learned in their home countries did not sufficiently address register, tone, lexical breadth, and pragmatic nuance which are all key to fluency. Realizing this, many were determined to use their time in country to develop greater authenticity on multiple linguistic levels.

Classroom instruction can contribute to accent authenticity by practicing problematic features (suprasegmental features as well as segmental ones), and listening to real speech to practice noticing how accent both provides social cues about speakers and contributes to the flow of interaction through pitch, pause, and other features. Practice can then focus overtly on how certain errors in pronunciation and intonation actually affect communicative clarity, and how this, in turn, affects listeners’ judgment of L2 speakers.

Lefkowitz and Hedgcock (2006) note that L2 learners are often aware of the impressions that “sounding foreign” can make on listeners, but may not accurately judge how they themselves sound. Teachers can help them to realistically assess this, and to realize the social and communicative significance of accent in specific contexts (Moyer, 2013, p. 170). Finally, teachers can directly discuss learners’ individual goals for accent, as not all aim to sound native-like; some prefer to hold on to a distinctly “foreign” accent for reasons of social or ethnic affiliation. Such an open discussion is also an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own attitudes and potential biases about accent.

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Bio



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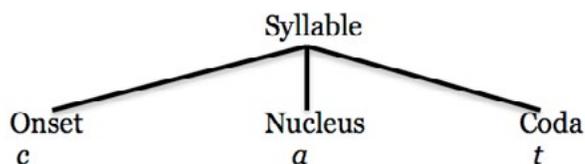
DID HE SAY *WET*, *WHEN*, OR *WENT*?

Second Language Learners and Consonant Clusters

By John Archibald, University of Victoria

As second language (L2) teachers, you are all familiar with the great diversity of second language accents. You can probably tell who sounds French, who sounds Polish, and who sounds Russian. All native speakers are good at this kind of accent recognition. Accents can be marked by troubles with such things as consonants, vowels, or stress placement and can manifest themselves in our production and in our perception. The issue that I want to focus on in this piece is *consonant clusters*. For our purposes, a consonant cluster is a sequence of consonants in the same syllable. So, a word like *plant* has a two-segment cluster at the beginning of the word and a two-segment cluster at the end. There are some languages which do not allow consonant clusters inside a syllable. So, when speakers of those languages learn English they have to learn about allowable English syllables.

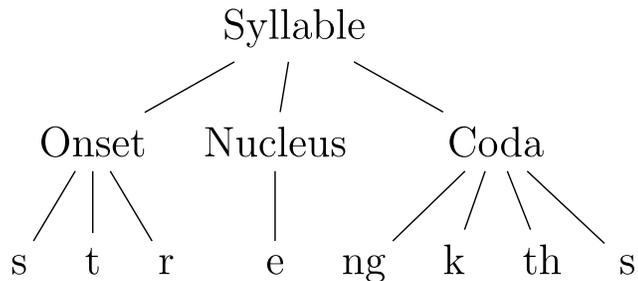
Syllables have internal structure which, simplifying slightly, looks something like this:



Languages vary in such things as whether or not they allow codas (some languages only allow syllables of consonant + vowel), or whether the onsets or codas can *branch*. If there are no branching onsets then only a single consonant can be in the onset. So a word like *pay* or *ray* would be fine but a word like *pray* would not be possible. L2 learners have to learn about the syllable structure of their target language.

When we borrow a word from another language, or when we try to say a foreign word, we tend to try to force the foreign or borrowed word to fit into our linguistic rules or patterns. So, a French speaker may not use a “th” sound when producing a word like *thumb* (instead saying *tum* or *sum*) because French lacks the “th” sound. This phenomenon can also affect our perception. A Japanese speaker (whose first language (L1) lacks a distinction between an [l] and a [r]) may have difficulty distinguishing between the words *rake* and *lake* if there is no context to help with the interpretation (but may do just fine when there is context: *He fell into the lake*). We refer to these as *repair* strategies, as we try to fix the foreign words to fit our L1 rules.

English allows pretty complex syllable structures as you can see in a word like *strengths*. Phonetically, this has three consonants at the beginning and four at the end.



Imagine the learning task if your first language allows one consonant at the beginning and one at the end! What’s a poor ESL student to do? Well, broadly speaking there are two strategies available to them: deletion and insertion. The technical term for insertion is *epenthesis*.

A deletion repair strategy: *plant* → *pan*

An epenthesis repair strategy: *plant* → *pilanti*

Some facts about cluster repair:

1. Native speakers of English “repair” clusters too. A word like *grandmother* is often pronounced *granmother*. Many languages don’t like having three consonants in a row (though languages like Swedish have a “pain threshold” of up to five in a row). Your students may vary on which consonant in a sequence they delete. English speakers tend to delete the middle consonant (as in *grandmother*) while other languages may delete the first or the third.
2. Some L1s prefer deletion repairs while others prefer epenthesis so your students may vary as well. For example, Japanese tends to break up consonant sequences that are not allowed via epenthesis. So, when Japanese borrows an English word that violates Japanese phonological rules (such as *baseball*), they insert epenthetic vowels (in this case an [u]) to make well-formed Japanese syllable and the word is pronounced something like *basubaru*. Experimental studies have shown that when Japanese speakers listen to made-up words which violate Japanese phonology (e.g., [ebdo] - because Japanese codas cannot have a [b]) they actually perceive an epenthetic vowel to be there; they hear [ebudo] when [ebdo] is played to them (Dehaene-Lambertz, Dupoux, & Gout, 2000). This shows that epenthesis is not just a late motor strategy to make something easier to say but a real perception issue. If we want to teach pronunciation, we have to work on perception too.
3. Languages vary on whether they epenthesize to the left of a cluster (*iFred*) or in the middle of a cluster (*Fi-red*) for the English name *Fred* (Broselow, 1992).
4. Even students who come from “deletion” languages epenthesize more as their proficiency level in English increases (Abrahamsson, 2003). This is most likely because it makes it easier for the listener to recover the intended meaning. Pronunciations like *wena* for *when* and *weta* for *wet* would be easier for the

listener than if both were pronounced by deleting the final consonant (e.g. *we*).

5. Students are more likely to epenthesize (rather than delete) on *content* words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) than on *function* words (articles, prepositions, pronouns, etc.). Thus, there might be variation in that the same student might change *cat* to *cata* but pronounce *it* as *i*. There may be a functional reason for this too as the listener has other sources of information to recover the word “it” in the phrase *i is over there* compared with recovering the word “cat” in the phrase *look at the ca*.
6. Students *can* learn L2 clusters. Interestingly, the most frequent sequences in their input are not necessarily the ones they become accurate on earliest. Brazilian Portuguese lacks s+Consonant clusters so have to learn to pronounce English *sl*, *sn* and *st* sequences. In their classroom input the *st* cluster is the most frequent. However, in the world’s languages, *sl* clusters are the most common. So, which will be easier for them to acquire first? It turns out that they become accurate on *sl* clusters before *st* clusters (Cardoso, 2007; Cardoso, John, & French, 2009). This demonstrates that language universals can influence second language learners’ grammars; not just their L1.
7. Students are also more likely to epenthesize in certain situations. For example, in casual conversation, they will epenthesize less than if they are reading out a list of words in a pronunciation class (Lin, 2001). The more formal the task, the more epenthesis (and less deletion) there is. In addition, sentences also provide contextual information to recover the meaning that a decontextualized word list does not. So, it would be easier for the listener to understand the meaning of *I bought a rose pant at the greenhouse* than it would be to hear the word *pant* in isolation and understand that the target word was *plant*.
8. The final aspect of learning L2 clusters that I want to address is a little more technical but bear with me. Broadly speaking it has to do with the question of whether you can learn “stuff” in your L2 which isn’t found in your L1. Short answer: yes. You can learn new consonants, vowels, stress placement, tones, and syllable positions. We know that, particularly at early stages of acquisition, structures from the L1 influence the L2 (a process known as *transfer*). An interesting question for me is *under what conditions can we override L1 transfer?* There are two broad conditions which I have investigated, only one of which I will elaborate on here. The two conditions are: (a) robust phonetic cues in the L2, and (b) redeployment of L1 structures. An example of robust phonetic cues would be that Japanese speakers can learn Russian “r” sounds even though they have difficulty with the English “r” sound (Larson Hall, 2004). The Russian “r” is much more strident and is trilled compared to the subtler acoustic cues to the English “r”. But, let me say a bit more about *redeployment* (Archibald, 2006). The basic idea here is that even if you lack a phenomenon in your L1, you might have the necessary building blocks in your L1 to construct the new forms. You can redeploy your blocks to build a new structure. Let me attempt to elucidate. When English speakers try to learn Japanese, they have to learn what are called *geminate* (or long) consonants. In Japanese a word like *kitte* means something different from a word like *kite*; the length of the consonant matters. English doesn’t have a long/short consonant distinction, but

English speakers seem to be able to learn Japanese long consonants (Summerell, 2007). Why? One argument is that English speakers take the building blocks of their stress system and use it for Japanese length. Don't worry about the details.

So, what does this have to do with consonant clusters? Well, let's look at two languages which both lack clusters at the beginning of a word: Finnish and Korean. If L1 transfer is the only story, we'd expect Finnish and Korean learners to behave in the same way. But they don't. Finnish learners do quite well at acquiring English clusters while Korean learners struggle. How are the Finnish learners overriding the properties of their L1? What I have argued (Archibald, 2003) is that languages which have an l/r contrast have an easier time acquiring initial consonant clusters than languages which lack the l/r contrast. The reasons for this are somewhat arcane but suffice it to say that languages differ on the kinds of clusters they allow. Greek allows initial sequences like *pt* (as in *pterodactyl*) while English does not (unless it comes across two syllables as in *helicopter*). Languages have rules about how similar the two consonants can be at the beginning of a word. Greek allows them to be quite similar ([p] and [t]), French allows clusters like *pn* (as in *pneu*) which has slightly more similar consonants than the English *pl* and *pr* clusters. Here's the link: the phonological structure which allows a language to make an [l] versus [r] contrast is the *same* phonological structure that you can redeploy to create an initial consonant cluster. So, Finnish speakers (who have an [l]/[r] contrast but no initial clusters) can redeploy that structure to acquire English clusters while Korean speakers (who lack an [l]/[r] contrast and also lack initial clusters) do not have the building blocks to redeploy.

Summing Up

As with any technical subject, the field of Second Language Acquisition as represented in journals such as *Second Language Research*, *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, or *Studies in Second Language Research* can be somewhat opaque and not necessarily welcoming to second language teachers. I hope that this summary of one small area of research has been helpful to you, and will allow you to listen to your students consonant clusters in a whole new way.

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Bio



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TALKING ABOUT ACCENT

The Canadian shift and Canadian raising

By Rebecca V. Roeder, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Each dialect of English reflects a mix of both common ancestry with other English dialects and a unique linguistic and social history. Therefore, to learn any variety of English—regardless of which variety one learns, or how one learns it—is to learn a dialect imbued with a distinct history and culture. Some features are shared by all dialects. For instance, the way in which the words *to*, *do*, *she*, and *he* are spelled is consistent across written varieties of English, in general, and these spellings still reflect the Old English pronunciations of these words. Some features, however, vary across regional or social varieties of English. An example of this is that words such as *analyse/analyze*, *theatre/theater*, and *favour/favor* are spelled differently in Canadian English as compared to American English, due largely to the efforts of early Americans to distinguish themselves from the British.

Such similarities and differences appear at every level (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) across the many dialects of a language. The examples above illustrate spelling in standard Canadian English as compared to standard American English, but a comparison could just as easily be made between accent features of a regional dialect in Canada and a regional dialect in the United States. For instance, the accent of someone from Detroit, Michigan, in the American Midwest, is likely quite similar overall to that of a native Torontonionian, especially if both individuals speak the dominant local variety. But differences do exist. The conditions that have shaped each dialect differ somewhat and include different input dialects/languages and distinct historical settlement and regional migration patterns. An additional factor is the inevitability of language change, regardless of whether external influences such as contact with another language have impacted the variety.

One salient difference between these two varieties can be heard in the pronunciation of words such as *hat* (IPA /æ/) and *hot* (IPA /ɑ/). In fact, this pronunciation difference is so extreme that these sounds are virtually reversed in the two dialects, so that the Torontonionian's *hat* sounds like *hot* to the Detrouiter, and vice versa! Furthermore, any word with either one of those two vowels could potentially lead to confusion between the Detrouiter and the Torontonionian. A second example is that the vowel in words such as *ride* is the same in the two dialects, whereas the vowel in words such as *right* is likely to be different. These characteristics seem strange and specific but can be explained simply and logically with linguistics. Each of these two features is explained more fully below.

***Hat* or *hot*? The Canadian Shift versus the Northern Cities Shift**

As implied in the classic George Gershwin song lyric “You like tomatos and I like tomahtos”, many variations in pronunciation are thought of as random, not connected to anything else in one’s vocabulary and pronunciation. With vowel pronunciations in particular, however, one change in pronunciation often triggers other related changes. The underlying reason for these domino-effect kinds of change is the need to maintain perceptible contrast between speech sounds. Speech sounds must be distinct from one another for communication to occur (and for a small child to acquire the language). Thus when accent change results in one vowel starting to sound too similar to another one within a given dialect, children must resolve this during the process of language acquisition by either merging the two vowels—in which case one vowel is eliminated and the inventory of contrasting sounds is reduced by one—or changing the second vowel too, thus preserving a contrast. In Canadian English, a vowel merger that likely resulted from extensive dialect mixing and population movement during the 18th and 19th centuries has triggered a change in vowel pronunciation referred to as the Canadian Shift. The vowel merger that triggered the shift can be heard in word pairs such as *cot/caught* or *sod/sawed*. Many American Midwesterners will pronounce the words in each pair differently whereas most Canadians will pronounce both words as homophones. This vowel merger, often called the low back merger, resulted in the elimination of one vowel from the inventory of Canadian English speech sounds, which then led to a rearrangement in the other vowels in the system. It is this rearrangement of the other vowels that is referred to as the Canadian Shift (for detailed information on the Canadian Shift, see Clarke, Elms, & Youssef, 1995, Boberg, 2005, and Roeder & Jarmasz, 2010, among others).

Chambers (2008) hypothesizes that the low back merger was brought north into inland Canada during the late 18th century by American Loyalists from Pennsylvania, who became the first permanent settlers in this region of Canada and established the low back merger as a core feature of what was to become standard Canadian English. The merger was subsequently reinforced by the arrival of immigrants from Scotland, who also displayed this feature in their speech. Written evidence for the merger in early Canada dates it as a feature of Ontario English as far back as 1852 (Chambers, 1993, p. 13) and possibly even as early as 1799 (Dollinger, 2010, p. 215), well before Canadians began migrating westward from the Toronto area in large numbers during the 1880s.

In a modern-day Canadian Shifted dialect, the *hat*, *trap*, *bath* vowel (IPA /æ/) sounds less like [æ] and more like [ɑ] phonetically. Thus a Torontonians’ *hat* sounds like *hot* to a Midwesterner, so that Canadian “I like your hat” sounds like “I like your hot” to someone from Detroit. As illustrated in this example, meaning can usually be determined based on context, so that instead of misunderstanding the Canadian speaker, the Midwesterner will instead perceive the Canadian as having an accent.

A vowel change occurring in the Midwestern United States is magnifying the dialect difference brought about by the Canadian Shift. In the Midwest, a change in the pronunciation of one vowel has led to a vowel chain reaction (i.e., a CHAIN SHIFT) instead of a vowel merger. This chain shift is called the Northern Cities Shift (NCS). The NCS involves six vowels—the *kit*, *dress*, *trap*, *strut*, *lot*, *thought* vowels (using the vowel categories developed by Wells, 1982)—and it appears to have spread outward from the major Midwestern cities, including Buffalo, Detroit, and Chicago (e.g., Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006). One effect of the NCS is that the *hot*, *lot*, *father* vowel (IPA /ɑ/) now sounds less like [ɑ] and more like [æ] phonetically. This is the reverse of what is happening in Canada. So, Midwestern *hot* sounds like *hat* to a Canadian speaker, making the Detroiter’s “It’s a hot day” sound like “It’s a hat day” to the Torontonians. Again, context will usually resolve the confusion, leaving the Canadian speaker who hears “It’s a hat day” to simply conclude that the Midwesterner is in fact the one with the accent.

These two shifts are responsible for several accent differences between the Midwestern U.S. and Ontario. The contrast being highlighted here—between the *hat* and *hot* vowels—is perhaps the most dramatic and recognizable of these differences. The NCS is effectively the opposite of the Canadian Shift in several ways. First, the Canadian Shift was triggered by two vowels merging while the NCS began with one vowel pushing another vowel further away and beginning a chain shift. Additionally, the direction of change for the *hot* and *hat* vowels is opposite in the two shifts, leading to a dramatic difference in pronunciation between the two dialects. The Canadian Shift/NCS contrast provides one example of a way in which the dialects of Detroit and Toronto are becoming more different rather than more similar, despite the proximity of the two cities geographically.

