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Santos, Vanessa. (2020). Covid-19 Response [Image]. Unsplash. <https://unsplash.com/photos/EJrKoJ8Jr7U>

Calendar of Events

December

- December 6 – [Teaching Literacy to English Language Learners](#)
- December 9–10 – [The 6th International Conference on Cultures and Languages in Contact](#)
- December 10–12 – [The 6th International Conference on Language, Literature and Culture in Education 2020](#)
- December 11 – [21st International International Meeting of Young Linguists](#)
- December 13 – [Memory Maps – a Task-Based Language Learning Activity](#)

January

- January 8–10 – [The HKCPB Hub Virtual International Conference 2021 for English Teaching Professionals](#)
- January 27–30 – [The 3rd International Conference on Educational Technology, Language & Technical Communication \(ETLTC2021\)](#)
- January 30 – [Technology for Teachers \(T4T\)](#)

February

- February 2–3 – [The Fifth Annual International Conference on Languages, Linguistics, Translation and Literature](#)
- February 6 – [TexTESOL V Virtual Regional Winter Conference 2021](#)

Editor's Note

Welcome to another issue of *Contact* magazine.

It is incredible to believe how fast this year has come and almost gone. I am sure you have spent a great deal of time watching the news, ‘zooming’ with family and friends, and conferencing with colleagues. Or maybe throughout the year you picked up a new skill or set new goals for yourself. I think one important thing 2020 has taught us, or me at least, is the need to unplug and to focus on myself, to take some time to unwind, and just lower stress levels in whatever way I know how. Reading is a great way to do that. As educators, we are well aware of the burnout that comes with planning, teaching, and marking. When we throw online teaching into the mix, it is a whole new ballgame with its own challenges (but also rewards). Taking a step back and giving ourselves a minute (or two) is sometimes all we need.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support and interest in the magazine. I would like to take it even one step further and encourage you to reach out and chat with me about possible ways you could get published or the possible articles that *Contact* could benefit from. If you are interested, but do not know where to start, not sure what to write about, not even sure how to write, send me an email, and we can bounce around some ideas. In fact, if you’re thinking of writing, this issue may be the inspiration you were looking for—I hope you enjoy it.

In this issue, Ali El Mahmoud and Angelica Galante explain Cognitive Theory (CT) in relation to translanguaging. Maximiliano E. Orlando examines features of Business

English language and pronunciation referring to multi-word terms and loans. Mohammad Falhasiri and Fatemah Hasiri discuss the limitations and benefits of implicit and explicit feedback in writing. Celine De Almeida focuses on problems learners and teachers face with learning and teaching idioms. Alanna Carter presents the importance of critical thinking and how it can be fostered in supportive classroom environments. Finally, Ricardo-Martín Marroquín raises awareness of the importance of the English alphabet and the phonetics of characters.

Thank you for reading. Take care.



Nicola Carozza
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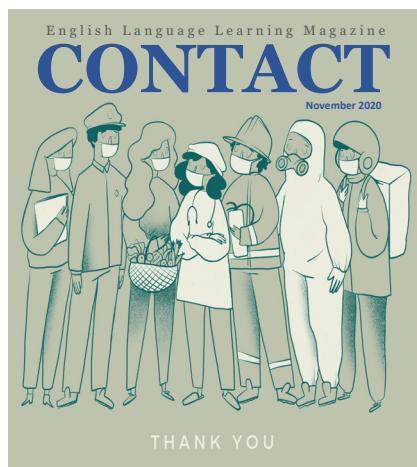
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Complexity Theory and translanguaging as pedagogy for ESL learner empowerment

By Ali El Mahmoud & Angelica Galante, McGill University, Canada

Abstract

Recent theories in second language education have highlighted the learner as a social being, who has agency and takes an active role in the language learning process. One recent theory of the social turn in second language education that is of relevance to ESL teaching is Complexity Theory (CT). In this article, we briefly explain how CT and the concept of affordance relate to the role of the teacher and the learners in the ESL classroom. We then discuss what teaching ESL through a CT lens involves and argue that translanguaging as pedagogy can empower ESL learners and transform the ESL classroom into a more equitable and inclusive space.

Key words: *complexity theory, translanguaging, affordance, communicative repertoire, ESL pedagogy, second language theory*

Introduction

Second language education (SLE) has witnessed a significant shift in the past decades, from an emphasis on studying second language development as a pure cognitive activity to examining it with a social focus centred on the learner (Thomas, 2013). Second language learning used to be seen as a purely mental process, one in which the learner would process words, grammar, morphemes and phonemes in a new language (Myles 2013), as if the learner's mind was primarily a computer processor that served to categorize, process, save,

and retrieve data. With the social turn in SLE (Block, 2003), scholars have stressed the importance of examining language use in a given social context as well as the extent to which language is learned through social interactions (Larsen-Freeman 2018; Myles 2013). This social turn can only be represented in the ESL classroom if teachers view the learner's presence as that of a social being who is resourceful, has agency, and mediates language learning with peers, texts, and the outside world (Myles, 2013). Learning English no longer demands that learners participate solely in grammar drills or retain lists of vocabulary words, which may hold no meaning to the learner, but were common teaching practices in the early years of SLE. Instead, learning English is a non-linear and dynamic process, and teaching practices needs to offer opportunities for affordances so learners develop agency and empowerment. Teaching and learning English in the social turn is therefore complex. This article first discusses Complexity Theory (CT) (Larsen-Freeman, 2018), an SLE theory that is relevant for ESL teachers who wish to shift their teaching into making language socially relevant for learners. It highlights the concept of affordance, one of CT's main dimensions, and provides pedagogical orientations that focus on empowering the ESL learner and creating a space that is equitable and inclusive where all learners are represented.

Complexity Theory and the concept of affordance

Prior to examining the main dimensions of CT, it is important to note how language learning is conceptualized in this theory. In CT, language is learned as an emergent process and not necessarily because it is overtly taught by the teacher. Thus, teaching English may require that teachers shift how they think about language and the power they exert over the learner's language development. One of the main important actions that the teacher needs to take is to provide learners with opportunities for English learning to emerge so language is developed, which can be done through the provision of a number of interactions (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). ESL teachers should not expect that learning is linear; for example, it is not because learners have been introduced to a somewhat linear sequence of grammar concepts such as the simple present, the present continuous, and the simple past, that they will have learned these concepts entirely. This may seem obvious; after all, most ESL teachers know it takes several attempts and extensive practice before learners are actually able start using these grammar concepts in impromptu speech. What is new in CT is that learning a language is complex—but not complicated—and is based on the premises of affordance (Piccardo, 2017).

The notion of affordance is of particular importance in ESL teaching through a CT lens as it requires learners' engagement with content, representation, and understandings from the learners' viewpoint. That is, what the teacher presents in class may or may not be learned by the student as the learning process will depend on how meaningful representations are made. Thus, a single affordance can offer different learning

opportunities to different learners (Larsen-Freeman, 2018; Van Lier, 2010). For example, a picture of nature could drive an ESL learner to make comparisons of types of trees in Canada and other countries while for another learner, it could pick their interest in how Canada takes environmental measures to preserve its forests. In other words, learners build a relationship with the opportunity offered by the teachers, which creates affordances for ESL learning and can spark learners' interests in learning vocabulary and grammar through meaningful connections. It is as if there were several doors from which to choose, and it is the learners' decisions which door(s) to open. As learners go through these doors, learning occurs.



Socha, A. (2016). Doors choices choose open decision opportunity [Image]. *Pixabay*.

<https://pixabay.com/photos/doors-choices-choose-open-decision-1767563/>

Learners also demonstrate an affiliation with the context through cognitive processes such as detecting patterns and storing information but also through social skills such as communicating with the teacher, other learners, and their community members. ESL learners' interactions with resources, peers, the social context, and their knowledge of the world create a dynamic and complex image of language learning, and every contribution from learners to the context adds a new affordance that changes the course of learning, which consequently re-organizes itself (Kramsch, 2012). In other words, it is through the multi-trajectories and facets of interactions that language emerges (Larsen-Freeman, 2012), and the prediction of the outcome of interactions becomes impossible, which explains the component of uncertainty in CT (Kramsch, 2012).

ESL teaching through a CT lens

ESL teaching through a CT lens requires that teachers provide affordances for learners to develop agency in their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2019), which may in turn position teachers as facilitators and also learners. Teachers no longer follow teacher-centered practices and do not expect their learners to see them as the sole source of knowledge. In CT, teachers encourage their learners to develop agency by creating and participating in collaborative activities, taking risks, and mediating learning with their peers

and affordances created in the classroom. If ESL learners ask the teacher for information on how to solve a problem, for example, the teacher will not provide the answer right away; the teacher will first invite learners to share what they know about the topic and activate their schemata, and develop a teacher-learner as well as learner-learner research collaboration to find out the best way to solve that problem. That is, learning is mediated and ongoing. The practice of mutual learning is derived from the belief that language cannot be acquired fully or has a final outcome, so language learning is a continuous and perhaps endless process that is always evolving in a complex system (Larsen-Freeman, 2012).

CT takes the pressure off the teacher to be the ‘know it all’. In the classroom, teachers can painfully admit that they do not know the meaning of a word or an expression and encourage learners to look it up in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual dictionaires, check its different uses, and explore more contextual features. For example, if a student asks whether ology is a word or a suffix, since we have many words that ending with ology, such as biology, anthropology, ecology, etc. the teacher can ask other students if they know the answer or consult their dictionaries to answer the question. They can also divide the class into research teams where every team has a goal: Team one can investigate the etymology, history, and evolution of the word; team two can report the multiple meanings associated with the word; team three can create lists of various examples, and team four can focus on the exceptions and interesting facts connected to the word. To conclude the task, the teacher and learners share information through an open discussion in which their findings are reported.

Because language learning is emergent and depends on learner’s interests in learning the language, it is helpful if teachers develop an interest in the topics brought on by their learners and their lived experiences because learning is viewed from an ecological stance (Kramsch, 2012). Put differently, the environment of learning is constructed and enriched by what learners draw upon in their lives, backgrounds, imagination, and interests (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). What a learner might say can help the teacher and other learners in developing a new piece of knowledge. For example, considering projects based on a learner’s lived experience such as artifacts, visual and textual representations as assignments are the finest representation of contextual learning enrichment. Every learner can investigate and research a different topic and create a unique final product that can serve as an affordance to other learners who might choose to act on it by asking further questions and engaging in meaningful discussions (Larsen-Freeman, 2018).