Canadian Raising

A second accent feature that is prevalent in many varieties of Canadian English is a characteristic referred to as Canadian Raising. American stereotypes of this feature were famously satirized in the Molson beer commercial entitled “I Am a Canadian”, in which the Canadian narrator asserts “I pronounce it *about* not a *boot*”, while a picture of a large boot appears in the background. A contrast in the pronunciation of words such as *right* and *about* does exist between most of Canada and many parts of the U.S. But the Canadian pronunciation can also be found in a number of American dialects. Furthermore, the contrast is subtler than the difference between *about* and *a boot*. A brief description of the linguistic rules governing this pronunciation in central Canada is provided here.

The vowel in words such as *right* and *about* is referred to as a DIPHTHONG (the prefix *di-* derived from the Greek word for “two”) because it actually begins as one vowel and transitions to a second vowel by the end of the segment. As such, both the beginning and the end of the vowel can differ across dialects. In this case, it is the beginning of the vowel that varies regionally. The Detroit speaker might pronounce *right* as [raɪt] and *about* as [əbaʊt], beginning the diphthong with an open “ah” sound. In contrast, the Toronto speaker may

say [ɾʌɪt] and [əbʌʊt], beginning the diphthong with the jaw slightly more closed—an “uh” type of sound. This feature is called Canadian Raising because the more closed jaw position produces a sound that is higher acoustically.

Another interesting aspect of this feature is that the pronunciation of this vowel depends on what type of consonant follows. The words *right* and *ride* appear to have the same vowel. But in the speech of someone who has Canadian Raising as a part of his/her accent, the vowel is pronounced differently in each of these words. As mentioned above, the beginning of the vowel in *right* will be raised and the utterance can be transcribed phonetically as [ɾʌɪt]. The beginning of the vowel in *ride* will not be raised, however, and the word will be pronounced as [ɾaɪd]. Why the difference? We must rely on DISTINCTIVE FEATURES to answer this question. Distinctive features are the elements of a speech sound that can be altered to produce a perceivable contrast with another speech sound.

One distinctive feature that is employed in English consonants is voicing (i.e., vibration of the vocal folds). For example, the consonant /t/ is identical to the consonant /d/ in every way except that the vocal folds do not vibrate during the production of /t/, but they do vibrate during the production of /d/. Therefore, consonants such as /p, t, k, f, s/ are labeled voiceless while consonants such as /b, d, g, v, z/ are labeled voiced. The phonological rule that governs Canadian Raising is that the diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ are only pronounced as raised when followed by a voiceless consonant within the same syllable (Paradis, 1980; Chambers, 1989). So words like *ripe*, *right*, *about*, *hike*, *mouse*, *life*, and *south* are pronounced with the raised /aɪ/ or /aʊ/ variant, while words like *jibe*, *ride*, *loud*, *gouge*, *eyes*, *hive*, and *tithe* are pronounced with the unraised /aɪ/ or /aʊ/ variant. What this also means is that *right* and *ride* are a minimal pair for someone who does not have Canadian Raising as a part of his/her speech because the two words differ in only one sound—the final consonant. But *right* and *ride* are not a minimal pair phonetically for someone whose speech includes Canadian Raising, because they differ in their vowels as well as their final consonants. Thomas (1991) provides more information on the origins of Canadian Raising, and examples of raised and unraised pronunciations can be heard at a [website](#) created by Taylor Roberts at York University in Toronto.

Conclusion

A good deal of research has already been done on Canadian English, and more research is underway. The two features highlighted here—the Canadian Shift and Canadian Raising—have been found across Canada, although they can vary slightly in how they sound by region. Awareness of these features can help students learning English as an L2 to accommodate more quickly and easily to their local surroundings. For more information on the accents of Canada, see Boberg’s comprehensive 2010 book entitled *The English Language in Canada*.

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Bio



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WILL ESL WRITING TEACHERS LOSE THEIR JOBS IN THE AGE OF HIGHLY ACCURATE COMPUTER-ASSISTED TRANSLATION?

By Guillaume Gentil, Carleton University

Can you make sense of this?

The issue of maintaining skills in French speaking federal employees back to the earliest language training programs in the 1970s, however, despite the increased attention given to official languages in the public service and the advancement of knowledge on the language attrition, little research has been conducted on the retention of the second language in the context of the public service for Edwards (1977).

How about this?

The retention of French-language skills among anglophone federal public servants has been an issue since the beginnings of language training in the 1970s. However, despite renewed interest in public servants' language use and noticeable advancements in the study of language attrition, little research has been conducted on second language retention in the public service context since Edwards (1977).

With official bilingualism, most Canadian academic journals require bilingual abstracts. But the unofficial quasi-hegemony of English as a language of scholarship means that most of my anglophone colleagues and students have little exposure to French-medium academic discourse, let alone practice in writing French as a second language. So I regularly receive requests to help translate abstracts. It seems such a quick, effortless job for a biliterate person like me. To prove they have spent some time and work on it, they often provide a draft that only needs “a little bit of revision.” It does not take long to see through the deception: they simply copied and pasted their text into Google Translate and hoped I would not notice. Alas, Google translatese, or Googledygook as it may be called, is quite noticeable. The RCMP in BC learned that lesson when a public outcry among French Canadians caused it to stop using Google Translate for its press releases in 2010.

Second language instructors have been noticing it too in their students' writing ever since machine translation (MT) tools became readily accessible in the late 1990s. Many in language education circles have taken a strong stance against MT as a form of cheating to be detected, prevented, and punished. But as the quality of output improves, is this inevitably a losing battle?

Despite the impressive and fast-paced progress of online MT tools, a recent study by O'Neill (2013) found that language teachers could detect online translation usage in L2 student texts, but only 70 percent of the time. The first text above is Google's translation of an excerpt from an abstract I wrote in French for a Canadian journal; the second is my own translation, which appeared in the journal. I must admit that Google did much better than I would have predicted based on translations I had seen just a few years ago. The overall gist is clear, and the grammatical inaccuracies with article usage, subject-verb agreement, and comma splices are not unlike common ESL errors. The meaning of "back to" ("dates back to") is recoverable from the context. More puzzling is "for Edwards," but the confusion between "since" and "for" is a known difficulty for French learners of English, and "since Edwards" is one of the alternative translations suggested by Google Translate. A more serious parsing error though turned anglophone public servants into French-speaking employees!

It is hard to predict when, or whether, automated translation will ever produce texts of such quality as to be indistinguishable from those translated by humans. MT has a checkered history. After the naive optimism of the early beginnings in the 1950s, dashed hopes brought MT research to a standstill in the mid-1960s. Modest successes in the 1970s, however, such as the Météo system designed by a Université de Montréal team to translate weather forecasts, heralded a new wave of MT research and development. Many specialists would agree that fully automatic high-quality machine translation faces insurmountable challenges, except in the case of technical documentation using very controlled language. And even there, anyone who has tried to make sense of a user manual in any language other than English will attest that there is much room for improvement.

If full automation is unlikely to produce output of publishable quality any time soon, the prospects of computer-assisted translation (CAT) are much more promising. Without looking into a crystal ball, CAT tools already offer a largely untapped potential for L2 writing instruction. While TESOL is understandably focused on facilitating writing development in English as a second language, it is worth bearing in mind that bilingual writers often need help with crosslingual work, such as writing in one language from sources in another and frequently switching the languages of composing and reading. Bilingual writers thus have much to learn from professional translators' strategic use of existing digital tools. Unfortunately, disciplinary divisions of labour often sequester translation training away from L2 writing instruction.

Amidst the condemnation of CAT as shirking and cheating, some educators (Williams, 2006, among others) have advocated the use of online MT for promoting electronic literacy and language awareness. For example, L2 writers can learn about polysemy, lexical and structural ambiguity, word boundary, idiomaticity, parts of speech, pragmatic effect, and so on, from the types of errors that online MT tools make. Importantly, student writers should know that online translation tools are primarily intended for gisting purposes—to provide a rough idea of what a text is about when one does not know the language. When

such tools are used to produce high-quality translations, it is with the understanding that the output is only a rough draft that will require much pre- and post-editing. Students may also need to know that such editing is typically done by language professionals who translate from their L2 to their L1. Because developing L2 writers have not yet acquired an ear for the target language, they might better appreciate MT output when submitting texts for translation into their L1. What sense do they make of the translation? How precise is it? How can it be improved by pre-editing (e.g., simplifying, disambiguating) the source text?

While online translators have received wide attention, professional translators make much greater use of digital tools that help them produce their own high-quality translations than they do MT. In addition to spelling and grammar checkers and a battery of online, corpus-based terminological and lexicographic resources for learning about a word's meaning, usage, and collocational behaviour, worth mentioning are bilingual concordancers such as [Linguee](#) or [TradooIt](#), for these provide contextualized translations of phrases from a large corpus of texts translated by humans. Many of these tools are free, but commercially available services worth checking out include [LinguisTech](#) and [Sketch Engine](#).

CAT tools are here to stay. They are fast improving in precision and accuracy. It will become harder and harder for students to resist their appeal and for instructors to police their use, and why should they? If the objective is to equip students for today's computer-mediated workplace, pen-and-paper composition tasks stripped of all electronic resources do not make much sense. That goes for both students, who will be ill prepared, and instructors seeking relief from the more menial and time-consuming aspects of corrective feedback that could be better handled by computers. As CAT tools improve, let them do more at the sentence level so that instructors and students alike can shift focus to higher-level concerns such as coherence management, composing strategies, and rhetorical effectiveness. Computers won't do the thinking for us. At least not in the foreseeable future.

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THE ROLE OF TESL IN THE AGE OF (HIGHLY ACCURATE) MT

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Can MT undermine language learning?

Although the quality of free online machine translation (FOMT) varies greatly depending on—among other factors—the language pair, domain, text type, input style and the intended use of the output, perhaps you have come across some pretty decent online translations when wanting to check the content of a website, access a foreign blog, contribute to it, or just get the gist of what your international friends were saying on Facebook or Twitter. If you were familiar with both the source and target languages, you may have spotted some inaccuracies, or you may have been pretty impressed with the result and thought: what is the need to learn a language, now that you can have instant FOMT at any time? In this paper we explain some of the reasons why this question that (English) language learners and teachers may be asking themselves is too simplistic.

Firstly, we should not forget that FOMT systems are intended to showcase the potential of machine translation (MT), but they fall well short of what “serious” translation software used in highly specific production environments is capable of in terms of accuracy and reliability. Their attraction lies in being just one click away, available at any time, free of charge, for several language pairs and in various mobile apps. Secondly, MT cannot be compared to human translations, which remain superior in quality. MT is most commonly used in contexts with large volumes of repetitive standardized language, hence the translation quality improves if the domain is restricted or controlled. In such scenarios, the main aim is to make the translation process more productive by reducing the time and money invested; this can be achieved, for example, by pre-editing (i.e. simplifying) the source text, or by revising the raw MT output, correcting it to the level of quality that is needed by the end-users in specific situations. Thirdly, the MT quality that is desirable may differ depending on the type of text, its intended users and the circumstances under which the translation is required (its deadline, feasibility of subsequent post-editing, how many people are going to read it, for what purposes and for how long, etc.).

Hutchins (2001) distinguishes three main uses of MT (not only FOMT) in relation to the expected level of quality, namely: MT for dissemination or publication purposes (where the maximum degree of quality is required), MT for assimilation or information gathering (where less-than-perfect quality may still be acceptable), and instantaneous MT for interpersonal communication (e.g. via mobile apps such as WhatsApp Messenger, where

the objective is to get the gist of what the interlocutor writes, to reply accordingly, just to support the short-lived online interaction in real time—style, nuances, etc. are of only limited importance).

There is some common ground between MT development and language learning: for example, the closer the languages, the easier it is to achieve good results. Both MT systems and language learners need to process linguistic differences concerning for instance inflection, agreement, word reordering, false friends, homonymy, homophony, pronunciation and intonation issues (for spoken-language MT), and also cope with a variety of exceptions that make language processing and learning ever more challenging.

Just as many of these difficulties are encountered both in speaking/listening and in writing/reading in a foreign language, they are also common to written and spoken MT. The impressive breakthroughs in spoken MT over the last few years are not to be underestimated. A good example is *Skype's Voice Translator*, which supports people communicating in real time over the phone, with each caller hearing the words translated on the fly into a language that they can understand. However, these voice translation systems are just as likely to cause communication problems due to mispronunciations and homonyms, and because spoken language is often more colloquial and unpredictable than writing (e.g. false starts, interruptions, coughing, overlapping turns in conversation, use of intonation for emphasis and meaning-making with frequent contextual references), and idiomatic or slang use.

Many of the errors that students make when learning a language, which are often very much dependent on their mother tongue, can to some extent be similar to the errors produced by an MT system translating within the same language pair, although MT also produces its own characteristic errors: these clearly differ in terms of gravity and frequency from those found in human translation and in L2 speech and writing. Somers et al. (2006) conducted an experiment aimed at distinguishing MT output from low-level language students' production in order to detect use of FOMT systems by language learners (e.g. to do their homework). They came to the conclusion that "the mistakes made by MT systems are sufficiently different from those made by language learners to permit some sort of automatic detection" (Somers et al., 2006, p. 47). FOMT is therefore unlikely to constitute a threat to language learning, if texts produced by this technology can be detected and penalized accordingly. From the teaching perspective, it makes sense that language tutors learn to identify passages produced by MT using tools such as *Turnitin*, to prevent the improper (and counter-productive) use of FOMT by language students.

This is, in our view, where the use of MT, and especially FOMT, can be controversial for TESL, with plagiarism as one of its potential hazards. If students use ready-made online translations, rather than making the effort of producing the texts themselves and learn from their own mistakes, then there is little point in attending classes and being taught a language formally.

Strengths, limitations and an overview of MT system types

It is true that the quality of MT output keeps on improving at considerable speed for an ever increasing range of language pairs, but several serious limitations still remain. Unlike human translators, MT systems are generally unable to process ambiguity or to capture text-level discursual phenomena and the interconnections between words and their abstract, implied or culturally motivated meanings. In addition, MT often fails with idioms, anaphora, proper names, culture-related words, slang, and colloquialisms. It cannot easily adjust to different registers and translate them properly—let alone handle puns and humour! For these reasons, MT output usually translates the source text too literally and can therefore be stylistically awkward. Granted, it can even be amusing if, for example, we attempt to translate a joke, figurative language, a horoscope or a dialogue from a movie. However, MT can produce surprisingly good and (under certain circumstances) usable or useful results with formal, standardized texts such as legal documents, for example, if less-than-perfect quality for gisting is sufficient, or if post-editing is an option to bring the raw MT output of uneven quality to publishable standard.

There are different types of MT systems, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Rule-based MT (RBMT) involves using an analyzer, a parser and a transfer lexicon to link the source- and target-language structures. The rules contain morphological, syntactic and semantic information of both languages. FOMT services such as [Babelfish](#) or [Apertium](#) are based on this traditional approach, which has gradually evolved ever since MT was first demonstrated in the 1950s.

The more dominant methodology is statistical MT (SMT), which uses massive bilingual corpora of previously translated texts, with aligned sentence pairs as its main knowledge base: translations are produced by algorithms that automatically identify pairs of phrases that (most frequently) correspond to each other between the two languages. SMT uses information gleaned from hundreds of millions of documents to generate translations of similar texts using statistical techniques that calculate the probability that a target-language string of words is the translation of a particular source-language phrase. After these correspondences at the phrase level are ranked in terms of probability, a target-language model is applied to help produce fluent, correct output, filtering out unlikely phrases that are not attested in the target-language model.

This approach is based exclusively on probability, and does not require any explicit or formalized linguistic rules, only very large quantities of human-translated parallel texts. This is in principle the way in which [Google Translate](#), [Bing Translator](#) and other statistical MT systems work: they detect translational patterns in millions of professionally translated documents and make intelligent guesses/mappings to generate new translations of unseen texts, that must be to some extent similar to the parallel corpus used for the training. This means that the system can only translate text that is in some sense similar to the text it

has already seen. So if the text it is trying to translate contains a misspelled word, or an ungrammatical sentence, it is more likely to get it wrong.

Finally, hybrid MT systems combine the strengths of the rule-based and statistical approaches, in an attempt to obtain more accurate results. These systems use an underlying statistical architecture, with the addition of explicit linguistic and translation rules that kick in to manage specific aspects of the translation process that are likely to cause mistakes if handled exclusively with a statistical approach, such as when morphologically rich languages are involved. Examples of MT systems using this hybrid method include PROMT, SYSTRAN and Asia Online.