Developing agency and empowering the ESL learner

In CT, learners play a major role in guiding their own learning and developing agency (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Teachers are not the only ones who make decisions about teaching materials, learning tools, and assessment methods (Douglas Fir Group, 2016) as learning is dependent on learners’ lived experiences and how they engage with language. Thus, ESL teachers can take learners’ needs and interests into consideration

in the selection of materials, which may be the first step to drive students' own learning (The New School, 2018). Teachers can ask their students to choose the content and the materials of a given topic in a syllabus that has been pre-designed and leave room in their syllabus designated only for student driven learning. By doing so, teachers empower learners by asking them to decide what they want to learn, requiring that they take an active role (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). The teacher may also provide choices regarding assessment: in CT, it is preferred that teachers avoid methods in which ESL learners are compared to native speakers of English. Instead, learners should be evaluated according to what they can achieve, or what they can do, in the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2018). Learners can choose to present what they have learned orally, to write an essay, to create a digital presentation, to design a postcard, or other types. By focusing on what learners can do—or cannot do yet—teachers empower the learners and avoid a deficit model of comparison between native and non-native English performance, which is an unrealistic expectation.

CT and translanguaging practices

Translanguaging, or the use of learners' entire repertoire of languages and cultural resources for meaning making (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2018), is one important pedagogical practice in CT. In the ESL classroom, translanguaging is a pedagogy that is used to assist with language learning by drawing on the learners' repertoire, building knowledge of a new language based on what they already know in their languages (e.g., L1) (Cenoz, 2017). Translanguaging can help learners communicate in, maintain, and develop their heritage languages as well as provide affordances for learning based on learners' lived experiences, identities, and cultures (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). One simple practice that can be embraced by teachers is to allow learners to access their *communicative repertoire*, which is defined as an accumulation of multiple languages and ways of communication (Myles, 2013). By accessing their communicative repertoires, learners invite their teacher to better understand and connect to their culture, history, and values, which can be helpful for teachers in terms of selecting classroom materials that are connected to the learners' lives.

In the ESL classroom, the teacher can encourage learners to bring texts in other languages, make comparisons across languages, and also use their languages in the classroom. Teachers can also create spaces in every lesson in which learners engage in translanguaging or *translanguaging spaces* (Li, 2011). For example, in a study carried out in an English classroom, learners were asked to sketch themselves as a visual representation that embodies their identity as they see it (Galante, 2019). The learners were asked to write and place languages they had previously learned or that they wished to learn in their drawing and discussed what those languages represented to them. These were languages that they had learned with friends and family, at school, on TV, on the Internet, in their communities, while traveling, etc. Such discussions, which were done in English and in learners' languages, allowed them to talk about issues related to identity and

belonging, language hierarchy, language policies in educational institutions, language testing, societal power and status, and linguistic discrimination, among others. Translanguaging pedagogical practices such as this one can help learners feel that they are accepted as they are, which in turn can motivate them to be more invested in their ESL learning.

Another simple translanguaging practice that can be encouraged in the ESL classroom is to get learners to access content, oral and text, in different languages by consulting online dictionaries or apps to engage with vocabulary in different languages by comparing meaning, use, script, and pronunciation. When learners are given the opportunity to share the knowledge of languages they already know and compare this knowledge with English, it transforms the ESL classroom into an inclusive and equitable space where all learners engage in the learning process. Comparing their languages also provides affordances for further learning, which goes beyond English learning to learning about how other languages are represented as well as language diversity.

Conclusion

The social turn in SLE demands a differentiated view of teaching languages with the learner taking an active role and developing agency over their own learning while the teacher offers affordances for learning to take place. One theory that supports this view is CT, through which English is learned based on learners' own motivations and lived experiences. English can only be learned if learners have their identities invested in the learning process and have their communicative repertoire respected and acknowledged as an integral part of their identity. Therefore, through mediating learning with their peers, resources, and the languages in their repertoire, ESL learners can engage in translanguaging practices to advance in the new language. Learning a new language may be a complex phenomenon, but when supported by pedagogy that empowers learners, it can transform the ESL classroom.

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Angelica Galante is Assistant Professor in Second Language Education at McGill University. Her research examines social factors in second language development, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and language pedagogy in multilingual settings. As Director of [Plurilingual Lab](#), Angelica conducts research with a team of researchers and graduate students.

Teaching the pronunciation of Business English multi-word terms and loans to adult speakers of Romance languages

By Maximiliano E. Orlando, English Montreal School Board, Canada

Abstract

This article examines two features of the language of Business English, and it discusses teaching the pronunciation of these features in Business English courses or in General English courses in which Business English content is dealt with. Indeed, it refers to multi-word terms and loans, and it shows why teaching primary stress to adult speakers of French, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish as a first language is linked to the former and why teaching English sounds to the same student population is related to the latter. This is done by referring to previous research in the case of loans and also by comparing the language of Business English with that of Business French, Business Italian, Business Portuguese, and Business Spanish in the case of multi-word terms.

Introduction

The following discussion results partly from a survey of 1,452 free access abstracts or introductions from three journals of English for specific purposes (ESP) and one journal of languages for specific purposes (LSP). The former are *English for Specific Purposes World*, *ESP Today - Journal of English for Specific Purposes at Tertiary Level*, and *English for Specific Purposes*, whereas the latter is *Revista de Lenguas para Fines Específicos*. One of the goals of this survey has been to find out if there is any research on the language of Business English (BE) and the relation between this language and teaching BE pronunciation.

I have found out that none of the target abstracts or introductions appear to revolve around a systematic analysis of this issue.

Indeed, with respect to the articles whose abstracts or introductions addressed specific pronunciation features, Westerfield's (1989) description of a pre-MBA ESP case study course in which a video method "[...] helps to develop fluency in small group discussion, a skill that is important for other oral classroom activities" could be cited (p. 75). However, the author explains that the materials that are used in this course can be adapted in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and General English (GE) courses. Twenty-nine years later, Sanguanngarm (2018) discusses how other technological features, i.e. self-access digital learning, and more specifically, online models, improve students' pronunciation in an English for Airline Business class. Nonetheless, this study looks not only into students' pronunciation, but also into students' retention and self-efficacy. As far as pronunciation needs are concerned, those of students attending a first year BE course at an economics and management school are discussed by Fethi and Feriel (2016). Nevertheless, as in the previous study, pronunciation is not the sole subject of this article. For example, the authors look into grammar and motivation, as well. Needs are also dealt with in Warren's (2014) analyses of the views of 1,010 professionals in Hong Kong on meeting-related skills. Amongst these, listening to different accents is one of the aspects of communication in meetings the subjects found most difficult. Camiciottoli (2005) looks into a different communicative context: business lectures. The author compares speech rate in an L1 business lecture in the UK delivered by a native speaker with that in an L2 guest business lecture given by the same speaker in Italy. However, as in some of the studies cited above, other variables are inspected, e.g. redundancies, interpersonal features, and references to local culture.

Because of this research gap in my survey, I embarked on looking into salient characteristics of BE and into the influence of these characteristics on teaching pronunciation in BE lessons or in GE lessons that deal with BE content. In this paper, I shall refer to multi-word terms and loans. The former will be considered with respect to teaching primary stress, whereas the latter will be approached in relation to teaching English sounds. These two issues will be examined within the context of teaching BE to adult learners of French as a first language (L1 French speakers), of Italian as a first language (L1 Italian speakers), of Portuguese as a first language (L1 Portuguese speakers) and of Spanish as a first language (L1 Spanish speakers). The reason for this lies in the prominent differences between BE and Business French (BF), Business Italian (BI), Business Portuguese (BP), and Business Spanish (BS) as far as multi-word terms are concerned and in findings of previous research regarding English loans in French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. As a result, it is hoped that the following two sections will be useful to professionals involved in teaching BE not only in BE courses, but also in GE courses to adult L1 speakers of any of the above-mentioned Romance languages.

Multi-word terms and primary stress

It has been reported that BE is very rich in multi-word terms; Curado Fuentes (2002), for instance, asserts that, in a 193,786-token sub-corpus called *General Business*, “collocations and lexical phrases are two common devices [...]” in the area of Business Technology (p. 18). In a “[...] linguistic description of Business English”, and more specifically, of the lexis of BE, Cortés de los Ríos (2003) points out that nominal compounds are frequent (p. 76). The author illustrates these with the following groups of words: *basic economic laws* and *the tax collection system*.

However, when producing BE multi-word terms which are equivalent to BF, BI, BP and BS ones, several operations may have to be performed owing to differences in word order between English and the four Romance languages in question. These differences come to the surface when Alejo and McGinity (1997) discuss the word order of economic Anglicisms. The authors refer to binominal compounds and argue that for most of their students (Spanish speakers) “[...] this type of construction entails a certain difficulty since they do not always understand the adjectival function of the first noun” (p. 224). Indeed, a common word order of BS multi-word terms is NOUN + PREPOSITION + NOUN, e.g. *estudio de mercado*. However, to produce equivalent BE multi-word terms, the second noun may need to be shifted to the front. Furthermore, the word class *preposition* may need to be deleted, which results in NOUN + NOUN. Consequently, the BS multi-word term *estudio de mercado* may become, for example, *market research* in BE.¹ Another common word order of BS multi-word terms is NOUN + ADJECTIVE, e.g. *crecimiento económico*. A change in the order of these word classes may need to be performed, i.e. ADJECTIVE + NOUN, to produce equivalent BE multi-word terms. As a result, the BS multi-word term *crecimiento económico* may become, for example, *economic growth* in BE. Table 1 shows more examples of multi-word terms that undergo either of these transformations in relation to BF, BI, BP and BS.

Table 1

BF, BI, BP, and BS Multi-word Terms Compared with BE Multi-word Terms

French	English	Portuguese	English
Marché national	National market	Mercado nacional	National market
Carte de crédit	Credit card	Cartão de crédito	Credit card
Italian	English	Spanish	English
Mercato nazionale	National market	Mercado nacional	National market
Carta di credito	Credit card	Tarjeta de credito	Credit card

¹ The translation of five of the multi-word terms that are in this section has been confirmed by using the online *WordReference.com* dictionary. You may refer to the References.

It is worth mentioning that these differences in collocation between BE and BF, BI, BP, and BS are accompanied by a phonological trait that L1 speakers of French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish may not be familiar with: “The primary accent in compounds is most commonly on the first element [...]” (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 249), whereas “[...] a two-word phrase is typically pronounced with late stress: that is to say, its second word has more stress than its first” (Wells, 1990, p. 150). Wells (1990) shows, for example, that the compounds *bank account*, *bank draft*, *bank loan*, *bank manager*, *bank rate*, and *bank statement* take primary stress, whereas the two-word phrases *national debt* and *national government* take late stress. Nonetheless, the adverbs *commonly* and *typically* in the two citations written above indicate that these do not define cast-iron rules: Compounds may take late stress, and conversely, a two-word phrase may take early stress. Carr (2013) and Wells (1990) discuss groups of compounds that belong, though not always, to the former group, e.g. “[...] those where the first element names the material or ingredient out of which a thing is made” (Wells, 1990, p. 151). Cruttenden (2014) provides an example of the latter group. In this example, the author brings up a concept that I would like to elaborate on: *contrastive accent*.

I have observed that English as a foreign language textbooks sometimes make use of *contrastive accent*, an item that will be illustrated in the next paragraph, to depict the interrelationship between sounds and meaning. Nonetheless, what I suggest is, first, that the target learners practise the pronunciation of difficult BE words (see *degree of divergence* in the next section, for example) in BE multi-word terms, and second, that they personalise the use of *contrastive accent*. As a result, a sequence of four activities will be put forward.

In the first activity, the learners brainstorm multi-word terms using a BE word they may find difficult to pronounce accurately, e.g. *national market*, *national companies*, *national income*, *national deficit*, etc. In the second activity, the learners make up isolated phrases in groups and with their teacher’s guidance using two of the multi-word terms in question, e.g. *National companies want to control the national market*. In the third activity, the learners are asked to place primary stress on each multi-word term, or alternatively, their teacher may ask them to choose from different options. Two possible options in this case are *National 'companies want to control the national 'market*, and '*National companies seek to control the 'national market*'.² Following the rule of two-word phrases that was introduced above, the most suitable option should be the first one. In the last activity, the learners illustrate the possible positions of primary stress within the multi-word terms that they have brainstormed by making up dialogues that reflect *contrastive accent*. For instance, during a meeting, a speaker corrects an attendee saying: *I'm sorry, but I wasn't talking about the national 'deficit. I was talking about the national 'surplus*. In a different dialogue, another speaker might say: *I'm sorry, but I wasn't talking about our 'national market. I was talking about 'regional ones*.

² The symbol '/' is used to indicate primary stress.

I think that activities in which differences in the syntax and pronunciation of multi-word terms between BE and BF, BI, BP, and BS emerge and in which the target learners (particularly intermediate and advanced ones) provide and discuss their own examples of these differences could be highly productive in the process of enhancing these learners' pronunciation skills.

English loans and English sounds

English lends French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish terms that may be used in business contexts. In this paper, I shall call these terms *BE loans*. *Feedback*, *helpdesk*, and *layout* (Lazarev, 2017) are examples of these loans in French; *business*, *test*, and *stock* (Pulcini, 1999) are so in Italian; *franchising*, *subholding*, and *yield* (Amorim et al., 2017) in Portuguese, and *joint venture*, *subprime*, *insider trading* (Orts Llopis & Sánchez-Lafuente, 2012), *management*, and *reinvestment* (Alejo & McGinity, 1997) in Spanish. It could be argued that the pronunciation of BE loans should not go unnoticed in BE or GE lessons where BE pronunciation is taught. In this section, I shall explain why by referring to English sounds.

The reason why I think it is important to work on English sounds when learning BE loans in lessons in which pronunciation is taught stems from the possibility that the target learners may have encountered these loans in written text or that they may have used them exclusively or quasi-exclusively in combination with L1 words in L1 speaking environments. It may be presumed that this situation may cause the sounds of the learners' L1 to interfere or even to replace English sounds when saying the loans in question. While discussing English loanwords in Italian, for example, Pulcini (1999) argues that "phonetic adaptation to the pronunciation rules of the receiver language is always present [...]" though the author asserts that in many cases this adaptation is minimal (p. 361). As for the pronunciation of Anglicisms in French, Lazarev (2017) illustrates this adaptation by explaining that *ch* in the word *challenge* may sound [ʃ], i.e. like *ch* in the French word *chimie* (*chemistry* in English). In regard to Spanish, Alejo and McGinity (1997), for example, speak of a "[...] tendency to produce a vowel sound before consonant clusters with s" (pp. 223-224).

In the discussion of the use of economic Anglicisms in the business classroom, Alejo and McGinity (1997) devote a subsection to pronunciation. The authors herein suggest taking into consideration the *assimilation index* of Anglicisms when teaching pronunciation to Spanish learners. This index is defined as "[...] the number of changes that an English word has to make to adapt its pronunciation to Spanish" (Alejo & McGinity, 1997, p. 224). However, I think that the *degree of divergence* of a given BE loan should also be borne in mind. By *degree of divergence*, I mean the amount of difference between the learners' pronunciation of a word and the target English pronunciation of this word. Indeed, I believe that, when lesson planning, taking the *assimilation index* of a BE loan into account is a good start, but that this should be contrasted with what actually happens in the classroom, i.e. with the *degree of divergence*. I shall illustrate this

concept with the following example. Alejo and McGinity (1997) suggest teaching the term *management* as its *assimilation index* is high in comparison to Spanish. Nevertheless, it could happen that, in a given class, this term presented few or no difficulties. Consequently, I think that, even in monolingual classes, i.e. those in which all the learners have the same L1, it would be interesting to focus first on those BE loans whose *degree of divergence* is high. If the *degree of divergence* could not be reduced, then it would perhaps be useful to address the *assimilation index*, i.e. to compare English with the learners' L1 (in this case, French, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish). However, if this were the case, the teacher would need to be familiar with the pronunciation of the learners' L1.

Conclusion

Because of the apparent lack of research that relates the language of BE systematically to teaching the pronunciation of this language in my survey into the free access abstracts or introductions of the journals mentioned in the introduction, I set out to examine this issue. In this paper, I have dealt with primary stress when teaching the pronunciation of BE multi-word terms and with English sounds when looking into the pronunciation of loans that may be used in business contexts. In the former case, I have compared the language of BE with that of BF, BI, BP, and BS and can conclude that there are syntactic and phonological differences between the first language and the other four, which need to be taken into account when teaching pronunciation in lessons that deal with BE. In the latter case, I have discussed the reasons why it may be important to teach the pronunciation of BE loans in the same lessons. In addition, I have referred to existing literature and to Alejo and McGinity's (1997) *assimilation index* in particular. I have also proposed combining this index with the *degree of divergence* when teaching the pronunciation of BE loans. Indeed, the ultimate goal of this article has been to reflect on issues that may come in useful when teaching pronunciation to adult L1 speakers of any of the four Romance languages in question in BE lessons or in GE lessons whose content is about business.

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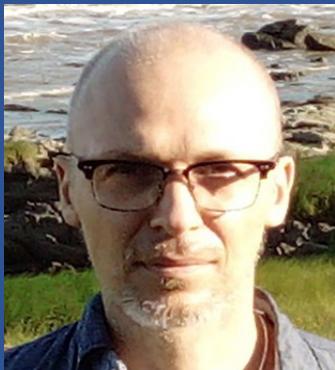
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Corrective feedback in second language writing: From theory and research to practice

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss choices available to language practitioners in connection to corrective feedback in second language (L2) writing. Using the results of some empirical studies and prominent second language acquisition (SLA) theories on corrective feedback (CF), we will address the benefits and limitations of implicit and explicit feedback types, peer feedback and self-correction, reactive and proactive feedback, and finally focused and unfocused feedback. In each section, some practical recommendations are made to help L2 teachers better deal with CF in language learning classrooms.

SLA theories underpinning CF

Two theories that are widely used in L2 research on CF are Cognitive Approach and Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Cognitive psychology is a branch of psychology whose theories have ushered SLA practitioners in how they view L2 learning. Unlike behaviorism that viewed learning as a chain of stimulus-response habit-formation, it focuses on rule learning through deduction and using conscious cognitive processes, and views errors as an important learning device (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). There are two main SLA theories regarding CF which have roots in cognitive psychology.

The first theory is the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), which posits that feedback, particularly in the form of negative evidence (indicating an error), is likely to cause learners to notice a gap in their interlanguage (L2 knowledge) by analyzing the mismatch between the corrected form and their output (which contains

an error), thereby developing their interlanguage. In other words, CF assists students in two ways: First, it helps them become aware of shortcomings in their L2 knowledge, and then, it draws their conscious attention to the target form, which, according to this hypothesis, are the essential requirements for learning to occur.

The other cognitive approach theory is Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2015) which suggests that language learning occurs in three stages. It commences with (1) declarative knowledge, which is the knowledge of rules, then develops to (2) procedural knowledge, which is the knowledge of how the rules are used, and through persistent practice, it gradually becomes (3) automatic. Moving from the first to the second stage tends to be fast and easy; once learners are given the rule and formula for a specific form, they can mostly do the grammar exercises, such as filling the gaps, quickly and rather accurately. But when given a communicative task to do, they tend to make many mistakes. This is because, in order to use language accurately in communication, they need to have automatized their knowledge (stage 3), which takes a long time and demands an overwhelming amount of practice. If they only possess procedural knowledge (stage 2), they are accurate only when they have plenty of time to consciously think about the structure. This is an important theory in CF since it accounts for how correction contributes to the development of knowledge (DeKeyser, 2015).

The overwhelming majority of empirical studies on CF have been conducted within cognitive approach, but after the seminal work of Aljaafreh and Lantolf, (1994), which looked at corrective feedback from a sociocultural perspective, more studies use Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as their underlying theory. The core idea of the sociocultural perspective is that knowledge is social in origin and is mainly gained through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Specifically, all cognitive processing starts between individuals and is internalized through interaction, which is within the recipient's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is defined as the psychological domain in which learners with a little support are capable of doing something, which otherwise they cannot do independently (Swain & Nassaji, 2000). In terms of feedback, the advocates of SCT believe that learning occurs when instructors (knowledgeable others) interact with the learners through mediation and scaffolding and ensure they understand the feedback, and it is within their ZPD. To make sure that feedback is within their ZPD, or in other words, within their grasp, it must be tailored to best fit the individuals' needs. According to SCT, a feedback type that works for one might be ineffective for another learner. Even for the same learner, for different grammatical structures, they might need different feedback types. But a general rule of thumb is that feedback needs to be very implicit at first, and if the learner fails to self-correct, it should become gradually more explicit. This way, knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and scaffolding. Several studies adhering to this theory have shown how such graduated CF helps students move from other-regulated to self-regulated (Swain & Nassaji, 2000).