MT in the language class

So the burning question now becomes: should you use MT in your language class, and, if so, how? Somers (2003) suggests the following uses:

- MT as bad model (Anderson, 1995 and Richmond, 1994), where language students can learn to identify the lexical and grammatical errors of MT output and correct them in their L1 or L2, in order to acquire a better grasp of the target language. This will also help avoid plagiarism by making students more aware of what FOMT can and cannot translate successfully. However, if the translation is done into the L2, especially with low-level students, it may reinforce incorrect use of the target language;
- MT as a translation-training tool for advanced students interested in acquiring new translation skills. In Lewis's (1997, p. 255) forward-looking words, "language graduates need to know what the capabilities of state-of-the-art MT are and how to evaluate its role as a practical tool in the language industry." This may also involve learning about pre- and post-editing skills, together with a range of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, including translation memory software, terminology managers and databases and concordancers, to name but a few;
- MT as a Computer Assisted Language Learning Tool (Somers, 2012) via programs such as *Transit Tiger*¹. With this program language tutors can design their own guided translation exercises aiming at practising translation as an independent language learning skill into the L1 and into the L2. The interface provides hyperlinked words as hints for structures or lexical phrases that may pose problems when translating. A glossary and two model translations are also available to the students for reference purposes.

Gaspari & Somers (2007) discuss the rather widespread (mis)use of FOMT systems for lexical look-up, i.e. as if they were bilingual dictionaries. Their survey was carried out among over 100 university language and translation students in the UK, investigating their

1. Transit Tiger Software Review [https://calico.org/p-184-TransIt%20Tiger%20\(32000\).html](https://calico.org/p-184-TransIt%20Tiger%20(32000).html)

usage of FOMT systems: 62.5% of the sample reported using them for single-word lookup, and the authors explain the risks associated with this practice. Some of the FOMT systems now recognize this danger, and automatically change to “dictionary mode” if a one-word translation is requested, offering a range of translations with hints as to which might be required.

Among the various instructional drawbacks of FOMT we have already mentioned the danger of plagiarism and the fact that being exposed to FOMT output into the L2 may reinforce bad language habits. These are some of the main reasons why it is understandable that language tutors tend to oppose MT: simply because the intervention of MT seems pointless or unnatural from the language teaching perspective.

In a more recent study, Niño (2009) surveyed language students and tutors about their perceptions of FOMT as a language learning resource. On the whole, students reacted positively, stating that manipulating FOMT output had enhanced their language awareness, improved comprehension, lexical retrieval and increased confidence in their target language skills. On the other hand, language tutors perceived it more negatively, arguing that they will only start incorporating FOMT in the language class in the future when translation quality is better.

The truth is that in as much as foreign language and translation students use the Internet and its various tools such as search engines, concordancers, corpora, dictionaries, term banks, and encyclopedias as means to support foreign language written production, the use of FOMT for translation and foreign language learning cannot be easily prevented or avoided. As McCarthy (2004) puts it, FOMT “is a new parameter in translation teaching and instructors and students must learn to work with it.” According to him, it is unrealistic to ignore or eliminate FOMT use for students’ translation assignments. He goes on to suggest some practical strategies for fair assessment, including raising students’ awareness of the potential and limitations of MT: they have the ability to produce a more accurate, idiomatic and fluent translation, especially if they possess an advanced knowledge of the target language. He also recommends teaching students about the deficiencies of MT, imposing severe penalties on machine-generated mistakes, and selecting very carefully the texts to be translated, so that for example they contain figurative language and idiomatic expressions. It seems to us that these recommendations can also be implemented in language learning programmes, to ensure that writing and translation assignments are completed in a pedagogically useful way, avoiding risky shortcuts.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion we can say that, although FOMT is an omnipresent resource used by both language learners and translation students, this technology is still not very accurate and was not designed as a language-learning tool. As a result, it should not be used for translation into the L2 without a tutor’s supervision, especially at lower levels of proficiency,

where students have more problems spotting incorrect language. For assimilation or communication purposes, there seems to be little pedagogic harm in using MT output into the L1, and exercises requiring students to revise MT output in their own language (Anderson 1995) may also serve a useful purpose in heightening awareness of differences between languages, and the need for natural-sounding translations; after all, being able to speak/write it is only one reason for learning a foreign language, and anyone hoping to earn a living from their knowledge of a foreign language is more likely to be employed translating *from* it into their own language.

Translation students and advanced language learners may like to explore FOMT's capabilities in combination with other online language and translation-oriented resources (e.g. concordancers, parallel and comparable corpora, dictionaries and terminology databases, among others). However, for production purposes, one should remember that MT is subject to many inaccuracies, in particular with distant language pairs, and does not cope well with informal language (as typically found in conversations or emails, for example). To achieve high quality, statistics-based FOMT depends heavily on large corpora of aligned human translations, which are currently restricted in terms of domains, text types, and language pairs.

Nothing compares to the experience of learning a new language and getting to spontaneously express oneself in it. As we know, this does not mean being 100% accurate from the beginning, but with perseverance successful language development will take place, and it will replace the tendency to rely on MT output for constant reassurance. TESL tutors should be aware of what MT is capable of, learn to spot MT errors as one form of plagiarism and to penalize it accordingly, and teach learners how to employ this technology for written production and when not to.

As for the potential threat posed by state-of-the-art MT to the future of the TESL profession, there is still uncertainty as to whether, or when, MT-enabled international communication can surpass the use of English as a global language, and this question cannot be definitively answered for quite a few more years. In David Crystal's (2003, p. 27) words: "It will be very interesting to see what happens [when MT matures as a popular communication medium] – whether the presence of a global language will eliminate the demand for world translation services, or whether the economics of automatic translation will so undercut the cost of global language learning that the latter will become otiose. It will be an interesting battle 100 years from now". Although we will not be there to witness the developments of MT and language learning of the next 100 years, we wouldn't be surprised if TESL professionals were still very much in demand in the 22nd century, and possibly well beyond that...

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Bios



Ana Niño has a background in Applied Linguistics and holds a PhD in Machine Translation and Computer Assisted Language Learning from The University of Manchester. Since September 2006 she has been Spanish and Portuguese co-ordinator at the Language Centre, University of Manchester. Ana teaches courses in general and Medical Spanish. In the last few years she has been heavily involved in developing various e-learning resources for the Spanish VLEs. Her research interests revolve around translation, corpus linguistics and the pedagogy of teaching specialized languages, with particular emphasis on the use of emerging technologies and innovative resources for independent language learning.



Federico Gaspari has a background in translation studies and holds a PhD in machine translation from the University of Manchester (UK). After working for a few years as a lecturer and language tutor for Italian at the Universities of Manchester and Salford in the UK, he currently lectures in translation technology and specialized translation at the Universities of Bologna (Forlì campus) and Macerata in Italy. He is a postdoctoral researcher at Dublin City University (Ireland), where he works on international projects related to translation technology and translation quality evaluation.



Harold Somers is Professor (Emeritus) of Language Engineering at the University of Manchester, where he worked for nearly 40 years on various aspects of Machine Translation, but especially issues of usability of MT in the general community, promoting awareness and understanding of MT and other language technologies amongst language professionals. After taking early retirement in 2008, he worked for 3 years at Dublin City University, focussing on similar issues, as well as use of language technology to assist patients with limited English in doctor-patient consultations. He is now fully retired, but still takes a keen interest in these issues.

EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT TECHNOLOGY IS WRONG

By Douglas Orme, University of Toronto

I would suggest that most of us have bought into one of two dominant ways of thinking about technology, and that they are both spectacularly wrong.

You've probably heard both of these two claims about guns? "Guns kill people" and, its counter-claim "No, people kill people!" You may have the gut feeling that both capture something true about how guns function in society. You may also have had the nagging feeling that both arguments line-up far too neatly along ideological lines: the left on the "guns kill people" side, and the right on the "people kill people" side. If you're like me, upon realizing that the debate has become ideological, you just want to throw up your hands and walk away. You may, sardonically, imagine them all in a locked room with a bunch of guns...

To work then: let us abstract the logic behind each of these two arguments, and then see how it applies to the way technology mediates TESL, and how machine translation (MT) may function within our field.

The "guns kill people" argument, so beloved of the left, points out the important insight that technologies are designed and that what is inherent in the design, the structure, will inevitably shape the effect of that technology, just as, say, the technology of writing gives priority to vision over hearing. Arguments from this point of view ask us to consider the inherent structure of any technology: wouldn't it be reasonable to suppose on this logic, that MT will do the work of translation and hence obviate the need for actually learning a language? Isn't it just a matter of time until my smartphone can read or hear any language and then translate it, instantly, into any other language? Language learning will be moot. In terms of solutions, this side will suggest a large scale, coordinated social response such as, "we need to band together with others put out of work by technology and/or

push for legislation to protect our way of life!” Recall the telephone operators of days gone by. One can imagine cries for the regulation of MT.

The counter argument applied to guns reminds us that “The gun doesn’t shoot itself: people kill people.” This argument dovetails with the ideologically conservative insistence upon individual responsibility. Bad people do bad things with technology, and good, responsible people do good things with the technology. It’s not the technology! Applied to the problem of the effect of MT upon our profession, someone on this side might suggest, “well, sure some people will just be lazy and use MT. But really, it’s up to the individual to know when to use it or not. What, are you going to outlaw it to save TESL? You can’t babysit everyone: educate them, and then let them choose.”

The conservatives will tell you a “bad guy” will do bad things with any given technology. A liberal will tell you the effect depends on what’s designed into the technology. But is there a way to think about technology that doesn’t have us ping-ponging back and forth between these two seemingly irreconcilable positions? What if we had an example of a “bad guy” using a gun for pro-social purposes - wouldn’t that show both arguments to be wrong-headed? As, it happens, there are justice systems in the Canadian arctic where judges have “sentenced” convicted criminals to take a gun and go hunting with Inuit elders for 3 months. Imagine that: the judge gives the convict a gun! What happens? The “bad guys” wind up making connections with the elders and their tribal traditions, reconnecting with nature, stepping out of the rat-race, and finding peace.

So, we see that it is not “what’s in the inherent design of the technology”, but neither is it “a matter of individual responsibility”. It begins to look like the effect of any technology depends upon the context in which it is inserted or deployed. Guns in an urban context where, say, there is high demand for illegal drugs, and, say a minority which lives with near 50% employment, obviously spells trouble. Guns used in a nature-connected hunting society may have an entirely different effect. It’s not the technology and it’s not the people: it’s the context.

What are some of the likely effects of MT upon TESL then? In thinking through this issue, I suspect you’ll hear lots of “OMG, it’s in the design. We’re doomed!” on the one hand, and plenty of “buck up, and take respon-

sibility for yourselves” on the other hand. Look out for these two types of over-simple arguments about technology in TESL; you’ll see them everywhere. They may feel good, but they won’t get us very far in our thinking.

The idea that the effect of any technology will depend upon the context into which it is inserted leads us to expect an interesting mix of effects because within our world, and indeed within our cities, many contexts overlap and coexist. What can we expect then of technology in general and MT in particular? We can expect complexity, by which I mean the simultaneous appearance of the seemingly contradictory. We can expect MT to be both helpful and harmful. The limited research available suggests that on the one hand MT can help lower-proficiency learners to generate more language than they would without it on writing assignments; a demonstrable benefit. On the other hand, the same research suggests that more proficient writers actually spend less time deeply involved in the writing task (editing, revising, re-thinking) when “assisted” by MT. If we tried to measure the effect of MT on average these interesting differences would disappear. Researching the effect within specific contexts turns out to be essential.

Is it possible that increasing the use of MT will provide seductive time-saving qualities, but have a negative effect on how deeply learners process ideas, and that they may be unaware of drawbacks? Interesting research in reading online versus reading on paper suggests that it may. When students were given an article they knew they’d be tested on, the ones who read on paper outperformed students who read online. That is perhaps not surprising. The most interesting finding was that the online readers (and they were randomly assigned to paper or online) predicted they’d understand just as much as their paper reading peers. The point here, is that we are unaware of the negative effect of some technologies on how we process ideas.

In our rushed world (there’s the importance of context again), where speed and ease seem to be of the essence, language learners may not have or take the time to reflect in the moment on whether the speed and ease advantages are worth the cost. We can say to ourselves, and tell our students, that a slower, deeper approach is better, but aren’t we, ourselves, too seduced by the speed and convenience of modern digital technologies?

Students can, even now, do all of their language learning online using digital tools including MT, Skype, etc., at home.

But they don't.

There is still demand for classroom-based language study by immigrants and international students among others. They may well, in their day-to-day lives, make use of these tools. Convenience and speed may predominate for many specific practical language-based tasks, but they know there is a difference between brief functional messages that just need to work, on the one hand, and the ability to truly express one's self on the other hand.

One possible future scenario for us to be on guard against: immigrants are given free smartphones with instant universal language translation software on board. LINC classes are cut. Meanwhile, the rich continue to send their kids to Academic English classes because they can afford it. Wouldn't that be an interesting, and horrible, example of context mediating the effect of the technology?

So, MT is not liable to replace language training that focuses on communication (in its fleshed out, dialogic, social sense). But, will the context of living in a globalized hyper-consumer, late-capitalist milieu be the equivalent of guns coming into a rough neighbourhood, or will it be more like Inuit offenders becoming re-acquainted with a nature from which we have all been too long estranged? The answer is: all of the above.

Bio



Douglas Orme has been teaching ESL and EAP for 20 years in Toronto and Japan. He has presented at conferences in Toronto and Japan on pronunciation, using music in ESL, and more recently, on issues surrounding the use of technology in the classroom. He recently completed an M.Ed. in curriculum & philosophy. He teaches EAP, and works on curriculum development at the University of Toronto.

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON WRITING

A tool for learning and teaching

By Danielle Guénette, Université du Québec à Montréal

Among the multiple tasks imparted onto second language teachers, one of the most time consuming, and for which we are less prepared, is providing corrective feedback to students. When I became an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, I had spent countless hours learning how to manage a classroom and create interesting lesson plans, but I was totally unaware of the sheer number of nearly incomprehensible copies that would cross my desk, and the different ways I could go about correcting them. In those days, I trusted that students would be impelled to correct the errors I had indicated and motivated to avoid them in the future, and I was convinced that no error should be left uncorrected lest it lead to fossilization¹. Then, a review article by Truscott (1996) changed my perspective on corrective feedback. Truscott was, and still is, of the opinion that providing corrective feedback is not only unnecessary but can even be harmful to students. Despite my unsuccessful experience with corrective feedback, however, reading this article only spurred my motivation to find more effective ways to help my students develop their written accuracy in the second language.

For the past 30 years, research on corrective feedback has attempted to answer the question asked by all second language (L2) teachers: what type of written corrective feedback can best promote second language development? But before moving on, let's consider exactly what corrective feedback is, and how it can be provided to learners.

Although it cannot be assumed that all teachers employ the same CF strategies and techniques, a recent survey conducted with 46 ESL teachers in Québec (Guénette, 2014) showed that

Terminology

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK (CF) targets the form of the language and must be distinguished from **FEEDBACK ON CONTENT** that includes comments that pertain to the ideas, organization and style of the text. **DIRECT CORRECTION** refers to CF strategies that provide the correct form or structure and may take various forms (crossing out or inserting a word or phrase, bracketing a misplaced word or writing the correct form above the errors, across it or in the margin). **INDIRECT CORRECTION** refers to techniques that are used to indicate that an error has been made without providing the correct form. **INDIRECT CODED FEEDBACK** is when the teacher indicates the type of error using a code that is known to the learners, for example SP for a spelling error. When using **INDIRECT UNCODED FEEDBACK**, the teacher indicates the location of the error using various techniques such as circling, underlining, inserting arrows, using question marks or counting the number of errors in the margin. Written corrective feedback (WCF) can also be **COMPREHENSIVE** (correcting all errors) or **SELECTIVE** (focusing on specific linguistic features), which some authors currently refer to as **UNFOCUSED** and **FOCUSED** feedback.

1. Incorrect forms that remain, or stabilize, in the learners' output.

a majority of them favor direct corrections, and that those who prefer indirect corrections mostly provide them through the use of a metalinguistic code.

Research on Corrective Feedback

Direct, Indirect, Comprehensive, or Selective?

The publication of Truscott's article (1996) sparked an interest in CF and led to a considerable amount of research using different strategies and techniques (see Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, and Guénette, 2007, for a review of these studies). These experiments also brought to light the myriad of factors that need to be considered before claiming that CF is ineffective. Nowadays, most researchers and nearly all practitioners believe in the usefulness of CF, as it can bring students to *notice*, a condition believed to be necessary for second language acquisition.