In the following sections, we will use these three widely accepted theories (namely Noticing Hypothesis, Skill Acquisition Theory, and Sociocultural Theory) to answer some pedagogical questions regarding CF in an L2 context.

How should WCF be given?

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) strategies can fall on a continuum, ranging from the most implicit to the most explicit, with the former entailing only an indication of an error occurrence (e.g., by only writing the number of mistakes in the margin) without correction, and the latter providing the correct form along with a metalinguistic explanation of why it is incorrect (see Figure 1). Basically, following the typology for WCF (Ellis, 2009), there are three main strategies: indirect, direct, and metalinguistics. Each one of these can be modified slightly to be more or less explicit (see Table 1 for all types with examples). Here, we will resort to empirical research findings and SLA theories to explore the affordances and constraints of all these feedback types.

Figure 1. *Feedback Types on a Continuum*

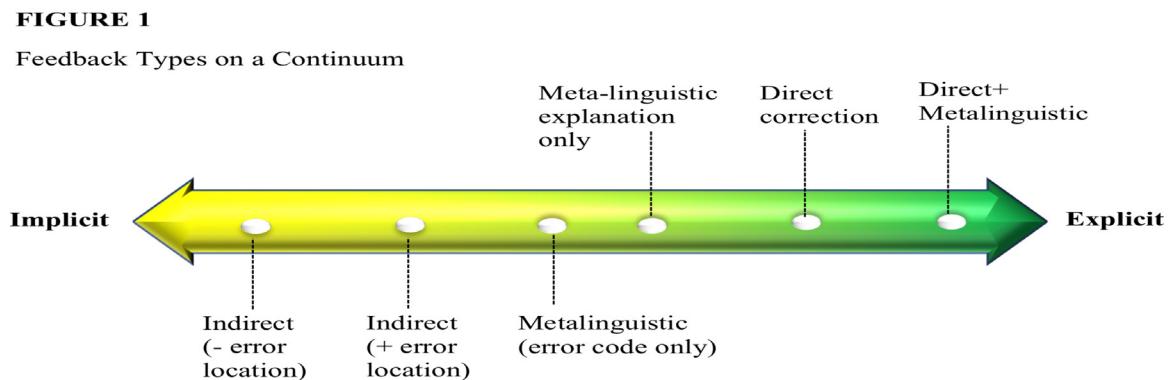


Figure 2. Types of Written Corrective Feedback**TABLE 1**

Types of Written Corrective Feedback

The learner's original sentence:	When I was child I enjoy from play soccer.
Indirect (- error location)	When I was child I enjoy from play soccer. (5)
Indirect (+ error location) ^ = missing word/punctuation	When I was child I <u>enjoy</u> <u>from</u> <u>play</u> soccer. ^ ^
Metalinguistic (error code only) ^ = missing word/punctuation	When I was <u>(article)</u> child <u>(punctuation)</u> I enjoy <u>(verb form)</u> from <u>(preposition)</u> play <u>(verb form)</u> soccer.
Meta-linguistic explanation only	When I was ¹ child ² I ³ enjoy ⁴ from ⁵ plays soccer. (1) use an indefinite article when referring to one item (2) after an introductory phrase, use a comma (3) use past simple when talking about past events (4) the verb “enjoy” is not followed by a preposition (5) use the gerund form after prepositions
Direct	When I was <u>a</u> child, I enjoyed <u>from</u> <u>play</u> <u>ing</u> soccer.
Direct+ Metalinguistic	When I was ¹ <u>a</u> child, I ² enjoyed ³ <u>from</u> ⁴ <u>play</u> <u>ing</u> soccer. (1) use an indefinite article when referring to a countable noun (2) after an introductory phrase, use a comma (3) use past simple when talking about past events (4) the verb “enjoy” is not followed by a preposition (5) use the gerund form after prepositions

Direct

Direct feedback, which is the most popular strategy among teachers and students (Sheen, 2011), can take three forms: (1) crossing out the erroneous form and providing the correct form, (2) inserting a necessary word or phrase, and (3) crossing out a redundant word or phrase. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) discuss the main affordances of this strategy. First, given its explicitness, it does not leave students in a state of perplexity and doubt (which might be the case when self-correcting). L2 learners have a tendency to use a trial and error approach when using a structure or word they are uncertain about, and therefore, they need feedback that either confirms or rejects their hypothesis. This, in turn, either can consolidate their learning or may teach them about an unacceptable form. Second, compared to self-correction, direct method is immediate in the sense that learners do not need to make self-corrections and wait for the teacher to confirm or reject them. Third, it stands to reason that more complex mistakes are more amenable to this feedback type. As mentioned, according to the Skill Acquisition Theory, for learning to occur, the individual needs to possess declarative knowledge. As so, if the form is totally new to the student and has not been instructed before, the only feedback type which might be effective is the provision of explicit feedback rather than implicit. This is especially true for low-proficiency levels (elementary and low intermediate) due to the fact that they do not have the required declarative or explicit knowledge¹ for most structures.

Despite these benefits, Ellis (2009) draws practitioners' attention to a potential drawback of this feedback type. He argues that since learners are already provided with the correction, "it requires minimal processing" which is less likely to result in long-term development (p. 99). This should prompt teachers to use direct feedback along with other types, like indirect and metalinguistic.

Indirect

As indicated in Figure 1 and Table 1, indirect feedback can be given in two ways, either by locating the non-target structure or by indicating the number of errors in each line in the margin (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). The rationale for this type of feedback, which invites students to reflect on their mistakes and self-correct them, is that it encourages self-discovery and provides learners with a problem-solving activity through reflection, which may lead to deep cognitive processing (Ferris & Roberts, 2001) and from there to internalization (Pawlak, 2014). For these reasons, it can be effective for mistakes or slips of the pen, defined as deviations which occur even though the learners know the rules. Indirect feedback is also backed by the Noticing Hypothesis because it draws learners' attention to notice the gap in their knowledge and try to fill it; a mental process which can be conducive to development (Schmidt, 1990). The other advantage of implicit feedback is that it is output-inducing (Pawlak, 2014), which means it pushes learners to, if they

¹ The authors are fully cognizant of the differences between these two in the literature, but for the purposes of this paper, they are used interchangeably.

can, produce the correct form. This is in line with the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995), which asserts that for learning to occur pure exposure to input does not suffice, and it needs to be complemented with output. This hypothesis was informed by the result of a study which was conducted in an immersion program where learners despite being exposed to a lot of input lacked accuracy, which was attributed, among others, to insufficient out-put inducing activities and interaction. Finally, indirect CF promotes a learner-center approach in which students have a more active role, while teachers become more of a “learning counsellor” or facilitator (Tudor, 1993) than the sole source of knowledge.

It is worth mentioning that these benefits are not exclusive to indirect feedback; any implicit feedback which requires learners to self-correct (metalinguistic with error code and grammar rule explanation) can also be argued to have the same benefits.

In spite of enjoying rigorous theoretical support, indirect feedback is not nearly as popular as direct feedback with teachers and students (Pawlak, 2014). This could be because indirect feedback, due to its implicitness, may not provide sufficient information regarding what needs changing and how, resulting in confusion and frustration. This could be even more so for low proficiency learners who lack the declarative knowledge. To mitigate this, Pawlak (2014) suggests dedicating some class time to feedback reflection activities where students can interact with the teacher or peers to clarify any confusion and confirm their correction hypothesis and assumptions. For frequent errors, the teacher can put the ill-formed structures on the board and draw all students’ attention to them. This way, students would get the best of both worlds, i.e., the benefits of both indirect and direct methods. The other recommendation is viewing the feedback as a process whereby indirect feedback is supplemented with one or both of the other two explicit types, particularly for errors that learners fail to self-correct. This movement of feedback from implicit to explicit is also in line with SCT which posits that teachers should offer support as needed and then step back (scaffolding).

Metalinguistic

In response to errors, the other strategy that teachers have at their disposal is to provide “some form of explicit comment about the nature of error” without correcting it, which is known as metalinguistic CF (Ellis, 2009, p. 100). It could take two forms which differ in terms of explicitness. A more explicit approach is to explain deductively why the output is ill-formed, or how it could be fixed or a combination of both (without the provision of correct forms in either case). A less explicit form is to pinpoint the error type through the use of error category labels.² For instance, the teacher might, in the margin or above the non-target like form, write “prep”, indicating that the preposition needs to be either changed or removed. To help students understand the labels, a list of all categories along with examples for each has to be provided.

² Many researchers consider this type to be indirect given that learners would need to sort out the solution on their own, but according to Ellis’s (2009) typology, it is metalinguistic since learners would need to resort to their linguistic knowledge to make corrections.

Both of these forms can be claimed to share the benefits of indirect feedback mentioned above because they involve output production, guided learning, and promote learner-centeredness. In addition to these, metalinguistic feedback in the form of error codes can prompt students to resort to their previously learnt metalinguistic knowledge and try to reflect upon it, which can ultimately improve their self-editing skills (Sheen, 2011).

However, the downside is that teachers would need to come up with error labels and train learners how to use them. One way to address this issue is to use the ones that have been designed by experts and tweak them to best fit their teaching context and students' proficiency level. Appendix A shows an error labeling scheme which is based on the labelling system that Nicolas-Conesa, Manchon, and Cerezo (2019) used in their study. The other challenge is that providing metalinguistic comments requires technical knowledge on the part of both teachers and learners, making it less practical for some contexts.

A variation of metalinguistic feedback is when it is complemented with correction, or even with some more examples of the target language which the learner seems to be struggling with. Obviously, it would be a time-consuming method. However, if teachers are using electronic feedback (via Microsoft Word or Google Docs), they can, either alone or with colleagues, prepare feedback templates for the most common errors. This way, they would simple copy the feedback and share it with their learners. It is an arduous task, but in the long run, it saves teachers a lot of time.

Now that you have read about all feedback strategies, you might wonder which type is more effective in honing learners' writing skills, especially with respect to accuracy and L2 development. Comparing a large number of empirical studies measuring the effects of different CF types on accuracy, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) and Bitchener and Storch (2016) conclude that no firm conclusion can be reached regarding the superiority of one over the others. This can be attributed to a wide range of factors that make such generalization difficult, if not impossible. Depending on many factors such as the context, error nature, proficiency level, age, course aims, etc., teachers should use one or a combination of all, based on their benefits and limitations discussed above, to best guide learners to achieve their goals.

Who should give feedback?

Correction can take three main forms: self-correction, peer feedback, and the most common, teacher feedback. Since teacher feedback is the most familiar, we will only examine how to implement the other two.

Maybe not very popular, but self-correction has been shown to be effective (Ferris, 2006), and the reason is attributed to the idea that it pushes students to "stretch their interlanguage and notice the gap" (Sheen, 2011, p. 48). One reason why its effectiveness can be compromised is related to learners' beliefs. Some learners see

self-correction as a waste of time, believing that only teachers, given their superior language knowledge and training, should give feedback (Pawlak, 2014). As a result, they do not take it seriously. Teachers should take some time to persuade and motivate learners to make a conscious effort when self-correcting.

Peer-feedback can be used to compensate for the shortcoming of indirect feedback and self-correction, which, as mentioned before, can offer insufficient support. Here, they can rely on a peer for help if they cannot self-correct (Sheen, 2011). Ellis (2009) recommends using peer feedback as a follow-up activity for self-correction. He argues that engaging students with activities in which they play an active role is important because teachers cannot do the learning for them; instead, they should be given a chance to discover and learn on their own. Edges (1989) notes that peer feedback involves deeper engagement with learning, makes students more autonomous, and encourages collaboration. If nothing, it engages students in an authentic communicative task while discussing forms, which according to SCT, is the most essential element of learning.

As with self-correction, peer feedback also requires training, otherwise it can be “the blind leading the blind” (Sheen, 2011, p. 48). Another problem it poses is that some students may be mocked by their peers, which can negatively affect their confidence (Pawlak, 2014). One way to prevent this problem can be teaching them how to show disagreement and give constructive feedback. For instance, the teacher can ask them to start by saying something like: “...I could be wrong, but I guess here we need to use..., what do you think?” Teaching them hedging techniques to soften their language might be necessary.

What errors should be corrected?

Teachers can choose to give feedback on only a few error types (focused) or a wide range of errors (unfocused). The rationale for the former is that humans have limited attentional resources (Skehan, 1998) and can attend to a few structures at a time. But the results regarding this claim are far from conclusive since only a handful of studies have addressed this issue. Except for controlled practices, focused feedback might not be an ideal choice due to the following reasons. First, uncorrected errors may reinforce the non-targeted patterns. Second, given that many errors go uncorrected, students might get the impression that they write accurately, and therefore not put more effort into improving. Finally, when all errors are not corrected, students may feel they are being deprived of learning opportunities arising from the correction of their mistakes.

Even though students have been shown to prefer unfocused feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001), it must be born in mind that a “haphazard” and “one-shot” feedback, which is not connected to the pedagogical agenda or the curriculum, is unlikely to lead to automatization (Pawlak, 2014, p. 110). Pawlak recommends a number of factors which should be considered to prevent cognitive overload and to make feedback more

systematic and therefore less haphazard. Here are some questions teachers should consider before deciding what to give feedback on and what to skip:

1. Is this feedback in line with the course aims and reflective of the course material?
2. What is the purpose of this activity; is it to improve accuracy or fluency?
3. Does this error hinder communication? In other words, is it global or local?
4. Is it an error (happening due to insufficient language knowledge), or is it a mistake (a slip for which the student might have the declarative knowledge)?
5. Would the students understand the feedback, or is it way over their head? Is it within their ZPD?

Answering these questions can help teachers provide feedback that best fits their context.

Some practical suggestions

Some errors are more responsive than others to feedback. These errors are usually in grammatical structures which are more rule-governed (e.g., regular past simple) and therefore easier to learn and more treatable to feedback (Ferris, 1999). Here, however, we wish to focus on errors that, despite being corrected, persist in students' writing. To better treat these errors, teachers are recommended to resort to form-focused instruction (Ellis, 2001) and dynamic written corrective feedback (DWCF) (Evans et al., 2010).

If certain errors persist, rather than waiting for them to occur again, take a proactive measure (Ellis, 2001; Nassaji, 2015). To do so, Nassaji suggests that teachers design tasks whose primary aim is to trigger communication but at the same time can elicit certain linguistic forms. For instance, the teacher preselects the use of modal verbs to express possibility as the target structure for students. Then a task is designed in which students are given a picture showing a house which has been robbed, and students take up detective roles to write a report on the possibilities regarding what might have happened. This is an example of proactive feedback because before learners make mistakes in a structure anticipated to be challenging for them, the teacher elicits it and then gives feedback in a more focused manner (Nassaji, 2015). This is usually done soon after teaching the target structure. Another proactive measure for challenging or frequent errors is the grammatically judgment test, which requires students to judge whether some preselected sentences are grammatically acceptable or not. This can be made completely learner-centered by pairing learners to first find the mistakes and then give metalinguistic explanation to correct them. After the pair work, the whole class can discuss the mistakes.

Another way to deal with hard-to-treat errors is to have a systematic and consistent feedback system, which provides more opportunities for practice. DWCF, which is based on the principles of Sociocultural and Skill Acquisition Theory, can help teachers to provide such feedback. Here are the steps for an adapted version of DWCF³:

(1) Students are asked to write a short paragraph in 10 minutes on a given topic;

(2) the teacher

³ The adopted version is given here because, unlike the original version, it involves peer feedback. For the original version see Evans et al. (2010). The authors of the original version encourage teachers to adapt DWCF for their context (p. 456).

gives feedback using error labeling metalinguistic feedback (Appendix A); (3) the teacher returns the drafts with the feedback, and students have to (a) write down the number of mistakes in each category on a tally sheet, (b) take some time to self-correct based on the feedback, (c) ask for help from the peer assigned by the teacher, (d) and make changes and return the draft to the teacher; (4) if some errors persist, this time, the teacher provides a more explicit feedback and gives more clues (e.g., metalinguistic explanation); (5) students self-correct and then check their changes with peers; (6) finally, the teacher provides direct feedback for the remaining errors.

This instructional methodology entails guided learning as well as interaction, which are, according to SCT, the crucial elements of learning. Also, it involves manageable, timely, meaningful and most importantly, constant feedback whereby learners practice repeatedly, which as Skill Acquisition Theory posits, can help proceduralization and automatization (Evans et al., 2010).

Conclusion

After over two decades of research, predominantly motivated by Truscott's (1996) opposition to written corrective feedback, researchers are still not able to pinpoint what CF type is more effective. It would be naïve to think that a single feedback type would be a panacea for all ill-formed structures since effective feedback, as discussed, depends on many factors. Teachers ought to resort to all types of feedback to better cater to learner's needs and support them to achieve their desired goals and to realize their potential. Experimenting with different feedback types (implicit, explicit, focused, unfocused, peer-correction, self-correction, and proactive), in connection with individual and contextual factors, seems to be a promising method in helping learners to develop their L2 accuracy.

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Appendix A. Error Coding Grammar Errors

Verb tense	I have seen this movie last night... (“saw”)
Verb form	She go to work... (“goes”). I need go... (“to go”) The car should fixed... (“have been fixed”)
Word form	It is Unlogical... (“illogical”) She is creativity... (“creative”)
Determiner (including articles)	I live in the Canada... (“in Canada”)
Plural	Furnitures are expensive... (“furniture”). I have three brother... (“brothers”)
Preposition	I enjoy from soccer... (“enjoy soccer”)
Word order	I go usually to work late... (“I usually go”)
Pronoun	They should love themselves... (“themselves”)
Conjunction	Although it is cold, but they want to go out (“Although it is cold, they want...”)
Sentence structure	I did the better that... (instead of. e.g., “I did my best”)

In all categories, the target structure is either missing, unnecessary, or incorrect.

Nongrammar errors

Wrong word	The document (instead of the passage, or the text) we read discusses...
Word choice (awkward use)	... a big effort ... (“great”)
Tone inappropriate	Children should be humble and not cocky. instead of. e.g., (“arrogant”)
Spelling	I beleive (believe)
Punctuation	It is hard, I need help... (“ It is hard. I need help”)
Apostrophe	All Student's parents should be... (“students’ parents”)
Redundant	In my opinion, I think it is..... (“ In my opinion, it is”)

In all categories, the target structure is either missing, unnecessary, or incorrect.

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Idioms: The icing on the cake for advanced learners

By Celine De Almeida, Canada

Abstract

This paper focuses on the problems that learners and teachers both face with idiom usage. The original submission was in part of the author's Cambridge Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Learning Skills Assignment for which it received a Merit, but it has been modified to serve a general teacher audience. This essay examines examples from several advanced level coursebooks and draws on the author's personal experience of teaching multi-lingual classes in Canada and England, as well as exam-preparation courses in Italy to assess the value of teaching learners' idioms. By identifying the problems that learners have with idiomatic language and analyzing different methods to help circumvent them, advanced students may be able to coherently and confidently express themselves in real-life scenarios.

Learners at an advanced level of English have the capacity to acquire idioms into their personal lexicon. However, they soon realize that learning these is not always a piece of cake. Idioms are not often included in syllabi, whether due to time or coursebook constraints. However, higher-level students enjoy the challenge of learning them in attempt to sound more like a native English speaker.

Let's get the ball rolling: Introduction to idioms

Analyzing idioms is inherently complex based on this vagueness of the term or phrase. In essence, an idiom can be defined as a lexical item where "the meaning of the whole is not immediately apparent from the meanings of the constituent parts" (Lewis, 1993, p. 98). In fact, idioms often consist of common well-known lexis, which are assigned non-literal meaning. They are primarily used informally, when speakers "comment on themselves, other people and situations" (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2010, pp. 6–7).

Several advanced coursebooks present idioms categorically by their constituents, containing body parts as the predominant lexical set (Figures 1-3).¹ By arranging them in this manner, the idioms seem accessible to learners who are already familiar with this everyday vocabulary. Despite this organization, the majority of these phrases may be used functionally to enhance personal descriptions or relationships. Accordingly, idioms provide a higher level of lexical sophistication for advanced students (Lewis, 1993, p. 98). For instance, *I don't see eye to eye with you* means *I don't agree with you*.

Students learn phrases to disagree at an elementary level, but the use of the idiom *see eye to eye* enriches the concept linguistically. In this way, idioms provide advanced learners with a new means to express familiar situations.