However, the results of these studies are contradictory and inconclusive. Some studies comparing direct and indirect WCF strategies found significant effects for indirect correction over direct correction (e.g., Lalande, 1982), while others concluded the opposite (e.g., Chandler, 2003) or observed that all learners improved their writing, regardless of the strategy used (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986). The impact of corrective feedback on various categories of errors has also been examined, based on the theoretical assumption that rule-based errors are treatable while non rule-based errors such as vocabulary and sentence structure are untreatable (Ferris, 2006). Some studies showed positive effects on specific treatable linguistic features (articles and past tense), but in a recent study conducted with grade 11 high school learners in Québec (Guénette & Foster, 2013), it was found that the treatable/non treatable dichotomy was not operative and that learners actually paid more attention to categories considered to be untreatable.

Learners' Perceptions of Corrective Feedback

It appears that learners expect their errors to be corrected and generally believe that it helps them (e.g. Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Evans, Hartshorn & Tuiotti, 2011; Schulz, 2001). However, studies that investigated learners' revisions following WCF indicate that perceptions and reality do not always coincide. In Simard & Guénette (2013), no relationship was found between high school learners' preferences and perceptions of the usefulness of WCF, and their ability to correct their errors or even to understand them.

Findings from studies on learners' perceptions nevertheless provide some insights into the various factors that mediate the effectiveness of feedback, namely the learners' willingness, motivation and ability to engage with feedback. The few studies that have investigated the issue of willingness have shown that unless forced to do so, high school students do not spontaneously revise their written assignments (e.g. Simard & Guénette, 2013; Sze, 2002). Leki (2003) also observed that even college and university level learners may lack the motivation to improve their accuracy in writing as the effort necessary to do so outweighs the advantages that could be derived.

Teachers' Perceptions of Corrective Feedback

In our study with pre-service teachers (hereafter called *mentors*) who provided WCF to learners over a semester (Guénette & Lyster, 2013), one of the major concerns expressed by our participants was how to adapt to their learners, especially the lower proficiency students for whom the mentors had difficulty isolating the linguistic features they should target and deciding how to provide the feedback. The very proficient learners represented less of a challenge as there were usually fewer surface errors in their texts, and it was easier for the mentors to know what to focus on. The mentors also worried about being wrong when diagnosing the errors made by the learners, which led them to use direct corrections rather than indirect corrections with codes for fear of using the wrong code. They were also inconsistent with their own coding scheme, a fact that was also observed by Ferris (2006) in her study with university instructors. Finally, our mentors also mentioned their own lack of motivation at having to correct the same errors time and time again, and seeing no apparent improvement in their learners' writing accuracy.

So what does this mean for second language teachers in search of solutions to continue providing WCF? We believe, based on the evidence, that it is part and parcel of our job. As such, we should maximize its potential to help learners develop more accuracy in their second language and keep their own motivation alive. This will be addressed in the following section.

Corrective Feedback: A Tool for Learning

In a study cited earlier (Simard & Guénette, 2013), corrections were made using a green pen. When asked about their perceptions of the corrective feedback provided, one student answered “La correction en vert me fait moins paniquer que si la couleur est rouge” (corrections in green don't make me panic as much as corrections in red). This seems to indicate that CF is a source of stress for some learners. In our previously mentioned study with pre-service teachers who were asked to comment on their own experiences as language learners, one of them commented:

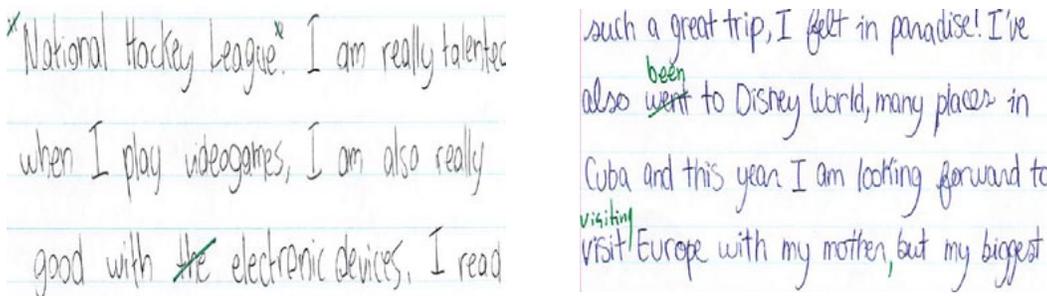
I remember my teachers were very, very strict with grammar and very strict with orthographical mistakes. It was “no spelling errors allowed,” [...] And I didn't find that it allowed me room to breathe, I was panic struck every time [...]

Although this participant recognized the effectiveness of WCF, he still mentioned how distressing it had been for him. Learners can also be offended by receiving corrections on their text, either because they feel that they haven't been understood: “On m'a mal compris et on m'a mis des erreurs à tort” (the teacher misunderstood and some corrections were wrong), or because they are convinced that they already knew the rule and simply made a mistake²: “I already know the plural form (third-person, etc.).” During my first year teaching ESL at the grade-nine level, a very proficient student handed in a paper that

should have been 300 words but totaled barely 50. When I spoke to her about it, she told me that the less she wrote the fewer errors she'd make. Logical, I replied, but totally ineffective for improving your second language. "And why would I want to do that?" was her answer.

At that time I realized that the learners' motivation to improve their writing in the second language did not always match my own. In addition, for students to benefit from the feedback received and be willing to act on it, they must first understand it. In our study, it was shown that learners might understand the correction, but misinterpret its scope. After having reviewed indirect corrections made to his text (see example 1 below), this learner commented the following: "I learned that you don't say the electronic devices. It's electronic devices." This student generalized that the determiner "the" is never used when talking about electronic devices. A similar situation occurred with the following correction (example 2 below). The student's comment was: "I did not know that 'went' is not the verb to places I have been and it is 'have been'." This seems to imply that this student will never again use the past tense to talk about places he went to.

Figure 1 – Examples of Direct Corrections



Then, there is the question of motivation which is also related to proficiency level. Learners who aren't advanced enough to understand certain complexities of the second language will not respond well to WCF that requires them to self correct. And even if they have reached the necessary level, certain elements of language might still elude them. For example, the third-person "s" rule is extremely simple and totally reliable (Ellis, 2002). However errors with this linguistic element continue to plague advanced second language learners' written productions because of its very low communicative value (Van Patten, 1996).

Finally, very few ESL learners will willingly revise their written work unless specifically asked to do so. One of the major problems with revision is that learners do not necessarily know how to go about editing their own work. They review their text but do not question what they read, since they feel that what they wrote is exactly what they wanted to say. An additional problem is that although the process writing approach is in favor in most educational environments, many younger students do not find it stimulating to keep working on the same piece of work over and over again, especially if they have not mastered

2. Mistakes result from a lack of attention, while errors are attributed to a lack of knowledge or competency.

the art of editing. Bruton also suggests “a little a lot, rather than a lot a little” (2009, p. 68). In other words, students might be more motivated, and it might prove more beneficial for developing their accuracy, if they wrote shorter texts on a variety of topics, frequently, and on a regular basis.

Corrective Feedback: A Tool for Teaching

Second language acquisition is a long and arduous process, and it is not always true that something taught has been learned. It takes years of practice to speak a second language well, and it takes even longer to master the intricacies of writing in a second language. Several studies conducted with high school French first-language learners (e.g., Gauvin, 2005; Nadeau & Fisher 2011) have shown that after numerous years of instruction, learners still make a lot of morphological mistakes in their first language. In addition, although research has shown that there are stages of development in the acquisition of a second language common to all learners, irrespective of their first language, there are individual differences that have an impact on the learning curve.

In Guénette & Foster (2013), our goal was to examine the effect of two WCF strategies (direct and indirect) combined with two different WCF modes: selective and comprehensive. Our results indicated that direct comprehensive corrections were not effective with lower proficiency learners because it created a cognitive overload and, presumably, affected their motivation. Although none of our groups showed a statistically significant improvement over time, we found that selective corrections, irrespective of the WCF strategy (direct or indirect) were more helpful than comprehensive corrections on all categories of errors. Another interesting finding was that our indirect groups who were required to revise each written production (a total of four texts during the semester) attempted less and less to self-correct as time went by. In addition, we found no apparent relationships between revisions of a text, and accuracy on new pieces of writing.

Our results, and those of other studies, indicate that both direct and indirect corrections can be effective if they are provided discriminately without overwhelming the learners. Direct corrections provide a model of what is correct; if they are provided regularly on targeted linguistic features, they can bring learners to notice the gap and will allow for the development of implicit knowledge. When providing direct corrections, however, we have to ensure that the learners are given the opportunity to practice what they have noticed. One way to do this is to let students review the corrections, and then one or two days later, have them write a text in which they will need to use the features that were the target of correction. Indirect corrections, on the other hand, force students to reflect about the language and test their hypotheses. This implies that learners have already been exposed to the targeted linguistic element and need to refer to their previous knowledge in order to self-correct. With regard to making the revision process more effective and motivating for learners, peer feedback groups can be formed so that learners can collaborate in editing their copies. But either WCF strategy will only be helpful if it is consistent with the learners’

current level of development in the second language, and the use of one or the other should be adapted to the level of competency, ability, and willingness of the learners to make use of the feedback. Portfolios and error charts (appendix A) can facilitate the teachers' job when it comes to adapting the feedback to individual learners. As far as the categories of error to target, it appears that learners will pay more attention to features that carry meaning (i.e., lexical errors; Simard & Gu nette, 2013). For grammatical errors that are common to all learners, it might be more productive for teachers to explore other ways of focusing on form, such as mini-grammar lessons, error charts, and peer feedback.

Finally, we suggest that it is not the type of WCF that matters as much as the frequency and regularity with which it is provided. Learners should be given ample opportunities to write with a purpose, and teachers should provide timely WCF that corresponds to what is most important for individual learners to continue progressing in the development of their accuracy in the second language.

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Bio



Danielle Guénette is associate professor in the Second Language Teaching Program at *Université du Québec à Montréal*. After teaching ESL in high school for several years, she obtained her doctoral degree from McGill University and has since then conducted studies on the corrective feedback beliefs and practices of ESL teachers in Québec and the effectiveness of different WCF strategies to improve ESL learners' accuracy in their second language. She has published in major academic journals and presented her work on corrective feedback on writing in various scientific and professional conferences in Canada, the U.S, and Mexico.

APPENDIX A

Personalized summary of error report

Below is a breakdown of the most frequent errors that came up in your last text. I'd like you to pay attention to these errors and try to correct them on your own.

Written assignment: My life as a teenager Date: _____

Error type	Number of errors
Verb tense	6
Spelling	8
Subject-verb agreement	3
Word choice	7
Sentence structure	3

My life as a teenager	Error No.	Error	Correction
Verb errors	1		
	2		
	3		
Spelling	1		

Source: Adapted from Ferris & Hedgcock (2005).

AN INTERVIEW WITH INCOMING TESOL INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEW WITH ANDY CURTIS, PART 2

By Jeff Brown, Humber College

7. The 2015 TESOL conference will be held in Toronto with TESL Ontario acting as “host affiliate”. What role do you see TESL Ontario playing in this regard?

This is a good time to be responding to that question, as TESL Ontario’s 42nd Annual Conference, *Integrating Language and Transcending Boundaries*, recently wrapped up (in Toronto, October 16 to 18), and the promotional brochures for TESOL 2015, *Crossing Borders, Building Bridges* (Toronto, March 25 to 28) were recently sent out. The short answer to this question is: Without TESL Ontario there would be no TESOL 2015 in Toronto! The TESOL Office staff in Washington and the TESOL’s Board of Directors have already been working closely with the TESL Ontario Board of Directors for some time now, to ensure that TESOL 2015 will not only be a great success, but mutually beneficial for both organizations, and all our members.

As I wrote in [Part One](#) of this interview (August 2014), I served on the TESOL International Association (TIA) Task Force on Convention Long Range Planning (from 2005 to 2006), which looked at the feasibility of holding the annual TESOL convention outside the US. One of my hopes then was that the annual convention would one day come back to Canada. Nearly ten years later, we’ve finally made it. My sincere hope is that the event is such a success that the TIA would consider bringing the annual convention back to Canada again, in the not-so-distant future.

There are many ways in which TESOL 2015 will not only be extremely international, as it always is, but also distinctively Canadian. For example, one of the keynote presentations at TESOL 2015 will be given by Dr. Jim Cummins, now professor emeritus at OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). The current TIA President, Dr. Yilin Sun, is an OISE graduate, and as the President-Elect, I used to run the English language program at Queen’s University, and I’m based in Kingston, Ontario. Added to that, some of the Invited Speakers are also graduates of Canadian universities, such as Dr. Suhanthie Motha, who received her BA from the University of Toronto, and Dr. Alistair Pennycook, who received his PhD from the University of Toronto as well.

On the back page of promotional brochure for TESOL 2015, some enticing details about Toronto are given, and the rhetorical question is asked: “What do Torontonians love about Toronto?” I agree with the reply, which is: “That’s a long list but topping it would be its

diversity.” The brochure goes on to explain that: “Two transit tokens are all you need to travel from one continent to another; to immerse yourself in the languages, art, cuisine, and ideas of a hundred different cultures.” That is one of the many reasons we’ve chosen to live in Canada, in Ontario and near Toronto, and one of the reasons I’m so pleased that TESOL 2015 will be taking place here.

8. Working conditions for ESL instructors (in various contexts) are a concern. In Ontario, the majority of ESL instructors have little to no job security, very few benefits, unrealistic demands in terms of grading and preparation, and inadequate professional development recognition (Brown, 2013). What role, if any, does TESOL International have to play in this regard?

I read your article, “Nomads on the Circuit”, which presents some worrying facts and figures. Those include the effects on ESL teachers of employers in Ontario avoiding a clause in the Collective Agreement “which stipulates that a sessional instructor who teaches more than 12 months in a 24 month period must be appointed to a full-time position” (p. 14). As you pointed out in your article, that situation results in a number of challenges and problems, not only for the teachers, but also for the students. A teacher without any job security is a teacher who always has to be looking for work, which means that their time and energies may be spent on ensuring they have a teaching position after their current contract finishes, instead of focusing their attention on their students. This constant concern is a distraction, which can prevent the teacher from making long-term commitments to their employer, as their employer has not made such a commitment to them.

So, it’s good that you ask what the TIA is doing about this, as well as challenging TESL Ontario to do more about this too: “If TESL Ontario is indeed ‘a supportive community empowering educational professionals’ (TESL Ontario, n.d.), then the time has come for this community to step in, acknowledge this situation and work with ESL departments to redress it, especially in light of TESL Ontario’s recent doubling of the required PD hours to 10 per year” (p.18). The TIA has a number of Standing Committees, which work on areas that constitute on-going, core concerns. One of those is the [Employment Issues Committee](#) (EIC), which: “serves as a forum for members to discuss employment issues and concerns in the field of TESOL, including equal employment, hiring, and retention for underrepresented groups; nonnative-speaker employment; and part-time, adjunct, contingent, and temporary employment.”

One the things that the TIA has done for many year is to publish position papers on issues that its members have raised and who have asked the association to take a position on. A relevant example is the “Position Paper on Equitable Treatment for Part-time, Adjunct, and Contingent Faculty”, which was approved by the TIA’s Board of Director back in 2003, and amended in 2006. [The paper](#) starts by giving the historical context: “Since the 1970s, experts have noted with increasing concern a trend in employment patterns of faculty at institutions of higher education, specifically the tremendous growth in the number and percentage of part-time, adjunct, and contingent faculty in higher education” (p. 1).

The paper also states that: “TESOL has long opposed excessive use and exploitation of part-time, adjunct, and contingent and adjunct faculty, because it undermines academic quality and freedom and respect for teaching. All members of an institution’s faculty are first and foremost instructors, so they all deserve equal pay for equal work and should be treated fairly and with an equal amount of respect, regardless of their employment status” (p.2). The paper lists a total of 18 recommendations under three main headings: Compensation; Employment, Responsibilities, and Professional Support; and Participation in Governance.

10. What do you consider to be the role in the ELT profession of accreditation-granting organizations such as TESL Canada, TESL Ontario, CATESOL, TESOL Spain, TESOL Arabia, etc.?

I believe that the kinds of accreditation-granting organizations you listed, including the TIA, play an important role in the ELT profession, in many different ways, on many different levels. But to give my answer to another timely question some focus, I’m going to refer mainly about the accreditation-granting work of the TIA, which was formalized with the founding of the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) in 1999, created by the TIA. According to the [CEA homepage](#): “The purpose was to provide a means for improving the quality of English language teaching and administration through accepted standards. CEA conducts accreditation reviews in the U.S. and internationally.”

Although definitions of *quality* and *standards* vary widely, depending on the context, this kind of monitoring and oversight is an important function of these kinds of accreditation-granting organizations. However, one of the challenges of taking on such monitoring roles and responsibilities is that there are, to the best of my knowledge, no universally agreed upon definitions of quality and standards, which makes the creation of international accrediting bodies difficult. That said, the CEA homepage also shows how such organizations can grow, from national to international agencies:

“In September 2003, CEA was recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as a national accrediting agency for English language programs and institutions. This recognition gave CEA the distinction of being the only specialized accrediting agency for English language programs and institutions in the U.S. In December 2005, the Commission expanded its mission to include the accreditation of English language programs and schools outside the U.S.”

This year, as the CEA became a completely autonomous and independent body, the TIA has also been considering launching a new accreditation initiative, for short-term certificate programs of six to ten weeks, details of which can be found on the [TIA website](#). The update, released in March 2014, explains that: “For several years, TESOL International Association has fielded requests to evaluate and recognize short-term certificate programs. TESOL does not have a set of standards for short-term training programs or any way to rate or approve their quality, but many individuals seeking short-term training as well as other stakeholders assume that TESOL does or should play a role” (p.1).

Looking at these kinds of developments, it seems likely that organizations such as the TIA and the associations you listed above will play an increasingly important role in assessing the quality and standards of language programs, as well as language teacher training and professional development programs, nationally and internationally. But because of the uniqueness of each language teaching and learning context, there will also be an increasingly important role for provincial and regional associations to play, as they understand the local context better than “outside expert”, which I’ve always considered a bit of a contradiction in terms.

11. Given the emergence of new technology and multimodal literacies in a globalized context, what are your thoughts on the legitimacy of language testing and, specifically, the use of standardized tests such as the IELTS and TOEIC?

As this is a very important and a very big question, answering it thoroughly would take a book. In fact, Professor Kathi Bailey—a Past President of TESOL, and my TESOL mentor for nearly 20 years—and I recently published the second edition of *Learning About Language Assessment: Dilemmas, Decisions, and Directions* (2014). The first edition was solo-authored by Kathi, and the updated and much-expanded second edition is more than 350 pages long. That’s around 150,000 words, so this will be a necessarily very much briefer answer to a very big question.

It’s interesting to see that you link technology and language testing, as this is a connection that concerns others as well. For example, Tim McNamara, in his book *Language Testing* (2000), wrote that: “The speed of technological advances affecting language testing sometimes gives an impression of a field confidently moving ahead ... But concomitantly the change in perspective from the individual to the social nature of test performance has provoked something of an intellectual crisis on the field” (p.83).

I don’t know if I’d agree that there has been an “intellectual crisis” in the field of language testing, but I do believe that one of the most important shifts in recent years has been from a focus on large-scale, standardized language tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, to classroom-based assessment. On the one hand, this is a positive development, as this puts more emphasis on what students and teachers do in language classrooms, rather than what happens in the examination hall. However, this has also put language teachers under some pressure to know more about the underlying theories of testing and assessment, including knowledge of statistical procedures, which language teachers often balk at, in my experience.

Another Big Move has been the growing interest in recent years in what’s usually referred to as “alternative assessment”, which has moved from the periphery of language testing to the mainstream. The term has been used to mean many different things, but Kathi and I used it to refer to “a wide range of assessment tools and procedures that can be used in lieu of any form of externally imposed ‘one shot’, high-stakes testing that was not developed

or selected by teachers or administrators of local language programs” (p.225). The key difference is the involvement of teachers and students in deciding what is tested, when, where and how. As long as there are tens of millions of English language learners who want and need to pass exams, there will be a place for large-scale, standardized language tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL. But I believe that such tests will be used increasingly in concert with classroom-based and alternative assessment.

What TESL idea is ready for retirement?

I read some of the essays from that issue of *The Edge*, and the answers to that question in the [previous issue](#) of *Contact*, which I agreed with, in general, although none of the answers seemed *to me* to be all that controversial. So, I’d like to end the interview with an answer that might be, to some readers, (much) more controversial. I’d like to suggest that we should consider retiring the notion that we’re all in the “post-methods era”. I respect the work of Kumaravadivelu, who popularized the notion, starting with his four-page paper on this, in 1994, titled “The Postmethod Condition” (in *TESOL Quarterly*), which was followed up with his first book on this, *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*, in 2002. The 1994 paper has been followed by a number of books and articles by the same author developing the same idea over the last 20 years (up to an including 2014), with a number of other writers jumping on this particular bandwagon.

Here, I use *bandwagon* in the online [Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary](#) sense of: “an activity, group, movement, etc. that has become successful or fashionable and so attracts many new people.” I would add to that definition: “so it becomes difficult for people to publicly question what has become an inherent part of the prevailing belief systems.” For me, one of the ironies is that, in *Beyond Methods*, Kumaravadivelu’s is highly critical of the “whirlwind of fashion” in language teaching: “Not anchored in any specific learning and teaching context, and caught up in the whirlwind of fashion, methods tend to wildly drift from one theoretical extreme to another” (p.28). Because discussions about how “post-methods” we now all are have become *de rigueur*, Kumaravadivelu may have become a victim of his own success, with post-methods having become exactly the kind of “fashionable whirlwind” he was so critical of before.

Although Kumaravadivelu, and his followers, have contributed much to the discussion of what we mean when we use terms such as ‘approach’, ‘method’, ‘technique’, ‘design’, etc., as I travel and meet classroom language teachers from all over the world, I meet very few who, when I ask them about what they do in their classrooms, tell me: “I don’t use a method. I’m post-method”. What they usually do, in answering the question, is describe an impressive range of activities, tasks, assessment procedures, etc., without any reference to ‘approach’, ‘method’, ‘technique’, ‘design’, etc. This has led me to believe that such discussions are, in general, by the scholars and academics in the field, for the scholars and academics in the field.

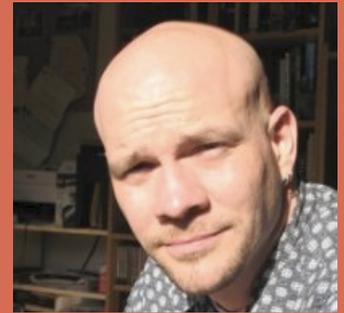
As I think Henry Widdowson has observed, ever since the demise of the Grammar Translation Method, demonized at the hands of the Communicative Movement, we seems to have been jumping from one methodological bandwagon to another, looking for the 'best practice'. To borrow from Mark Twain, rumours of the death of GT have been greatly exaggerated, with GT appearing to make a spirited comeback in recent years in a number of countries. And there is, of course, no one best practice, for all teaching and learning contexts, which would be an unacceptably, un-post-colonial position to take.

It's all about "best fit", in the Darwinian sense of best adapted to the environmental conditions *at that time*. As times change, so should the notion of what works "best", in that particular place, at that particular time. So, instead of ignoring the obvious ironies of treating 'post-methods' as though we've finally hit the methodological mother lode, I would like to propose that we set 'post-methods' aside, as another useful phase (and/or phrase) in the discussion, but one that is over – and that we're now 'post post-methods'.

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A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO ACADEMIC READING

By: Sreemali Herath, York University English Language Institute (YUELI)

The use of transformative or critical pedagogy in ESL/EAP settings is not only a powerful and effective way of teaching and learning, but it is also a means of empowering language teachers and learners so that they might experience transformation themselves, both politically and in their everyday lives (Cummins, 2001, 2009; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989). Although there are many discussions regarding the theoretical underpinnings of the transformative or critical pedagogy approach, many practitioners are often not clear what such pedagogy looks like in practice. This paper provides a real-life example of how transformative pedagogy was put into practice in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) setting.

I begin by providing an overview of Cummins' (2009) nested pedagogical orientations to highlight the theoretical foundations of three broad orientations to pedagogy: transmission, social constructivist, and transformative (Cummins, 2004, 2009; Skourtu, Kourtis-Kazoullis & Cummins, 2006). I then discuss the strengths of the transformative approach in particular as employed in an EAP reading class. Finally, I discuss the pedagogical implications of using this approach in academic reading classes. I look at the use of newspaper articles, specifically, as a means to develop collaborative, critical, and thus transformative inquiry in an advanced EAP class.

Cummins' (2009) Nested pedagogical orientations

Cummins (2009) presents three broad orientations to pedagogy: transmission, social constructivist, and transformative. In his formulation, the three pedagogies are nested within each other such that they are understood as interconnected and co-dependent rather than isolated from each other.

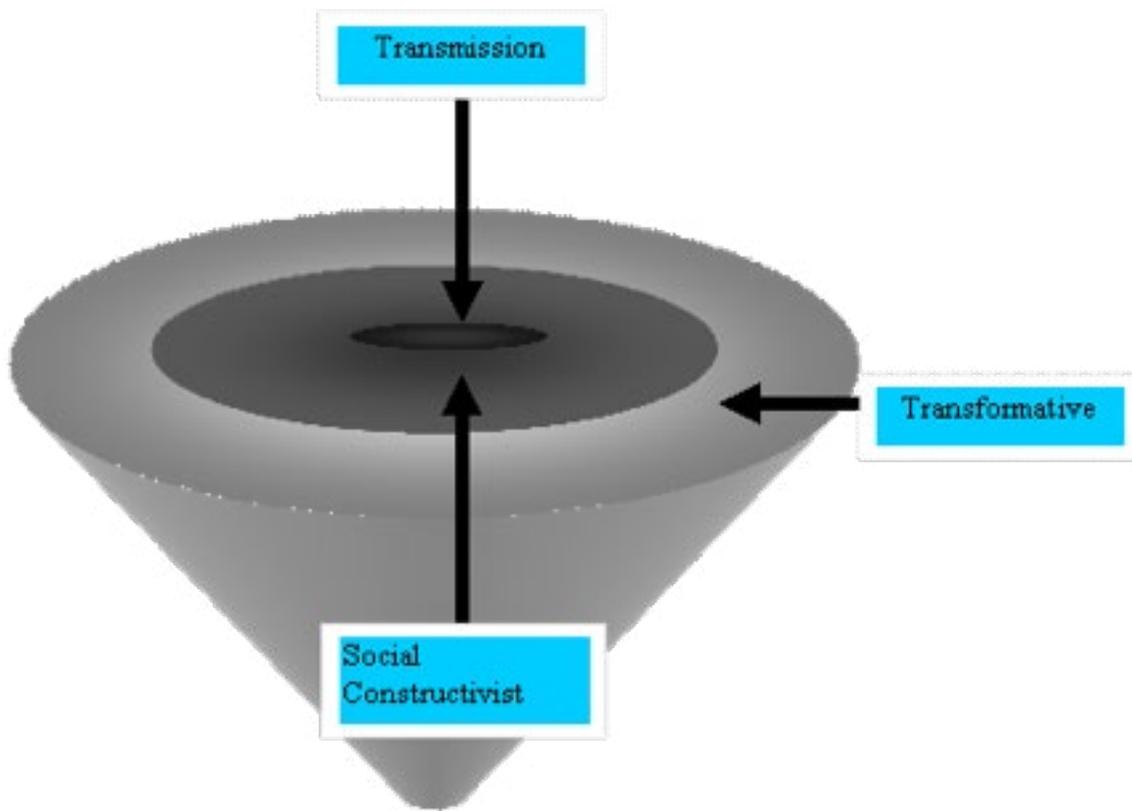


Figure 1. Nested pedagogical orientations (Cummins, 2009).

Transmission-oriented pedagogy, located at the center of the nest and occupying a small space, has the narrowest focus. Its aim is to transmit information and skills directly to students. This is similar to what Freire (1970) calls “the banking model” of pedagogy (i.e., teachers simply “deposit” knowledge into their students’ “empty” minds as one would deposit money into a bank account). Although the importance of activating students’ prior knowledge might be acknowledged by teachers who follow this approach, in practice, transmission-oriented pedagogy takes the form of revisiting prior lessons and activating students’ knowledge about content they have previously learned. Exclusive reliance on a transmission approach, Cummins argues, would promote memorization rather than deep and active learning.

Social constructivist pedagogy, occupying a broader pedagogical space in Cummins’ nest, is located between transmission and transformative pedagogies. While acknowledging the importance of transmitting knowledge, constructivist pedagogy additionally focuses on “the development of higher order thinking abilities as teachers and students co-construct knowledge and understanding” (Cummins, 2009, p. 5). In this orientation, there is a focus on experiential learning, collaborative inquiry, and knowledge building. The importance of enabling students to take an active role in the learning process is emphasized.

Finally, the *transformative approach to pedagogy*, my main concern in this paper, is located in the outermost layer of the pedagogical nest, broadening the educational focus even further. It highlights the importance not only of transmitting the curriculum and

constructing knowledge, but additionally, and most importantly, of enabling students to “gain insights into how knowledge intersects with power” (Cummins, 2009, p. 6). In practice, students engage with materials and undertake discussions with the purpose of identifying the types of social action they can take to change their own and others’ social realities. Transformative pedagogy, attentive especially to issues of equity and justice, thus enables students to challenge existing power relations in society. It builds on both the transmission and social constructivist pedagogy approaches to include a wide and rich variety of pedagogical, educational, and sociopolitical goals.

Why a transformative approach to academic reading?

EAP academic readings (which may include selections from newspapers at times) typically focus on issues, debates, and modes of inquiry with theoretical or practical implications, or with some combination of the two. The use of a transformative approach to such readings is beneficial in an EAP context as it requires students to go beyond simply comprehending academic texts to actually engaging with them. The aim is for students to gain insights into how texts both reflect and construct knowledge-power connections. To achieve this end, students work together with their peers, using collaborative critical inquiry to first analyze what they read. They then continue to work together toward understanding how the material they have encountered might be connected with the social realities of their own lives and of their communities. In groups, students actively discuss and consider ways they can challenge and transform the social realities and power relations they have read about and/or experienced themselves.

From Theory to Practice

To understand the transformative approach in action, this section of the paper draws on my own insights and experiences from teaching pre-university intermediate and advanced level EAP classes in a Canadian university. The students in these classes are international students who plan to pursue their undergraduate or graduate studies in Canadian institutions. Most of the students come from educational backgrounds where there is a heavy emphasis on passing high-stakes standardized examinations. As a result, the students are used to pedagogical methods that rely significantly on memorization and rote learning. Engaging with texts in a manner that is critically oriented and, moreover, geared toward socially and politically transformative purposes is a new and often daunting concept for many of them. Many students need a lot of scaffolding in order to be able to understand how power relations in the broader society intersect with the texts they are presented in class.

In order to develop a transformative approach to academic reading, I used newspaper articles. Newspaper articles are well-suited for EAP classes for several reasons: they are readily available; there is always a wide choice of topics to choose from (irrespective of the student levels or the particular focus of a lesson); they present information that is current;

and they make students aware of current events. Most importantly, most newspaper articles are accompanied by pictures. I find it much easier to get students engaged in readings that have pictures. In the following section, I use a sample lesson plan to show how transformative pedagogy can be put into practice.

Pre-reading

I first present the headline of an article, the picture that accompanies it, and the caption for the picture. I ask the students to infer what the article is about. On one occasion I used an article from the *Toronto Star* on Canadian development aid titled “Canadian development aid takes of corporate colouring: Canadian aid and foreign policy increasingly advances the interests of Canadian multinational in the Global south” (Gordon, 2012). The articles consisted of a picture of a Filipino protestor carrying a placard that stated “Canadian Mining companies out of the Philippines”. The following caption appeared along with the photograph

A protestor holds a placard during a demonstration outside the Canadian embassy in Manila coinciding with a visit by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in early November. The protestors complained about environmental damage caused by Canadian owned mining companies.

The students are first presented only this information, without the actual text. Once they have scrutinized the heading, picture, and caption, and inferred what the article is about, all their answers are then listed on the board. Their answers may be correct or incorrect. Accuracy of inference is not the point here. Rather, the purpose of the activity is to get students engaged in the materials and thinking about the topic. The technique also allows them to activate any prior knowledge they might have about the topic and to begin to make connections between the topic and their own lives or experiences.

Introducing New Vocabulary

Once the above steps have been completed, students are then introduced to new vocabulary. Some of the new vocabulary items that appeared in this article were:

- development aid
- multinational companies
- corporate social responsibility

While new words and phrases are introduced, students are encouraged to question how those words and phrases are being used in relation to the topic of discussion. To accomplish this task they are also encouraged to draw in examples from their prior knowledge to make meaningful semantic connections.

Reading comprehension

Once the students have some background information about the text and are familiar with the new vocabulary, they read the article. After reading the article, the class revisits the list

of ideas about the possible topic of the article. With a better understanding of the text, the whole class collaboratively revises the list. At the end of this activity, the key themes and issues addressed in the article are left on the board.

Students are then required to answer a number of comprehension questions based on the article. They may do so individually or collaboratively in pairs or groups.

Post-reading: discussion questions

The above tasks are followed with post-reading discussion questions. These questions are integral to the transformative approach as they are geared specifically toward enabling students to take their reading to a level that transcends mere comprehension. Post-reading discussion questions help students to analyze and understand the social realities that surround them. These realities don't necessarily have to be tied to students' immediate experience, but can be connected in some way to the larger communities in which they live and interact. Above all, post-reading discussion questions should help students to scrutinize power relations in the broader society.