Furthermore, idioms vary by how easily their meaning can be guessed. Moon (1997, p. 44) categorizes idioms by their non-composability, which is the ability to interpret them based on individual words. An idiom rating high in this category means that it is difficult to deduce its meaning, whereas having low non-composability could garner some guesses.

Non-composability

Low	High
<p><i>She stabbed me in the back when she started dating my ex-boyfriend.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of betrayal can be inferred by the literal meaning of assaulting a person in a place where they can not anticipate it. 	<p><i>You've got to be joking! Stop pulling my leg!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is hard to deduce that this expression means to trick someone based on the individual meaning of the content words, pull, and leg.

Idioms are multi-word units composed of various parts of speech. Accordingly, they come in an assortment of forms. Inversely, Lewis (2002, p. 38) believes that fixed expressions such as these should be acquired without internally analyzing them. However, there is value in dissecting idioms to their single parts in

¹ **Figure 1.** Coursebook Idioms taken from p. 102 in O'Dell, F. & Broadhead, A. (2014). *Objective Advanced*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Click to view image](#).

Figure 2. Coursebook Idioms taken from p. 54 in Brook-Hart, G. & Haines, S. (2015). *Complete advanced*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Click to view image](#).

Figure 3. Coursebook Idioms taken from p. 129 in Aish, F., Tomlinson, J. & Bell, J. (2017). *Expert IELTS 7.5 coursebook*. Essex, England: Pearson Longman. [Click to view image](#).

order to determine their flexibility. The extent to which it is sequentially frozen can help classify an idiom (Moon, 1997, p. 44). Changing the nouns, adjectives, articles, or prepositions would make them nonsensical because they rely on each other to convey meaning. Despite this, Lewis (2002, p. 219) defines semi-fixed expressions as those who can change an item with the same linguistic characteristics, such as possessive adjectives and objects, which reflects the perspective of the phrase without affecting the core sense.

In the flow of speech, content words with semantic meaning are typically stressed whereas those without are not (Barrera-Pardo, 2008, p. 15). Given this, function words are often reduced to weak forms: *I don't see eye to eye with you.*

However, as a result of the broad categories of idioms, there are varying pronunciation patterns. Moon (1997, p. 44) defines a “phonological criterion where multi-word items often form single tone units”. In this way, each idiom has its own pronunciation pattern that must be memorized to sound natural.

The crux of the matter: Learner problems

Learners struggle with the non-literal meaning of idioms. Students who rely on bottom-up processing techniques will try to understand each word to grasp the overall meaning. While this occasionally may work for idioms that rank low in non-composability, it is more difficult for those with a higher score in this attribute. Likewise, when encountering an idiom receptively through listening, learners may not catch the unstressed counterparts in an idiom, making it challenging to deduce meaning of the whole without catching all respective parts.

Moreover, “many idioms carry subtle nuances in meaning” which challenge students (Hedge, 2000, p. 114). For example, the low non-composability of the idiom, *the icing on the cake*, allows students to infer that what is being described is something positive, just as the finishing touches on the dessert would be. Though it does technically mean the enhancement of an already good situation, native English speakers tend to use it in a sarcastic or ironic sentiment.

Furthermore, the duality of this idiom is played up in the title, highlighting the vagueness of language that English language learners ultimately miss out on. Advanced learners who are trying to assimilate into an ESL environment may face inaccessibility if they are unaware of these, and as a result, may feel like outcasts. Similarly, over-inserting idioms into daily speech may further out them as *foreigners*. Though advanced students enjoy learning idiomatic expressions in an attempt to sound more like native English speakers, this eagerness can result in their overuse in speaking and writing. Students who speak West African languages are influenced by their L1’s “rich in proverbs and colourful sayings” when speaking in L2, making them sound parodic instead of natural (Swan & Smith, 2001, p. 259). Furthermore, from my

teaching experience in English for Academic Purpose classes, these students, among others, tend to insert these expressions in their essays. This proved to be problematic as many idiomatic expressions are informal and unsuitable for academic registers.

Moreover, learners inaccurately produce idioms by making errors pertaining to their rigidness. Confusing the article in a completely fixed expression such as *letting the cat out of a bag* renders the idiom incomprehensible (O'Dell, 1997, pp. 274–275). Changing the definite article, the, to the indefinite article, a, gives this phrase the literal meaning of freeing one's feline, which native English speakers would find laughable. Making an error like this could be detrimental to the confidence levels of shy learners, particularly those from Japanese or Korean cultures who fear being ashamed or humiliated in front of others (Swan and Smith, 2001, pp. 309 & 241). This could result in reluctance to using idioms in the future.

Additionally, students may make a mistake with a particular word as a result of L1 interference. Italian learners may say something is *as good as bread* when *gold* is the correct English word. Conversely, Turkish speakers may assume that English's *written all over one's face* is equivalent to their expression *written on one's forehead*. However, the latter is about one's future being preconceived, similar to English's *being written in the stars*, rather than the former to convey an opinion physically with one's face. This poses complications in multilingual classrooms as learners from differing L1s may be exposed to incorrect idioms and begin producing them.

Students may also experience frustration with the correct articulation of an idiom. Learners may not be able to give accurate stress to an idiom if they have not been exposed to a model of pronunciation which highlights its stress pattern. In my experience preparing students for the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) exam, a candidate used, *Should I get the ball rolling?*, to begin her collaborative task, stressing each individual word. By focusing on the accuracy of this idiom's form, rather than ensuring the function words were unstressed, she sounded unnatural, thus weakening her attempt to use an idiom correctly.

A thorny issue: Teacher problems

Nevertheless, it is not just students who experience uneasiness with idioms. The presentation of idioms in advanced coursebooks is often unsatisfactory. Teaching idioms notionally by associating them around familiar vocabulary words will confuse learners (Thornbury, 2002, p. 127). Figure 1 presents the idioms with body parts but used in isolated examples. Learners are not given enough context on when to use the idiomatic language that would allow them to practically acquire them into their personal lexicons. By relying solely on textbook content for idioms, learners risk sounding inauthentic both in meaning and in pronunciation.

Conversely, teachers tend to shy away from teaching idioms because they date and vary regionally (O'Dell, 1997, p. 274). As a speaker of Canadian English, I personally struggled to understand some idioms presented in advanced British coursebooks just as my learners did while I was teaching abroad. For instance, being unacquainted with the phrase, I was unable to determine the meaning of *on tenterhooks* from context during a listening track. Though I encourage my students to receptively acquire idioms, a current coursebook presenting outdated ones is problematic for students who may try to use them productively and then be misunderstood by native speakers.

The light at the end of the tunnel: Viable solutions

Advanced learners would greatly benefit from learning idioms receptively. Doing so would present a situational context in which they are used in real-life rather than how a coursebook may present them categorically by their common lexis. This will also raise students' awareness on when and how frequent idioms can be used naturally.

Songs are also an excellent resource to help clarify learners' problems with meaning, form, and pronunciation. Using a gap-fill with target idioms missing that students have to listen for would greatly focus the students' attention. In this way, they are simultaneously exposed to correct form and accurate models of pronunciation by the singer, before analyzing the lyrics in order to deduce meaning from context. Learners with musical intelligence may appreciate this variation best as it allows them to recognize the significance of the rhythmic nature of the idioms. Moreover, teens and young adults may appreciate using songs in a lesson because it makes them more accessible outside the classroom. While extroverted students will also enjoy singing along, allowing them to practice the idiomatic tone units, more introverted students would benefit from repeating the song's idioms in isolation. Learners "can be encouraged to pronounce such phrases as quickly as possible, running the elements together" (Willis, 2003, p. 160). In this way, students practice the stressed and unstressed patterns of idioms merging into a single tone unit to sound more natural.

Having students write their own dialogues with idioms can help reinforce meaning while practicing form. Doing this in pairs will allow students to use L2 collaboratively to negotiate meaning of how and what to include in their text. In order to prevent the issue of overuse, a teacher should restrict the idiom usage depending on the length of the dialogue. Moreover, students could create a controlled practice with their dialogues by leaving a gap where an idiom should be and having another group solve it. For stronger students, they could be given an idiom to use in an improvised role-play, in which they have to insert it into the conversation naturally.

Using a thematically-relevant idiom as a class warmer and challenging students to use it throughout the lesson gives them the opportunity to produce it in conducive context. Not only does this activity build

learner autonomy, as it is on the onus of the student to actively think of opportunities to use the idiom appropriately, but it also increases their incentive to participate in class. I have found this to be particularly effective in classes of advanced teenagers, who were driven to be the first to use it correctly.

As an extension, setting the task of finding an idiom a week from an outside source could be an ongoing homework task. This extension works best with advanced exam-preparation students, who begin to actively search for idioms in media, or through interaction with English speakers in ESL environments, ultimately helping them with both usage and with accurate syllable stress in their speaking test practice. Students can also share their findings with their peers. In monolingual classrooms, collaboratively discussing and comparing similar expressions in L1 helps attach new form to a familiar concept, proving to be an asset in making them more memorable.

In a nutshell: Conclusion

To sum up, advanced learners benefit greatly moving from recognition to production when it comes to idioms. Teachers must direct students towards those with social and temporal relevance and tailor their exposure to students' learning styles in order to maximize their chances of using them accurately. Doing so will help learners combat their issues of not knowing where, when, how, and how often to use them. Taking these recommendations into account will make advanced learners feel more confident when expressing their ideas with idiomatic language to both native speakers and other learners.

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**Author Bio**

Celine began her ESL career in Canada before combining her passion for educating others with her desire to travel abroad. While hopping around Europe, teaching in southern Italy and in England, she completed her Cambridge DELTA, earning a Merit in Modules 1 and 2. She ultimately returned to Toronto, where she teaches ESL in a private language school and develops curriculum and content for various international education companies.

Developing critical thinking skills in the ESL classroom

By Alanna Carter, Ryerson University, Canada

Abstract

This paper presents a discussion of the importance of developing the critical thinking skills of ESL students. Critical thinking skills are sometimes overlooked in the ESL classroom which is problematic given that ESL students need to be equipped with the skills and thinking strategies necessary to perform in academic and professional arenas. ESL teachers can foster critical thinking in supportive environments in their daily practice by including activities that require students to challenge the self and activities that require collaboration and creativity. Several classroom activities that encourage critical thinking are presented and discussed.

Defining ‘critical thinking’

Critical thinking is an important area of interest in education and stems back to the Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Perdue, 2014). All three philosophers embraced the values of questioning, examination, and reflection. Concepts of critical thinking today can be traced to the work of philosopher John Dewey who wrote on the centrality of critical thinking in the educational experience (Dewey, 1933). More recent concepts and practices of critical thinking emerged in the works of Lipman (1988) and Ennis (1989). Lipman (1988) argues that critical thinking is a complex form of thinking and involves “skilful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it relies upon criteria, is self-correcting, and is sensitive to context” (p. 39). Ennis (1989) developed 13 characteristics which identify critical thinkers; according to Ennis, critical thinkers are open-minded, adapt a holistic approach to

situations, and look for reasons, among other things. Although a great deal of research has been done on critical thinking and differences of opinion exist about how exactly to define it, most researchers agree that “an important aspect of critical thinking is the ability to collect, evaluate, and make use of information effectively and appropriately” (Beyer, 1985, as cited in Iakovos, 2011, p. 82). Importantly, education has gravitated toward the idea that students must learn the processes of inquiry, learning, and thinking rather than simply accumulate skills and information.

Students’ development of critical thinking skills goes hand-in-hand with the types of activities and questions teachers provide and ask and, consequently, Bloom’s taxonomy (1956). Bloom’s taxonomy identifies lower- and higher-order thinking processes. Lower-order thinking skills involve knowledge, comprehension, and application. Higher-order thinking skills include analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Effective educators provide students with opportunities to develop both lower- and higher-order thinking skills. Effective questioning and use of inquiry as a pedagogical practice supports development of students’ critical thinking skills (Wang & Seepho, 2017).

Critical thinking in the context of the ESL classroom

While critical thinking is valued in all disciplines, it is especially important in subjects where there is an intimate connection with language. Simply put, as one uses language, they are demonstrating personal thinking. Listeners can often identify a speaker’s linguistic and ethnic background based on pronunciation and speech patterns; using this information, listeners make judgments about the speaker (Ze et al., 2013). When one does not use language well, the speaker may feel that his or her thinking is being exposed and judged in a negative way. Although this may be true in some instances, when the involved speaker or writer is also a student of English as a second language, such interpretation is too simplistic.

As indicated above, all students need to develop critical thinking skills and be given opportunities to practice and develop higher-order thinking; however, the asking of and responding to higher-order tasks questions can be problematic for ESL students. Often teachers wrongly equate language proficiency with cognitive ability (McNeil, 2010). Some teachers assume that because ESL students have difficulty with language, they also have difficulty thinking critically. As a result, teachers may give lower-order tasks and ask closed-ended questions to ESL students which offer little opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, take chances with language, and, ultimately, develop linguistic competence and fluency. In fact, this approach is problematic on a number of levels: classes can be too elementary; students and teachers may become bored; and student progress can stall. Many ESL students, when given opportunities and appropriate supports to complete higher order tasks and answer complex questions in their own languages, flourish.

The need for ESL students to develop critical thinking skills

Upon examination of data related to the numbers of international students coming to Canada to pursue studies, the need for ESL students to develop critical thinking skills becomes clear. The number of international students choosing Canada as a study destination increases yearly: The number of international students who chose Canada as a place to study increased 68% from 2014 to 2018 (Government of Canada, 2020). In 2018, the number of international students in Canada reached 721,205. One of the top reasons that international students cite choosing Canada to study is the quality of education offered (Humphries & Knight-Grofe, 2014). Indeed, the high quality of education that international students seek in Canada is deeply rooted in academic programs that champion innovation, creativity, and pushing boundaries. Critical thinking underpins all of these concepts.

In order to achieve their personal, educational, and professional goals, ESL students require fluency with language as well as skills to think critically about issues that are present in their educational or working careers. Importantly then, students require support in developing language skills as well as other skills as they are required “to think, to reason, to communicate, and to continue their learning outside the classroom” (Shaila & Trudell, 2010, p. 2). Carefully honed critical thinking skills are necessary for students’ personal success as well as the success of the institutions and companies at which ESL students will study and work. Many universities have expressed concern about ESL students meeting the academic demands of university courses and have developed skills-based courses to support these students (Baik & Greig, 2009). Thus, ESL teachers need to ensure that they are equipping students with the academic and critical thinking skills necessary to be successful at higher levels of education and in the workplace.

The role of the teacher in developing students’ critical thinking skills: Providing support and challenging beliefs

Support

Fundamental to the development of critical thinking skills is the environment in which these skills are nurtured and encouraged. Given that critical thinking in the ESL classroom involves learners taking significant risks both with respect to language and the formation of ideas more generally, learners can be hesitant and shy to engage with these types of tasks. Thus, a learning space in which students feel comfortable, safe, and appreciated is essential. According to Iakovos (2011), an ESL classroom which fosters the development of critical thinking skills is a “friendly, supportive and non-threatening classroom atmosphere [that] can have a positive impact on students’ motivation and language performance” (p. 84). Learners need to feel that their ideas will be accepted and considered fairly and respectfully. Instructors

need to work to ensure that students engage with all members of the class and materials in respectful and supportive ways. If students are made to feel that their ideas are not important or valued, they may lose motivation, and the development of critical thinking skills will stall.

Challenge and beliefs about students' abilities

In addition to feeling safe in the learning environment, students need to feel a sense of challenge. Research has shown that well-designed tasks and questioning advance the development of critical thinking skills and that presenting ESL students with higher-order tasks and questions results in more language production than lower-order tasks (Yang, 2010). At the same time, research has also shown that teachers ask ESL students lower-order questions much more frequently than higher-order questions; this practice is linked to teachers' perceptions of students' abilities (McNeil, 2009). Teachers can be hesitant to ask ESL students higher-order questions and thus cultivate students' critical thinking skills because they believe that tasks that require critical thinking are too challenging for these students. While this belief may be true in some instances, in the overall, it is an inappropriate springboard for learning and for preparing students for the academic and professional challenges that they will experience. Accordingly, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills in their daily lessons and to experience challenge.

A review of literature by McNeil (2010) found that teachers' perceptions of students affect their questioning patterns; likewise, students' perceptions of themselves affect their levels of confidence and belief in their abilities to answer difficult questions. McNeil states that teachers need to change more than just their questioning patterns; teachers need to be conscious of their beliefs about students' abilities and learning processes (p. 77). In other words, teachers need to regard their students as highly capable learners and present learners with tasks that are innovative, interesting, and ultimately, challenging.

A number of activities that promote and nurture the critical thinking skills of ESL students are offered below. The suggested activities are grounded in the author's 10 years of experience working with ESL students across a variety of learning situations including general language classes, English for Academic Purposes classes, and test preparation classes. In the author's experience, the activities described engage learners, encourage collaboration and communication, allow for diversity of ideas, and help students create connections between ideas and skills. The activities are sorted into two categories: activities that challenge the self and activities that encourage collaboration and communication with others.

Critical thinking activities that challenge the self

Growth and learning occur when one is encouraged to consider what they already know and connect this knowledge with new ideas and information. The ability to make connections between previously known and understood ideas and information and new ideas and information is an important skill for learners to negotiate the world in which they live.

Prediction activities

Prediction activities are a valuable way for students to consider the information that they already know about a topic and use it to inform what they believe a different topic will be about (Literacy Work). With respect to reading and listening skills, students can be encouraged to make predictions based on the title of a text/video, the images within a text/video, or a few select words or phrases taken from the text/video. Encouraging students to make guesses about texts based on limited amounts of information will encourage them to make links with topics that they are already familiar with and extrapolate or hypothesize. It likewise primes students for reading/listening materials and will help with comprehension and engagement. Confirming or refuting predictions after a reading or listening task will help learners see how old and new information fits, or does not fit, together.

KWL

KWL charts (*What I Know*, *What I Want to Know*, *What I Learned*) are not new to teaching and learning; this is perhaps because they are valuable tools to foster critical thinking among learners. KWL charts are useful in encouraging learners to think about new and unfamiliar topics. The *What I Know* column on the chart empowers students and reminds them that they are holders of knowledge about various topics. This perspective is particularly important in an ESL classroom where learners can sometimes feel powerless and vulnerable due to the inherent understanding in the classroom that English is dominant, and the teacher is the holder of knowledge. The *What I Want to Know* column sparks interest and engagement with topics and motivates students to want to learn and discover new information in the target language of English. Finally, the *What I Learned* column encourages reflection and appreciation for the learning process and the language that is involved in that process. Students often feel a sense of pride when considering the *What I Learned Column*, particularly when they are reminded that they learned it all in English. Although these charts are quite simple, they are powerful tools in a supportive classroom dedicated to fostering critical thinking.

Perspective taking

Putting yourself in someone else's shoes and understanding what and how another person may be thinking and feeling is an extremely difficult activity that requires an open mind, a deep understanding of a situation or issue, and a willingness to be vulnerable. Despite its challenges, it is an exceptionally effective classroom activity that can foster learners' critical thinking skills. Activities that encourage considering others' perspectives involve deep understanding of an issue or situation, sensitivity to the ways that one might interact and relate to others, and strong communication skills so that perspectives are presented

in authentic, sensitive, and culturally appropriate ways. Clearly, these types of exercises require extensive thinking and understanding.

One way to bring this concept to life in an ESL classroom is to take a reading text from a course book, for example, and to have students rewrite the information/narrative/story from the perspective of another person. Possible perspectives include those of a person from a different cultural group, age, or gender. Alternatively, students could take a story or fairy tale that is popular in their own language and rewrite it for an English audience. Students should be encouraged to consider the types of themes, characters, and symbolism in the story and how these elements might be understood and interpreted by the audience. Upon rewriting the text, students should share and explain their choices highlighting similarities or differences between the original text and their interpretation.

In a speaking lesson, role plays are excellent activities to encourage perspective taking. Role plays require students to consider how others might react in particular situations. In addition to role plays being ways for students to practice common scripts used in English, they involve understanding and thinking about the responses and reactions of others. Role plays can be helpful for teaching about aspects of culture that may be unfamiliar to students (Thornbury, 2005).

Again, students need to feel safe and comfortable in the learning environment for perspective taking activities to be successful. Importantly, the instructor needs to remind students about the dangers of slipping into stereotypes. Perspective taking activities allow for important discussions about culture.

Critical thinking activities that create opportunities for interaction and collaboration

Activities and tasks that facilitate interaction and collaboration among students foster critical thinking. While it can be challenging to work with others and to understand the approaches that different people take in order to solve problems, the benefits are substantive. Working together with others requires significant communication, creativity, and innovation. Therefore, teachers should work to design activities that require purposeful and meaningful interaction and collaboration between students in the ESL classroom.