When I initially introduce this newspaper reading activity to a class, I prepare the post-reading discussion questions myself. However, once students are familiar with the activity and what they are expected to do, they are the ones who come up with the discussion questions. First, the students collaboratively identify the issues that are presented in the article. Some of the issues the students identified were about:

- Development aid
- Corporate social responsibility
- Human rights and environmental abuses
- The author of the article and their affiliation

Then, discussion questions are generated based on the issues. Some examples of discussion questions would include:

- Does development aid really help developing nations?
- Who benefits from development aid?
- Why should corporations take corporate social responsibility?
- Why did this journalist write this article? Why did they take this stance?

Transformative action

The final step of this lesson involves the students in collaborative and critical inquiry. They are asked to identify, discuss, and consider ways they might act in order to transform the social realities they have read about in the newspaper articles they have engaged with. In groups, they talk about what they, as students, can do to change the situations presented to them. Then they come up with "*a plan of action*" in which they develop a collaborative action plan for social change. Some of the actions the students took for the above article involved

- Leaving comments on the comments section of the newspaper online.
Many students found this to be a very interesting activity. They were excited to be a part of a larger community of readers who also have an interest in this particular issue. Commenting on development aid and other themes in the article gave them the opportunity to see what others were thinking about the same issue. It also gave them a chance to be actively engaged in following the news.
- Creating a Facebook page to promote awareness of the impact of development aid on developing countries.
This group developed an online poll and posted various news items on this topic on their Facebook page.
- Creating awareness-raising posters that raised awareness about the issues raised in the newspaper article.
- Designing fact cards.
These fact cards were small cue cards that consisted of facts about how multinational companies operate in developing countries. They were distributed to their classmates.
- Organizing a debate.
In this case, the debate was about the benefits and drawbacks of development aid.

What next?

As a next step in this transformative pedagogy approach, I give students themselves the responsibility of identifying and choosing newspaper articles they want to present to the class. This allows them to find topics that are of interest to them and relevant to their lives. In groups, the students go through news sites and select articles featuring issues they feel they need to act upon.

Once the groups have selected their articles, they then present them to the entire class. The presentation involves an introduction to the article, the main issues that are raised in it, and the groups' ideas regarding what they, as students and members of a larger community, can do about these issues. The following example shows the collaborative action some students took after reading an article on violence towards seniors.

- An awareness-raising presentation about violence against seniors.
For many students this was a new topic and a new kind of violence they had not previously heard of.
- A Facebook page.
This page consisted of articles and news items related to the topic. The group that created this page also sent out notices to their classmates to respond to their posts and share opinions.
- Cue cards.
Students were given cue cards with some basic information about violence against seniors. At the back of each card, there was space for each student to note down their thoughts on what actions they could take to help seniors avoid violence.

- Discussion.

Each student presented the ideas they had listed on cue cards to the class. The presentations were followed by a class discussion about violence toward seniors and what students can do to ensure that it does not happen to their elders or in their own lives when they become seniors themselves.

Conclusion: A Reflection

One of the biggest strengths of the transformative approach to pedagogy is that it can be used with language learners in any level or age group. By using newspaper articles as the main reading texts, it is easy to find sources that are relevant and suit the level of the students. Every time I do this activity with my students, I see how actively they engage in the readings. There is a great deal of discussion and questioning following the reading often much more than occurs when standard textbooks are used. When students become aware that they are expected not only to comprehend but also to act upon what they have read, they make connections to their own lives, knowledge, and experiences, and to the lives, knowledge, and experiences of others. Moreover, allowing them the freedom to create their own “plan of social action,” gives them opportunities to use their language and other creative and organizational skills (e.g., computer skills, drawings, designing, creating posters, brochures, organizing competitions, etc.). But, even more importantly, through their encounters with a transformative pedagogy approach, students become equipped with a greater sense of agency and urgency. Collaboratively, they come to learn about the pressing issues of the day and they come to realize that finding solutions for these issues depends on their ability to take action.

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Bio



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THEMATIC UNIT: CULTURAL COMPETENCY & RESTAURANTS

Project-Based Learning: Putting on a Luncheon

By Sabrina Marchand & Ashley Clark

Lesson overview: This six-lesson (18-hour) unit involves planning and producing a luncheon using a community kitchen.

Learner Profile: This unit is targeted toward learners who are at Canadian Language Benchmark 7, moving toward CLB 8. They are extremely capable communicators who speak at a normal rate, have a range of expressions, including some abstract and idiomatic language, and their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation rarely impede communication (CLB pg. 58). The aims and objectives of the lessons in this unit are taken from CLB 8 in order to develop student competency to that level.

Adapting for learner levels: The activities can be easily modified to suit other levels by simplifying the vocabulary and language of the exercises. For example, the phrase “Would you mind passing the salt” could be changed to “Please pass the salt.” Vocabulary can be simplified for the adjective and adverb activities, and only basic rules of word and sentence stress included.

Adapting for different learning environments: This lesson can be easily adapted to different learning situations in regards to space, funding, age, program duration, etc.

Community kitchens are often available for booking at little/no cost. Alternatively, the menu could be developed to include items that can be pre-made at home. If funding for the food cannot be subsidized by the institution, teachers could incorporate a fund-raising activity into the unit.

Many of the tasks can be easily modified for different topics or themes. For example, the Politeness dialogue and intonation exercises can be adapted to express any number of emotional states, and Connotation Conundrum activity could be used for different contexts such as describing personalities, appearance, greetings, etc.

Lesson Sequencing

This unit has been divided into six three-hour lessons; however, these lessons need not occur consecutively. This unit could be spread out over a semester (e.g. use one of these lessons every Monday for six weeks), or broken down and its elements used to suit a shorter class time (e.g. Separating each lesson into two shorter lessons). The lesson components are listed below for all lessons, but a detailed lesson plan is only presented for lesson one.

More detailed lesson plans and activities for lessons two and three are available on Tutela.

<https://tutela.ca/ViewContentItem?itemId=12323>

Lessons 4–6 are outlined generally. Instructors must develop their own evaluation rubric but we recommended encouraging learner input regarding the evaluative process in keeping with the emergent participatory philosophy of this unit.

Lesson 1

1. Students will negotiate assessment schemes and rubrics.
2. Students will be able to consciously select more and less polite phrasings of requests/commands in English.
3. Students will be able to identify elements of politeness.
4. Students will be able to identify emotional state, mood, and attitude from tone and intonation.
5. Students will be able to recognize an expanded range of register and style.

Lesson 2

1. Students will learn about and use punctuation rules, capitalization rules, as well as practice writing and saying dates and numbers correctly.
2. Students will be able to provide accurate and detailed descriptions and explanations.
3. Students will practice recounting events in a clear sequence.
4. Students will practice identifying implied meanings and unspecified meanings.

Lesson 3

1. Students will practice word and syllable stress and learn strategies for identifying word stress patterns.
2. Students will practice sentence stress and learn how to stress content words.
3. Students will create front-of-house script and menu together.

Lesson 4

Luncheon Project Preparation

Lesson 5

Final Project – Luncheon

Lesson 6

Evaluation

LESSON #1: FORMAL LESSON PLAN

Thematic Unit Introduction & Polite Requests Lesson

Time: (3 Hours)

Part One: Background

Timetable fit: This is the first lesson in a sequence of lessons as part of a Project-based Thematic unit. The students will spend approximately 15 class hours building the skill set for, planning, and executing a luncheon.

Aims (objectives): Students will

- negotiate assessment schemes and rubrics.
- be able to consciously select more and less polite phrasings of requests/commands in English.
- be able to identify elements of politeness.
- be able to identify emotional state, mood, and attitude from tone and intonation.
- be able to recognize an expanded range of register and style.

Discussion of aims (objectives): This three-hour lesson is divided into two main parts: Thematic Unit Introduction and Politeness in English. In the first section, we will discuss and decide as a group the main elements, steps, and skills required to achieve the final outcome of the unit, putting on a successful luncheon. While the teacher may have clear ideas about the direction the project will take, eliciting information from the class gives the teacher a clearer view of the knowledge the students already have, as well as engages the students more thoroughly in the creation of the project. Having the students build the rubric allows them to articulate the skills they perceive as important. The teacher may provide guidance, insight, and options for assessment, but allowing students to negotiate the final assessment elements allows them to take ownership over their learning and invest more fully in the process.

This lesson is based on the premises of communicative language teaching (CLT). CLT methodology states that:

“...successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings” (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013).

Moving away from a focus on language structure in isolation, this unit seeks to be an engaging process of learning by which students are actively involved in the creation of meaning. In lesson one, students and teacher work together building the rubric and making

the syllabus more personalized to the particular needs of that class. Also in lesson one, the class builds a context around the grammar structures before those structures are elicited or taught. Through a brief comparison of their own culture(s) to the dominant culture they are currently experiencing, students begin to engage more deeply in the meaning of the language structures.

The second section is the first thematic lesson targeted toward building the cultural competencies required by the final luncheon project. The activities outlined below are designed to draw the students attention to the more nuanced aspects of verbal communication and increase their ability to identify aspects of mood, attitude, and speaker's intent through the grammatical structures and intonation used (CLB Listening 8). They also allow the students to practice and demonstrate their use of appropriate cues and signals, and adapt their speech style and register to a range of audiences and situations (CLB Speaking 8).

CLT methodology further explains that to develop a deep understanding of meaning, negotiation of and interaction with the target structure will be more effective than practicing the grammatical forms in isolation (Richard-Amato, 2010). In step 5, eliciting the degrees of formality with which people speak to those in different situations allows learners to relate the upcoming language structure to their own cultural perceptions of politeness. Creating this base of engagement from which to scaffold cultural conventions of the dominant culture may help to develop this deeper understanding.

The homework is purposed to stimulate reflection on the material covered, as well as incorporate a writing element in the lesson. It allows the students to practice creating moderately complex texts on a personally relevant topic and demonstrate their competence in the appropriate and relevant language, format, and content (CLB Writing 8).

The activities are designed to be as student-driven as possible. Rarely does the teacher "explain." Rather, examples are given and students are encouraged to notice particular elements such as use of modals for politeness, direct vs. indirect language, the effect of pitch on speaker's intent, etc. Students generate the explanations, with the teacher's knowledge used to provide clarity and elaboration.

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Materials and Aids:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Blank Rubrics
- Restaurant Dialogue Worksheet
- Politeness Phrases Worksheet
- Homework Assignment

Part Two: Procedures (Sequence of Activities)

1. Intro (10 mins; using the Whiteboard; in a group configuration)

- Brainstorm with students about which situations require linguistic and cultural competence.
- Introduce Unit Theme: Cultural Proficiency: Restaurant
- Identify final project: Put on a Luncheon
- Students will host a luncheon for the public. Students will be responsible for creating a menu, preparing and serving the food, and attending and servicing customers.

2. Brainstorm (10 mins; using the Whiteboard; in a group configuration)

- Decide as a class what the steps/skills/elements of luncheon will be necessary
- Brainstorm together the logistics of putting on a luncheon, definition of roles, etc.

3. Evaluation Determination (40 mins; using Blank Rubrics; in group and small group configurations)

- As a class, discuss and decide what elements should be included in evaluation criteria (e.g. fluency, appropriateness, quality of service, pronunciation, etc.).
- Have students fill in the extremes of the blank rubrics with what they consider to be unsatisfactory (0) and exceptional (4) descriptions of each of the criterion.
- Discuss and decide final rubric as a class.
- Discuss and decide evaluation format/methods (e.g. Portfolio, Customer comment cards, peer evaluation, self-evaluation, teacher, evaluation, etc.).

Break

4. Personal Space – Transition Activity (10 mins; in pairs)

- To illustrate the importance of personal space, ask students how far you should stand from someone when you speak. Start very far back from your partner. When they tell you to go closer, stand very close to your partner. Highlight the discomfort of standing too far or too close to a person.
- Put students in pairs. Have them stand on opposite sides of the room facing each other, and ask them to take one step forward at a time.
- Students should raise their hands to indicate when a comfortable distance has been reached.
- Discuss different levels of comfort, cues that determine other people's comfort (e.g. Edging away)

5. Making Polite Requests: Intro (5 mins; using the whiteboard; in a group configuration)

- Ask the class what kinds of people they talk to. (e.g. Friends, parents, strangers, doctor, etc.) Elicit as many suggestions from the class as possible.
- Ask if they speak to all these groups of people in the same way. Ask them how they might say something one way to one person and another way to someone else? Say they want a glass of water. How would they ask their little brother or sister for it? How would they ask a friend's grandmother?
- Write "Politeness" on the board.

6. Activity (15 mins; using the dialogue sheet; in a pairs configuration)

- Ask for two volunteers to read the two parts of the Restaurant Dialogue. Ask the class if Kim is polite to the waiter.
- Have the class work in pairs to underline any specific words Kim uses to be polite. (e.g. Please, modals, etc.)
- Discuss the different things we can change in what we say to be more polite, and how English requests are often the way we command people very politely.
- Explain that requests and commands fall on a range.

7. Practice (35 mins; using the politeness phrases worksheet; in small groups and pairs configurations)

- Group Give students the list of Sample Orders/Requests in a shuffled order. Have students work in small groups to number them in order from more direct to most indirect.
- Go over the sentences as a class to come up with an order everyone can agree on. As you go, discuss why each sentence is more or less indirect/polite than the other.
- Write the techniques that come up on the board (please, would/could, questions, apologies, making it we or someone instead of you, hinting instead of asking, using qualifiers).
- Have the students work in pairs to "translate" the list of "Impoliteisms" to make them as polite as possible. Encourage them to use some of the things from the list of politeness techniques.

Share the "translated impoliteisms" as a class and discuss.

8. Intonation Whiteboard (23 mins; using the Worksheets (above); in a group configuration)

- Discuss the importance of tone and pitch in regards to politeness. Read some of the Sample Order/Requests, varying your pitch tone.
- Have students notice the pitch of your voice (low, medium, high) and decide whether it sounds abrupt, polite, or condescending.
- Go around the room and have students read one of the phrases from the worksheet. Assign an "attitude" to each student, and give feedback on the effectiveness of their production (i.e. Pitch, rising/falling intonation). Encourage students to exaggerate their expressions and have fun!
- Next, get students to read the expressions and have the class guess their intended attitude. Give feedback only where necessary.

9. Wrap-up (15 mins; using the homework assignment; in a group configuration)

- Discuss and review what was learned and how it may be helpful, particularly in context of the Luncheon project.
- Hand out homework assignment. Discuss assignment together, provide an example (from your own life or fabricated), answer any questions

Back-Up Ideas

10. Practice Pairs

If activity runs short or students need additional context, have students develop short skits demonstrating the appropriate and/or inappropriate usage of polite phrases/impoliteisms/awkward answers

11. Intonation Pairs/Sm. Groups

In pairs, have the students read the restaurant dialogue again, this time changing the perceived level of politeness by changing their intonation.

Have several pairs of students present their dialogues to the class and have the class decide how polite each of the characters was intended to be.

Students may write their own dialogues using the strategies discussed. Encourage them to display their understanding of the nuances of the expressions by using specific strategies (i.e. Modals, directness, intonation, etc.) to create a misunderstanding, have rude/condescending characters, etc.

*Expansion

Logistics of a Luncheon: As a class, determine the steps necessary to put on a successful luncheon

- (e.g. Greet customers, take food order, make drinks, take payments, etc.)
- **Restaurant Roles:** Who is needed to run a luncheon (e.g. Waitress, cook, etc.)?
- Describe the duties of each position.

SAMPLE RUBRIC: To be modified and determined by class

	4 Excellent	3 Very Good	2 Fair	1 Poor
Preparation 20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective and efficient use of class time • equitable division of labour • group members cooperated and compromised 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wasted class time • unequal division of labour • group members didn't cooperate or compromise

Restaurant Dialogue

Waiter: Hello, Can I help you?

Kim: Yes, I'd like to have some lunch.

Waiter: Would you like a starter?

Kim: Yes, I'd like a bowl of chicken soup, please.

Waiter: And what would you like for a main course?

Kim: I'd like a grilled cheese sandwich.

Waiter: Would you like anything to drink?

Kim: Yes, I'd like a glass of Coke, please.

Waiter (After Kim has her lunch):

Can I bring you anything else?

Kim: No thank you. Just the bill.

Waiter: Certainly.

Kim: I don't have my glasses. How much is the lunch?

Waiter: That's \$6.75.

Kim: Here you are. Thank you very much.

Waiter: You're welcome. Have a good day.

Kim: Thank you, the same to you.

(From: <http://esl.about.com/od/beginnerlessonplans/a/Esl-Lesson-Plan-For-Conversation.htm>)

Sample Orders/Requests

- Close the window.
- Please close the window.
- I'd like you to close the window, please.
- I'd appreciate it if you would close the window.
- Could you close the window?
- Do you think you might be able to close the window?
- Sorry, but do you think someone could close the window?