Debates

Debates are extremely effective and engaging for students, and they require students to develop and use critical thinking skills (Iman, 2017). Debates require students to take, explore, explain, and defend a position. Students can be free to choose the position to defend or, to add a layer of challenge, teachers can assign students positions to defend. Assigning students positions to defend can increase the level of challenge involved in this task because students may be forced to consider and defend opinions that they do not necessarily agree with.

Debates are inherently interactive and require extensive listening and speaking on behalf of the participants. Essential to a good debate is preparation so that students can feel confident expressing their opinions and ideas. Further, it is helpful to encourage students to anticipate beforehand the arguments the opposing side might present; this requires significant forethought and an appreciation for the fact that multiple perspectives exist. Debates also require significant active listening and processing of information during the actual live debate situation. Active listening will ensure that students respond appropriately and logically to the arguments presented. Debate about topics that are directly relevant to learners' lives will generally result in the most engaging and successful lessons and thinking.

Seminars

Seminars in which students serve as experts on specific topics and lead discussion are valuable activities that encourage critical and creative thinking. One approach is for students to choose a topic related to the theme of the unit and to partake in independent research about the topic. Students should be given a degree of freedom in choosing their topics so that they are engaged in the research and have a genuine desire to learn more about their topics. Then, students need to run a seminar with a small group of students. During the seminar, the student shares some of the interesting research that he or she has found and leads a group discussion about the topic based on a series of discussion questions prepared in advance.

Running a successful seminar requires students to use critical thinking skills throughout the entire experience. First, students need to find research relevant to their topics and decide which information is necessary and interesting for their classmates. Then, students need to decide how to share their research in engaging ways. Finally, students need to draw their classmates into conversation about the topic in accessible and meaningful ways. Creating relevant and stimulating discussion questions can be extremely challenging. Likewise, managing group conversation so that it runs smoothly and naturally is an important skill for all learners, especially for learners who are working in a language that is not their first.

Problem solving tasks

Tasks that involve working with others to solve a problem always require students to think critically. According to Snyder and Snyder (2008), "students who are able to think critically are able to solve problems effectively" (p. 90). Problem solving tasks can be complex or relatively simple. An example of a task that requires students to problem solve involves asking students to create a product to solve a common, everyday problem such as the difficulties of waking up in the morning or stubbing one's toe on the side of the bed in the middle of the night. These problems are universal and students will certainly have had experience with them. Students work in groups to design a product that they think will solve the problem; then, they need

to *pitch* their idea to the class. Certainly, this type of task can be much more involved; for example, students could work together to create a poster or presentation focused on a real-world problem, or they could work together to build a product or item that fills a need that exists in the classroom or a designated community.

This type of activity is inherently creative and requires diverse skills. Working with others requires communication, listening, strategizing, and navigating problems with others. Working together to solve problems is representative of the work students will experience in academic studies and the workplace.

Conclusion

In all, educators need to equip students with the skills necessary to *survive* and *thrive* in increasingly competitive educational and professional settings. In particular, teachers need to ensure that ESL students are ready to meet challenges, embrace diversity, and be successful, creative, and aware. In order to achieve these goals, ESL students need to develop strong language and thinking skills. Given the unique challenges that exist in a language classroom, critical thinking skills can be overlooked as the teacher is sometimes more preoccupied with helping students to improve their accuracy and fluency. However, language development and critical thinking go hand-in-hand: Developing good critical thinking skills will support language acquisition and increase students' confidence and ease with communication.

Teachers need to design activities with care so that students develop and use critical thinking skills in purposeful ways. At times, teachers may need to sideline their own personal biases and impressions of students and their abilities as a student's fluency with a language is not always indicative of their cognitive capacity and ability to think critically. Teachers need to challenge students in supportive and meaningful ways. In this way, students are empowered, and their confidence levels increase. This, ultimately, leads to capable learners who are well-equipped and confident to work, study, and live in English-speaking environments.

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The complexity of recognizing the ABCs for English language learners: More than twenty-six sounds

By Ricardo-Martín Marroquín, Redeemer University, Canada

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to support English language learners in the early literacy stages of English through raising awareness of more than one sound that may exist (or not) on certain English characters (letters). Having a character acquire more than one sound could add a layer of difficulty in learning how to read in English. Additionally, this could also be seen when two letters are placed together. Learning and memorizing the phonetics of each character would evidently allow for one to learn how to read. However, as a teacher, being able to recognize these characters, and then teaching vocabulary intentionally (by highlighting these characters, and the construction of new sounds), would benefit the learner, and may even speed up the language acquisition process.

The ABCs in any given language is usually the starting point when learning an L1 or an L2. This is usually the case because everything else stems from this foundation. In the English language, we first learn by memorizing the letters in sequence of traditional order (A, B, C, D...), usually through a popular catchy song. Then we assign a phonetic schema to each letter, allowing us to properly recognize and pronounce each character. In English, the good thing is that all of the consonants have a fixed sound, with the exception of the *h*, the *c*, and the *g* (both *c* and *g* being attributed a hard and a soft sound). This article will raise awareness of the different sounds one character might acquire, and how this could be a difficult task for an English Language Learner (ELL). For this reason, it is important to support the ELL when learning English, in this case, by being aware of the letter sounds and the general rules that accompany each consonant,

and the phonic that the formation of two consonants make. The goal of this article is to facilitate English language learning at its primary foundation, the ABCs. It is to provide the extra support in language, and in this case, in the early literacy stage.

To start, the *h* in most cases makes a soft voiceless sound (*/h/*). Letters have two types of sounds, a voiceless and a voiced one. The voiceless is the one when the speaker uses air by breathing out and fixating the position of the mouth to create the sound of the letter. Whereas, in the case of a voiced letter, the speaker uses their vocal chords while expressing the sound of the letter (Szczegielniak, n.d.). This sound is found in words such as *honey*, *home*, *house*, and *hi*. However, there are instances where this character is silent (Marian, n.d.). In this case, the term starts with the letter *h*, like in *honour*, *hour*, *honorable*, *honest*, *heir*, etc. There is also the case where the *h* is silent, and it is not found in the beginning of the word but rather anywhere in the sentence, such as *ghost*, *ghetto*, *whether*, etc. In all of these cases, the *h* is silent, which means that it is not pronounced. In addition, when mixed with another specific letter (*c*, *p*, *s*, *t*, and *w*), the *h* acquires a new phonic. For example, the *ch* generally speaking makes the */tʃ/*, which are found in *church*, *change*, *chipmunk*, *champion*, *exchange*, among others (“Pronounce,” n.d.). In very rare cases, this combination of the *ch* makes a diverse sound known as the */ʃ/* and is found in words like *machine*, *brochure*, *charades*, *parachute*, *chalet*, etc. Although this last list of terms all use the *ch*, the *sh* (*/ʃ/*) sound is the appropriate form of pronunciation, not the *ch* (*/tʃ/*) itself. The *ch* also makes a hard *c*, which is found in terms such as: *choir*, *character*, *school*, *ache*, etc. The *h*, when it follows the *s*, makes */ʃ/* sound, depicted in the English language in words such as *shower*, *shin*, *show*, *shunned*, *fish*, etc. It is important to point out that the */ʃ/* sound may not be present in other languages, and therefore, ELLs would omit the appropriate sound. Spanish speakers, for example, would use the *ch* sound for the *sh* sound erroneously, and this is due to not having the sound in their native language.

Additionally, when the *h* is in front of the *ph* it makes the same sound similar to the *f* (just like when the *h* follows the *g* to form the *gh*). This is found in *phone*, *phonetic*, *phase*, *phenomenon*, etc. Although its origins are rooted in the Greek language, its spelling was altered in the English language with the character *f*. However, the *ph* spelling remained and/or was recalled in the English language for many terms. The idea with ELLs is to remind them that when a *p* and an *h* form the *ph*, the sound it acquires is now the *ɸ*, which simply (in English) is the *f* sound. Similarly, there is a list of words that acquire this same phonetic but rather found in the combination of *gh*, and these terms are (but not limited to) *enough*, *tough*, *rough*, *laugh*, etc.

The *k* sound is the same as the hard *c* sound when accompany by any vowel. Nevertheless, when the *k* and the *n* are placed side by side, it creates a silent *k*, allowing only for an *n* sound. This is seen in words such

as *knight*, *knife*, *knee*, etc. As for a silent consonant such as the *k*, there are a few letters that also become mute. Examples are: silent *g* in *sight*, *eight*, *bright*, *sign*, etc. and silent *w* for *wrap*, *wrestle*, *write*, etc.

Finally, when the *t* precedes the *h* to form the *th*, it forms a new sound [θ]. This sound depicted by the [θ] is found in words such as: *teeth*, *with*, *throw*, *tooth*, etc. The [θ] is a voiceless sound, made only with air, which is a voiceless sound compared to the [ð], which is a voiced sound (to make a sound with the vocal cords). However, the *th* also makes a different sound like in the following words: *then*, *this*, *they're*, *there*, which is depicted by [ð] (McCulloch, 2014). Furthermore, when the *wh* combination is formed, there are two sounds that are also made; one is simply the *w* sound (silent *h*) and the next one is the *h* sound. The former idea is depicted in *when*, *what*, *where*, *why*, *whence*, and the latter in *who* and *whose*.

It is also interesting to note that in English the *q* is always followed by a *u*. Nevertheless, this construction of letters is not necessarily visible in the Arabic language. Therefore, keeping in mind that our Arabic ELLs may omit the *u* when writing terms such as *quick*, *quiet*, or *quite*. Furthermore, it is important to note that the sounds that the *p*, the *g* and the *v* make are uncommon in the Arabic language. In fact, it is common for Arabic ELLs to compensate the *p* sound with the *b* or the *b* for the *v*. For this reason, it would be important for the ESL teacher to note the lack of phonetic concepts with the ELL and stress the usage in the English language.

In short, as teachers of the English language, it becomes important to teach the ABCs and the sounds that the letters form. This might be to reinforce the phonetic concept that the student already has for a consonant (hard *c* sound in front of the *a*, *o*, and *u* in English, Spanish, Italian, French, etc.) and adding a new notion or sound that a letter makes, either on its own or when combined with an additional letter. Doing so will facilitate the learning of the English language, by providing the ELL with strategic early reading intervention. This could help establish the building blocks of the ABCs while supporting early reading and writing.

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