- Do you think it would be okay if we maybe closed the window?
- Is it just me, or is it a little cold in here?

Impoliteisms

- Bring me a glass of water.
- Help me with this.
- Be quiet.
- Go home, I want to go to bed.
- Come on a date with me.
- Leave me alone.

HOMEWORK: Cultural Misunderstanding

POP GOES THE CLASSROOM

The Need for Pop Culture in EFL (Part one of three)

By Stephen Roney, Jubail Industrial College

& John Allan, College of the North Atlantic - Qatar

There are two good reasons to teach ESL/EFL using pop culture media: popular music, popular films, and so forth. One is obvious. One is not.

The obvious reason is motivation. There is, of course, a reason why popular culture is called “popular.” People in general like it. If motivation is useful in the classroom, we should be using it.

Perhaps you remember how you learned to read in your own L1. We do. The school texts, back in those faraway days, were the famous “Dick and Jane” series. “Oh, oh, oh! Oh Puff! Look and see! Oh, oh, oh! Oh, see!” New words and new phonemes were doled out in patient spoonful, just above the reader’s current level. It was all very carefully pedagogically designed.

And it did not teach us to read.

Instead, the first things we ever read were comic books. No pedagogical design was involved, other than the obvious idea of using short and common words for a young readership.

It didn’t matter. What mattered is that the pictures were interesting, the story was interesting, and we *wanted* to find out what it was all about. In practice, motivation trumps everything else. But besides being the single most important thing in teaching, motivation seems to be the single most overlooked thing.

We know that motivation matters, and matters a great deal. Plato knew this: “Bodily exercise, when compulsory, does no harm to the body; but knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind” (*The Republic*). Noam Chomsky knows this: “I think about ninety percent of the problem in teaching, or maybe ninety-eight percent, is just to help the students get interested” (Chomsky, 1992). The TESL research confirms it: “Without it [motivation], nothing much happens” (Cohen & Dornyei, 2002, p. 172). It is not just that engaging the students’ interest gets them to pay attention to the lesson. It is also that what is most interesting is most memorable, and a thing not remembered is a thing not learned.

When it comes to expertise on what is motivating, nobody can match the mavens who put out pop culture. For one thing, uniquely, their livelihoods depend on getting this right. For another, they have the world’s largest survey mechanism, a little thing called the free market.

Imagine, for example, putting out a magazine that is sold every week on supermarket magazine racks. Week after week, you create a new product. You get maybe one glance from your consumer, then a decision on whether to buy. If you can get something really motivating on the cover that week, you will sell 100,000 more copies. Every week is a new survey of 200,000,000 consumers. Don't imagine for a moment that nobody is tracking those numbers.

It is the same with books. Publishers know that, if they use a green cover, they will sell 5,000 fewer copies. TV producers stopwatch all the laughs from a studio audience. And so on with all the popular media.

If we do not use this massive body of expertise in our classrooms, for motivation, we are just throwing away our best resource. And it is free.

That is the first, obvious reason why we should use pop media in our classrooms. Now, for the second, probably less obvious, reason: because knowing pop culture is a part of being literate in English. It is necessary for reading fluently, and quite possibly also for speaking fluently.

Here we refer to the work of E.D. Hirsch Jr., the developer of the concept of "cultural literacy" (1987). Hirsch's focus is on reading skills among first-language learners. But his findings apply doubly to ESL/EFL. He argues that it is impossible to read fluently without a command of the various cultural allusions an author is going to include in his work.

How do we usually teach reading? Most textbooks and the texts we, personally, are using focus on just three skills: skimming for the general idea, scanning for details, and making inferences. Or rather, it is not clear that we ever actually teach this; we just repeatedly test our students for these skills.

According to Hirsch, and it frankly sounds plausible, it takes only ten lessons for an average class to completely master these techniques. There is, after all, not that much to it. After those ten lessons, anything more we do along these lines is useless (Hirsch, 2010, p. 12).

But it's worse than that: any student we have who is already a competent reader in their own L1 already knows these techniques. Covering them in ESL/EFL, we are simply wasting their time.

Instead, we need to be teaching target vocabulary, then idioms, then cultural allusions.

Any writer must assume a certain shared knowledge in his readers. He cannot explain everything without being tiresome. In addition, cultural references are used by the best writers because they make reading more enjoyable; they are colourful, motivating.

An everyday example from a British newspaper may make the point:

The prime minister will attempt to get back on the front foot this week after the embarrassment of his close aide and Business Minister, Baroness Shriti Vadera, declaring she could see 'a few green shoots' in the economy (Merrick, 2009).

Bio



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Even as Canadians, close as we are culturally to the English, there are a few allusions here that might cause us trouble. What does it mean, exactly, to be “on the front foot”? Why is it a problem to say the economy is looking up? And imagine how much more difficult it might be to grasp the significance of “a few green shoots” if you came from a tropical country. These things may need to be taught.

When it comes to college textbooks, Hirsch cites studies which suggest that having a solid grounding in the common cultural allusions “correlated significantly with GPA, Verbal SAT scores, Math SAT scores, and grades in a whole list of courses, including freshman English, first-semester history, government, general psychology, and freshman math” (Pentony, 1997). The same must hold true for our second-language students studying EAP. Of course, correlation does not automatically prove causation; but other studies suggest that schools that implement a “cultural literacy” curriculum produce better results on standardized tests (MacIver, Stringfield, McHugh, 2000).

Popular culture in the classroom is the ideal vehicle for teaching common cultural allusions. Firstly, most of them come from popular culture, and secondly, dealing with real popular cultural materials ensures that such common allusions will come up in the classroom. That, plus their motivational value, makes them almost essential.

Next issue: the problems with popular culture materials.

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Bio



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SAFE ZONE SUPPORT CLASSES FOR IEPS

By Jeannie Haller & Jerry Carson, York University

In the language support classes that we teach as part of an Internationally Educated Professional (IEP) program, we're struck not by how many language issues students bring to class with them, but by how many of their questions cannot be answered by a language textbook.

This is because our students are special. By special, we mean that the type of language support they need is something that's difficult to narrow down into one course. They're doing certificates in Business Management, Human Resources, IT, or Accounting over two years, and many of them have already completed Masters degrees (many in English) in their fields, so they fall into an unusual category of being highly fluent and accurate but still struggling with everyday interactions within their workplaces. If they had registered for a "Business English" course, they'd be covering a lot of material they already know (many of them could teach Business courses). If they took a "General English" course, they'd have to sit through classes on speech functions they're mostly adept at. They know how to disagree politely and how to interrupt, but they don't know things like why their colleagues can use profanity in the office when they were always taught that it's wrong. So much of negotiating a language is about setting, but students are often surprised to learn that there are multiple registers at work in their professional lives. The number one question we get is about which English is correct: what they hear from a boss or what they hear from a colleague? A close second has to be what they hear from the cashier at Tim Hortons. Since our students work in a wide range of professions, we need to work on language support that goes far beyond the academic or business English worlds that are so closely associated with IEP programs because we're so often confronted with questions that fall outside the parameters of those areas. As McCarthy and Carter (2001) point out, no "obvious authorities exist for the grammar of conversation", so we can't direct them to a text, yet the grammar of conversation is often what they need answers about (p. 71).

The answers are far from simple. We had a student once bring us a list of expressions he'd gotten used to hearing at his office. The salesmen there, many of them considerably older than our student, used terms that seemed to come directly from a 70s sitcom like *turkey* (as in *He's a turkey*) and *fuddy duddy*. On the other side of that, we've had middle-aged students trying to incorporate *dude* and *sick* into conversation because they'd heard those terms from coworkers. For our students, this is a challenging aspect of building a professional life in Canada. All of the others things are inevitable—you can find a resume

sample online, pay for interview coaching, get business cards printed in an hour—but language development isn't as clear-cut. So much of the language students need at work is not business English at all. It's all of those casual interactions throughout the day—the small talk in the elevator, the chat by the water cooler, the shared lunch—that make up so much of our students' professional lives, and it's these interactions that are most often problematic and mysterious to them.

Part of the problem (which is actually hard to call a problem) is the general politeness with which native speakers treat their coworkers. It would be, in most cases, unthinkable for someone to correct a colleague's language, but most of our students would like to be able to ask language questions of their colleagues. Some of them have experienced that moment of asking about something they've said at work and whether or not it was correct, only to be told it was "fine". Although the basic purpose of language is to communicate meaning, which they do very well, they want more than that. Highly fluent and articulate in their own languages, many of them strive for the same excellence in English. Since they're at the top of their game in their native languages, they don't want to be "fine"; they want to be "superb".

In some cases, being "fine" has consequences. We had a student who returned from a job interview puzzled by a moment at the end of the interview, which had gone extremely well until, when asked if he felt he could fit into the office environment, the student said he was "pretty sure" he could, not realizing that being "pretty sure" is somewhat less than being "sure". He noticed something on the interviewer's face that told him something was off, but he didn't know what. When we explained what had probably happened, the student felt annoyed that no one at his current job had ever told him that he'd been using that expression incorrectly, but we told him it certainly wasn't deliberate. What students often come to realize is that their colleagues are accurate by habit, not by conscious decision, so it would be impossible to get the answers they need or the corrections they want. We often teach this by telling them to ask a native speaker to explain the uses of the present perfect to them, and they're surprised at the many inane responses they receive. This goes a long way to teaching them that the answers they need probably won't be found in their offices, any more than they'll be found in one text, so students need to be proactive in their quest for true fluency.

This can all be aided by a language "Safe Zone" for IEPs, a place to bring every question and comment that the workweek produces. We tell the students that that's part of what our support courses are about, so no question is off limits if it pertains to any aspect of work or language, and we're pleasantly surprised by how eager they are to take advantage of that. Our course covers troublesome aspects of English that the students request (preposition combinations and verb tense being favorites), but we welcome any and all questions. From Monday to Friday our inboxes fill up with things students want to discuss on Saturday ("Why do my colleagues laugh when I say, 'bye-bye'?" "Is *darn* different from *damn*?"), and everyone, regardless of country of origin, is on board with figuring out the answers.

The answers aren't set in stone, and they're not really to be found in a book. We all negotiate our way through our professional lives, but register and appropriate language are second nature (hopefully) for most native speakers whereas for IEPs, this is an ongoing struggle. Take, for example, *you're welcome*. Students know myriad substitutes for this, but when exactly should they say, "no problem", "not at all", or "don't worry about it"? Students resist the use of *you're welcome* even though it's always polite and appropriate because they say Canadians don't use it. This topic alone can fill a three-hour class as students invariably compare notes about what they hear and how they're confronted with multiple registers at work. The uses of *sure* and *of course* are equally fascinating to them. That *of course* has the potential to mean more than "yes" (Simon-Vandenberg & Aijmer, 2002) is a surprise to most of them, especially since they've spent years answering any simple question with *of course* with the mistaken impression that its only use is to show a positive attitude. The use of *of course* to also suggest that the speaker should already know the answer to the question (e.g., *Do I love my family? Of course I do, you idiot!*) is usually a surprise to them. On top of all this, we could spend an entire 10-week course just on the use of profanity.

Our relationship as teachers is helpful in this regard. We use ourselves as examples to give the students insight into language in a professional setting. We explain that the way we speak to each other in private differs from the way we speak in a staff meeting. For the students, this is a bit of a revelation. The knowledge that our conversation might be littered with profanity while we walk across campus together but would become more formal in front of other instructors seems to resonate with them because it shows that even native speakers are always making conscious decisions about how they speak.

To raise this consciousness in our students, though, we found that the Safe Zone in itself wasn't enough unless we approached things in a concrete way. Answering their questions and monitoring their discussions was helpful, but we came to realize that what the students needed was a text even if they had to write it themselves. To that end, we keep track of their questions about pragmatics and email them as a review of every class. We've found it helpful to break them down into four categories: age, location, relationship, and context as suggested/indicated by our students. As these sheets grow in number, the students become adept at noticing patterns emerging and more conscious of the variety of choices available to them. Realizing that "What's up?" was said by student A's colleague at the photocopier as a prelude to small talk becomes less mysterious when they also realize that student B was asked the same question on the condo elevator by a neighbor. By the end of the course, having five or six real examples of "What's up?" and "You're welcome" and "No problems" in writing is a great boost to confidence and gives the students the courage they need to play with the language and make informed choices. Since, as Crystal points out, "everyday conversation is the most creative of language varieties" (1995, p. 47), arming the students with myriad examples of how expressions are used only serves to increase their own creativity.

Our classes weren't always like this. When we began three years ago, we created a course outline that enabled us to diligently cover the main aspects of grammatical accuracy and pronunciation that we knew our students found problematic. Our opinion was that you can never get enough review of the basics and that for students, increased proficiency is a great boost to confidence in the workplace.

Though we still believe that—grammatical accuracy is a large part of our curriculum—we shifted our focus and changed our outcomes because we found that so many of our Saturday classes were being spent on digressions. After months of feeling vaguely guilty about not covering what we'd planned to cover, we realized that we were in fact covering what the students needed us to cover through these digressions. As one of the professors in their Business Communication Writing course said when she learned about this shift away from the agreed-upon curriculum, if they don't learn about these things in support, where will they learn about them? Her course can teach succinct business proposal writing, but time constraints don't allow her to spend a class deconstructing the correct response to *what's new?* at the photocopier.

Since our epiphany, classes have flourished. Attendance is up, and the students have turned their support classes into a lively discussion on all aspects of language in Canada and Canadian workplaces. In fact, we've had many students who've graduated from the IEP program request permission to continue attending support. In fact, they've shown up for class carrying their "texts" from the previous term, and we're often pleased to see they've continued adding to them. Since we're fortunate enough to have a management team that understands that language support should be an ongoing experience and not an isolated event, they're happy to continue welcoming students for as long as they want to attend, and they're as pleased as we are that our classes can contain voices from every stage of the IEP experience.

This isn't to say that all of our support classes are purely about register and pragmatics. We get in a lot of grammar, too, a lot of it empowering. We once had a student regularly bring in copies of his boss's email for the class to correct together. Is there anything more liberating for an IEP than realizing that his Canadian MBA boss doesn't use the conditional correctly? Yet what we've learned as instructors is that grammatical accuracy is only a part of the question for our students and that when offered a venue to address any topic and create their own text, students will be willing to take advantage of that opportunity.

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Bios

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COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE ACADEMIC IN L2 WRITING INSTRUCTION

By Conttia Lai, University of Toronto, OISE

I used to enjoy writing about my everyday encounters and my feelings about them in English when I was a teenager. My class teacher was surprised by my enthusiasm in using English to write my weekly class journal. I have no clues as to why I insisted on doing that, but I just felt good that I could express myself freely and make sense of my surroundings in a language that I chose to develop and got responses from my class teacher who showed genuine interest in what I wrote about my week. She did not pick on my written English. Her responses often made me reflect on what I had written and thus allowed me to arrive at a new understanding of myself and others. Everything went well until a day when I was given a task by the teacher advisor to write a text as a house captain. I completed the task to the best of my ability. Of course, I knew my writing had room for improvement, but I did not expect to get my writing back with the page swamped by red marks. The red marks were all over the page! He literally rewrote everything, denying my initiation and contribution. I held my tears when the teacher went over every single problem that he spotted in the text. My heart sank when I was told I could not even get a single sentence (that he would feel) right. I cried for days, and the hurt remained for years. My memory of how I overcame the hurt is blurred, but it is clear that because of the hurt in the old days, I have come to realize the detrimental effects of a primary focus on accuracy and forms in L2 writing on the affective aspects of learners' language development.

I have taught English as a second language for twelve years in Hong Kong and a year in Toronto. My understanding of the importance of fostering learners' motivation and confidence in L2 writing has become a guiding principle when I responded to my students' writing. I was torn, however, by the cultural and institutional expectations of providing more feedback on the mechanics and grammar of learners' texts and of teaching the prescribed structure of various academic text types. The sad part of it is that the overall quality of learners' writing has shown no substantial improvement over their years of schooling even with an increased amount of feedback on grammar and more focused teaching of text types. Some learners even write less or resort to simple sentence structures to avoid errors. All these have made me wonder if the prevailing approach to teaching that favors conformity to prescribed structures of texts based on disciplinary requirements and to correct grammar is the best way to teach L2 writing to first-year undergraduates. Putting together my experience as an EAP instructor and the success stories of the use of personal narratives in some writing classrooms, I begin to see a potential that these seemingly

distinct approaches to writing can complement each other in developing learners' capacity to write.

Expressive Approach to Writing Instruction

Contrary to some dogmatic approaches to writing (e.g., genre approach), people believing in expressive writing reject any judgment of writing based on correct use of language and conformity to given text structures. They conceive of writing as an exploratory, generative process during which meanings are constructed through learners' engagement with the discovery and reformulation of their thoughts. Unlike the assertion made by some social constructivists such as Bartholomae (1995) that teachers are managers in the classroom, expressivists believe that the teacher's goal is to understand students' texts, encourage creativity and self-expression of learners, and design tasks that "promote self-discovery, the emergence of personal voice, and empowerment of the individual's inner writer" (Ferris, 2004, p. 5). To achieve these goals, expressive writing instruction should be learner-centred, personalized and nondirective so as to facilitate creativity, spontaneity and development of learners' own voice in their writing,

Elbow (1998) has advocated non-stop, censor-free writing practice and the use of learners' own texts as the core text for the writing class. This has inspired a variety of task and text types used in the writing classroom, such as response writing to literary texts, reading response journals, personal narratives, and autobiographical and ethnographic writing. These variations of task and text types indicate more recent attempts to integrate expressive writing into traditional academic writing courses, which were once described by Elbow (1995) as "two different mountains". Although Elbow seems to hint at a conflicting relationship between the personal and the academic, his metaphor suggests a potential dialectic relationship between (personal) writing and academic writing.

Making Transitions between the Personal and the Academic

Britton (1992) has successfully made the once invisible bridge between the two mountains in Elbow's metaphor visible and accessible for learners to maneuver. He believed that expressive language should be the starting point where the learners feel safe to explore the connections between themselves and the academic discourse and thus move toward the academic in a gradual manner "to ensure that 'the self' is not lost on the way" (1992, p. 179). The learner's self, therefore, should initially be positioned in the comfort zone for most first-year students who are adapting to the new culture of academia. For example, first-year university students could be asked to write personal response essays or reflective journals about topics or events that are based on their academic readings. As these students gain confidence in their ability to write about their opinions and perhaps form an argument backed up by evidence—either from their personal experiences or from

external sources—they are less likely to be intimidated by the academic prose that they need to compose in the subsequent years of their studies. This generative view of writing illuminates the developmental potential of expressive language.

Although the studies that specifically focused on the effects of expressive writing on the learning of the academic discourse are far from being the mainstream, some initiatives have been made by organizations such as the National Writing Project (NWP) at the University of California at Berkeley and the writing centre at Dartmouth, offering professional development and resources for teachers to provide assistance to their learners to make transitions from the personal to the more formal genres that they need to produce for other courses in university, and these attempts have signified a middle ground between the personal and the academic. Here are six possible writing activities suggested by the NWP. They are drawn from a reposting¹ by May (2007) of classroom activities and tasks (perhaps originally collected by Karen Gocski) that teachers can integrate into their courses to help their students appreciate how personal writing serves the academic ends:

1. Assign personal response papers, but base them on a text that is related to students' academic studies. It is not necessary for the students to conform to the formalities of academic writing, but teachers should make it a requirement that students quote some part of the assigned/chosen text at the beginning of their response papers.
2. Ask students to write a personal essay on a topic and provide an opportunity for students to return to it and analyze it after they read and discuss scholarly work on that particular topic.
3. Ask students to frame their personal essay with an introduction and conclusion that are critical or analytical.
4. Encourage students to make use of an anecdotal introduction, if appropriate.
5. Assign weekly journals in which students write about their thoughts on what they have learned about the subject matter during the week, and require them to use their journals as a resource when writing academic papers.
6. Offer students with feedback on their reading journals that blends the personal and the theoretical.

Some evidence of the successful use of reading journals with academic feedback has been documented. In Robertson (1988), for example, the student called Colleen managed to generate ideas even for difficult topics through the teacher's use of probing questions and her collaborative effort with the teacher to move between writing about the reading and writing about the experience. This practice of alternating between narrative and exposition deepened Colleen's critical reading of the published sources and made it easier for her to reflect on her experiences. At the end of the semester, she was able to retain the structure

1. I was excited to see, in Richards and Miller (2005), that the writing centre at Dartmouth had produced a handout called "The 'Place' of the Personal in the Writing Classroom". Unfortunately, it has been removed from their website. Instead, I found it re-posted on May's blog.

of her ideas in the reading journals and turn them into an academic paper by adjusting the presentation of the text for a different audience. Colleen's transition to the academic illustrates a student moving successfully into the space between her inner world and the outer world of the college.

Allen (2002) stresses the significance of building learners' confidence in their own abilities as writers by "making a place for the self in university" (p. 155) through the writing of personal narratives. His study of a writing course using personal narratives exemplifies a way of "bridging the artificial gap between the personal and the academic" (p. 160). The two student writers in the course demonstrated their grasp of the importance of striving for appropriateness in their writing rather than correctness. Allen argues that once student writers are able to internalize the concept of appropriateness of writing, a linkage between the personal and the academic is possible.

In my graduate studies at the University of Toronto, I have experimented with a more personal style of writing that draws on my personal experiences as a lead into academic writing that is developed around a thesis with the support of external source material. I have found that this approach not only engages the reader at the outset of my papers, but it also gives a personal significance to the issues under study and enables a natural flow from the personal to the academic. The more I relate my personal experiences or personal stance to the academic discussion, the stronger I feel about my authorial self within my discourse community. This is an essential connection that first-year undergraduate students need to eventually build between themselves and their discourse communities in order to bridge the two mountains that Elbow (1995) suggested.

My Final Thoughts on Expressivist Pedagogy

I am convinced of the developmental potential of expressive writing. It seems, however, that expressive writing has typically been used sparingly in writing courses. For a true integration of the personal and the academic to occur, it is necessary to design tasks that allow the natural blending of the personal and the academic in the text. Fortunately, the activities cited here as May (2007) make an attempt to integrate the personal into the academic. More classroom-based research, however, should be done to examine the usefulness of those activities and tasks, and how well they would work in different instructional settings and for classes with diverse student populations. Nevertheless, these activities represent a potentially useful starting point for moving from the personal to the academic.

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Bio



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WHERE ARE YOU FROM? THE COMPLICATED PRAGMATICS OF ONE SIMPLE QUESTION

By Kasia Kasztenna, Durham District School Board

It probably does not come as a surprise that, when we bought the new house for our family, we were quite excited, proud and, in my case, less anxious about the future in the new land. I loved the mature trees and the view from our new office, a quiet street and an additional space inside. When renovations and relentless unpacking finally ended, I embarked on a coffee table shopping. Lost in the vast and cavernous furniture store, I grabbed attention of the first salesperson passing by asking a predictable set of questions about the prospective piece. The merciful woman led me to the appropriate corner of the store while chatting about intricacies of coffee tables. Suddenly, in the middle of this exchange, she asked: “Where are you from?” It almost ruined my day. Let me explain why.

Immigrants’ life in the new country—or maybe any life—can be epitomized by a collection of answers to the questions asked in different circumstances, by various authorities and by ordinary curious people. In a sense, answering these questions allows to build a narrative which we choose for ourselves as a personal history. Immigration can be viewed as a decision to leave behind familiar and non-inquisitive context and accept the process of piecing together a new story of ones own life. This process is prompted by different questions: “Where are you from?” is one of the most powerful among them. It evokes the entanglement of emotions, rationalizations, and presuppositions that a potential answer can sometimes fully articulate but most of the time leaves latent and non-verbalized. This text tries to capture a few aspects of this communicational conundrum.

If, as Austin suggests in *How to Do Things with Words*, language offers not only a vehicle to carry meanings, but also the ability to perform actions, then in fact “saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, of the speaker, or of other persons.” What kind of “feelings, thoughts, or actions” are inspired by the act of asking the “where are you from” question?

We can look at it from two perspectives: the perspective of a person who inquires and the perspective of the one who is asked. Let us concentrate on the receiver of the question.

In what circumstances can you be asked “Where are you from?” as a newcomer to the land? Anywhere and anytime. The anecdotal accounts of possible circumstances in which the enquiry is made indicate first of all its profound impact often caused by the fact that the question is posed in situations hardly justifying enquiry. It can be asked, for instance, in the

furniture store when one shops for a coffee table. Although the introductory circumstances such as a presentation of the new classmate or co-worker understandably motivate this kind of investigation, a non-native English speaker is exposed to it without any warning. If the coffee table example is at all typical, the “interrogated” person is surprised and caught off guard with all possible defences down. In fact, the coffee table from the opening anecdote serves as a symbol of being at home and having a place to stay for a long haul, while “where are you from?” question screams: “I told you it is only an illusion.”

The recipient of this question inadvertently seems to think of all other questions that are not uttered but linger behind, such as: Why are you here? What motivated you to come to this place and leave your original context? How typical are you for the group you originally belonged to? How well do you exemplify the stereotypes our society holds about your people? And the most general one: How are you different from us (beside your accented language)? The last potential subtext, quite possibly not consciously activated by the asking party, is particularly powerful. “Where are you from?” separates interlocutors, placing the interrogated party in the sphere of otherness, apartness, oddness, and distinctiveness, outside of the community of speakers of the “proper” language (since the linguistic features often trigger this conversational exchange). Although unintended, the question forces the immigrant to relive and retell in an extremely concise form the most dramatic events (which immigration always is) of our personal story. One can only imagine how discomfiting it might be, especially in the midst of a shopping escapade, to have to revisit the painful decisions preceding this moment, encompassing possibly separation from family and friends, abandoning a profession, a workplace position, a language, favourite jokes, and the pleasure of being at home. If we feel well assimilated, the brutal force of the well-intended inquisition serves as a reminder of the utopia of full belonging, if it is even strived for. It underscores the futility of efforts to remove the external signs of “otherness”. The effort of furnishing a new place seems in this context intensely pointless, encapsulating at the same time the common history of immigration: a struggle to normalize a situation that escapes this normalization. The immigrant constantly has to recalculate their position on the emotional GPS and a map of belonging.

One of the most befuddling aspects of the conversations initiated by the “Where are you from?” question is the fact that the person asked often would like to answer with other questions: “Why do you want to know?” “Why does it matter?” or “How is it going to influence our further interactions?” It cannot be done, though, since it would sound rude, but it will shape the interaction, especially if we realize that there is often a faint trace of fear that can be detected in the answer, fear enrooted in the stereotypes that are automatically activated once we say, “I’m from Germany/Poland/Sri Lanka, etc.” The responder who utters the answer is, or might be, perceived now in the broader context of the stereotypical connotations inextricably associated with the country or region of origin. Hence, in fact the discomfort created by the question might be related to the impending loss of individual profile replaced by overriding generalization.

Another potentially important component of the situation created by that question is the power distribution in this interaction: people who initiate inquiry position themselves as legitimate representatives of the cultural or nationalistic circumstances. It confirms the “native” status and associated prerogatives, including the one of identifying a foreign “phonetic allegiances” and, by extension, its origin. The respondent might be viewed as a somewhat inferior and lacking some noticeable characteristics asking herself a question: “Is it acceptable to be where I am from?” It is interesting that an asked party in conversation with the native speaker rarely returns the question, reducing the interlocutor to the generalized “native” dweller of the land, which naturally in most cases simplifies the situation beyond acceptable standard of meaningful interaction. The asking party is undoubtedly from somewhere and it might be as influential as the immigrant’s background.

As we can see, the simple question can be perceived as predicated on a range of assumptions: from acknowledging charming foreignness to instilling the feeling of inadequacy.

What can we potentially do answering the “incriminating” question? Unquestionably, it creates immediate familiarity leading to a possibly deeper, personal interaction and is a manner of establishing some level of acquaintance that facilitates further proceedings, no matter how remote from the “Where are you from?” exchange.

From the respondent’s point of view, however, it might be perceived as well as a cultural and conversational imposition since normally, among people who are marked as familiar and belonging, questions regarding genealogy do not appear in the introductory phase of interaction, but are reserved for closer relationships.

It has to be mentioned that the potential cluster of thoughts and emotions sketched here is personal and possibly idiosyncratic. In other words, some people would not feel that way and would not dwell on the possible meanings of the question.

Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that usually the objective of the asking party is “innocent” and friendly. Hence, the possible confusion and plunge into existential dilemma caused by the question is neither intended, nor suspected.

I loved this question as a tourist in the foreign lands during vacations spent when it sparked the warmth of recalling home. However, now, at this point on the curve of my assimilation into the new culture and life, it marks the area of conflicted emotions and vulnerability since, if only by the virtue of spending years in my new home, I want to feel like I am from here. Shouldn’t my new coffee table be an anchor in the new reality? Is there a silver lining to this event?

That evening in the furniture store, I bought the ottoman, which has ever since been employed to the comfort of our feet. Although the question-centered situation was a co-production, the moral from the episode is mine: I decided to see the strength and resilience in my ability to face the difficulties and awkwardness related to “otherness”, joy and satisfaction in the chance of meeting new, sometimes curious faces, surprise and

inspiration in reflections sparked by everyday encounters. I now better understand what I can feel and comprehend in such situations, and it does not now matter where I am from. In fact, I'm grateful for having been asked the question that inspired it all.

Bio



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VIVA LA LINGUA FRANCA

Torn Between Two Lifestyles

By Eufemia Fantetti

As the Canadian-born, solitary child of Southern Italian immigrants, I had multiple opportunities to experience what I like to refer to as the “clash of the culture-titans” growing up; the Old World order—a regime my parents routinely tried to enforce—gave way to glorious New World chaos.

The soundtrack of my teen years could have been Anarchy in the UC (Upper Canada). I went through a disastrous pseudo-punk-slash-hippie stage, cutting off all my hair and dying it tar-black with dark blue streaks. Within a week, the electric indigo shade washed out to a fern-like green that made it look as though I had patches of moss growing around my forehead. Without knowing about the band, the album or the country, I wore a Dead Kennedy’s Holiday in Cambodia T-shirt and a denim vest that marked me as a moving target, due to a hastily drawn Mercedes logo on the back, an image I thought meant “Peace”. I spent my fifteenth year looking like a pale imitation of an anarchist who tripped and fell into a vat of tie-dye. My fashion sense simply did not exude the essence of Italian poise, grace or style; I was a big fail in the “fare la bella figura” department.

It’s difficult to say for certain, but I suspect that much of my identity was formed in contrast to the many unspoken restrictions and expectations for females from my parents’ village (some sexist attitudes were spoken, of course, by my mother, usually at the top of her lungs). Even now I find I am constantly assimilating contradictory aspects of my childhood cultural duet; I appreciate the tightrope balancing act it requires, navigating high context and low context communication styles in the same headspace. While the majority of my behavioural impulses are most often influenced by my polite Canadian education, I have on occasion raised my voice—to make a point, crack a joke, or drown out the other speaker because they were annoying *and* wrong—and still slept soundly at night. Most nights.

I consider myself someone who is still struggling to accept, adapt and integrate some elements of the Italian part of my identity; I resented feeling like a second class citizen in several different situations: at school, where the substitute teachers constantly mangled my name, or at home where I was expected to carry the weight of the family’s respect in the community with a constant awareness that being deemed a too-friendly-female was enough to bring shame to the House of Fantetti. My parents came from a village where I was once chastised for wandering into an espresso bar to get an ice cream bar at 11; my

paternal grandfather got up from his card game, bought my favourite Lemon & Liquorice gelato, and pulled me outside for a lecture on my lewd behaviour. My nonno spoke about the event as if I'd been seen walking into a bordello with a Help Wanted sign posted in the window. I often wonder what my life might have been like if my father hadn't emigrated, if my father hadn't been a feminist. Females appeared to have no voice in the village unless they were shouting at their kids.

The misunderstandings which occurred while I was growing up were classic examples of tensions that arise from conflicting communications styles. My parents grew up with a history of hierarchical attitudes toward authority and a respectful, formal mode of expression. (My mother in particular thought that Canadians were too casual, a little too loosey goosey on the listening to children and taking the kid's feelings into account. Considering she'd been raised in the "I know what's best for you" tradition of totalitarian parenting—her marriage arranged, her destiny decided without so much as a blink—it's no surprise she thought her neighbours were all softies, a bunch of marshmallows destroying their families with freedom of choice.)

I'm taking the scenic route to make short story long; there are so many ways these intercultural confusions can multiply, can add stress to a classroom situation if the teacher's experience is limited. I'm talking about myself of course, I'm new to the teaching profession: I find it challenging, intimidating, rewarding, and wonderfully surprising. I recently started working at a new job where I overhear conversations with complaints about ESL student attitudes towards attending classes, being on time or completing assignments. Since I'm not in line for sainthood after death, I have voiced some complaints as well. But most days, I take a deep breath and think about these glorious differences, how entertaining life can be, how dull it would be if everyone thought the same, behaved the same, and didn't let young girls buy their own gelatos. It's the same stabilizing, centring breath I had to take before calling my mother and receiving a dowry of unwanted advice. Sometimes I speak to students about the difficulties I encountered, trying to balance my inherited values with the beliefs I was forming from my own experiences.

As the adage goes, it's the journey not the destination that matters. My aim is to create an atmosphere where everyone feels respected and every voice is valued; an environment where everybody talks and everyone listens. I want it to be a space where students are comfortable expressing their hopes and goals in fabulously accented English, a place like the country Canada.