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“Welcome to Oklahoma”: A Service-Learning Project in an Undergraduate Technical Writing Course

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The present project provides information about a service-learning project in an undergraduate technical writing course assigned in the Fall Semester of 2011 at a small public university in Oklahoma. Students in the course were assigned to “performance teams” and tasked with interviewing faculty advisors and officers of international student organizations on campus. Based upon the results of these interviews, the members of each team were asked to compose documents or deliver presentations that met the expressed needs of the student organizations. The assignment was designed to allow students an authentic experience in assessing the needs of a particular audience and in working with students from a different cultural group. The outcomes of the assignment and the challenges expressed by the students were discussed. The participation of students in the international student organizations was discussed in terms of university retention.

Keywords: international students, teaching, technical writing

Introduction

The proliferation of technical writing courses in American universities is the result of a general recognition of the importance of workplace writing. As a result, teachers in these courses seek ways to help students respond to real-life writing situations. To address this need, “service-learning” courses (courses in which students work in local companies and nonprofit organizations) are becoming part-and-parcel of undergraduate technical writing courses. The opportunity to respond to real-life occupational and rhetorical demands is a powerful and profound feature for these courses. It allows students to learn how to tailor their appeals to an actual audience as opposed to the more fictive ones used in the vast majority of writing courses. As Kixmiller (2004) suggested, when students saw the value in and necessity of writing to a real situation, the writing classroom became a more dynamic place.

Another recent feature of the undergraduate technical writing course in many universities involves teaching students to write for international audiences. With the recognition that the workforce becomes more “global”, students are asked to consider the needs and expectations of clients and colleagues from cultural groups different from their own. As companies become more “transnational”, a greater need exists for writers who can compose documents for linguistically and culturally diverse audiences. Teachers of technical writing recognize the need and strive to find ways to give students practice in writing for readers and users from other cultural groups.

The present paper discusses an attempt to combine service-learning and authentic audience-centered writing
for an international audience at a small university in southwestern Oklahoma. As the university itself embarked on a project of providing more service-learning opportunities and internships for students in all academic departments, an introductory course in technical writing added a component in which students provided documents for international student organizations. The outcomes of this course modification are discussed here along with the implications of this action.

The University and International Students

Cameron University is a 6000-student public university in Lawton, O.K.. Approximately 300 of these students are international students with most coming from the English-dominant nations of the Caribbean, as well as from Nepal and Nigeria. Lately, the university has entered into partnerships with universities in the United Kingdom, China, and South Africa, and the enrollment of students from other countries is expected to increase. International students are served by an Office of International Affairs that provides assistance with visas, referrals for academic assistance, and social events. It offers an International Club for foreign students and is active in cultural events in the community. Additionally, students from the Caribbean, Nepal, and Nigeria have their own student organizations (Students of the Caribbean Alliance, the Cameron University Nepali Association, and the Nigerian Students Association, respectively).

Like many universities, however, Cameron University struggles with ways to incorporate international students into campus life. In a separate survey, international students at Cameron University expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with the International Club and with a perceived inability to form relationships with students from other cultures. Although the Nepali Association hosts a rather well-attended Dashain celebration every year, the prevailing perception seems to be that international students tend to “keep to themselves”.

The Initiative and the Service-Learning Project

During the 2011-2012 academic year, faculty members were encouraged to develop service-learning projects and internships in appropriate courses. A challenge for this rather important initiative involved the demographics of the region in which the university is located. Lawton, O.K., where Cameron University is located, has a population just slightly under 100,000. The biggest employers in the city are Fort Sill, a U.S. Army installation and Goodyear Tire Company. Unemployment is slightly over 6% (less than the national average) but job growth is stagnant (City of Lawton, 2012). Although this initiative responded to this difficult employment outlook throughout the region and hoped to provide students with marketable skills and experience, there were not many businesses that were able to offer on-site internships for students. The Technical Writing (English 2333) course, however, lent itself well to a service-learning project. It is a three-hour course that covers the various genres of workplace writing and communication (e.g., letters, memos, proposals, and presentations). It is a requirement for English majors in the Creative Writing track and for majors in Multimedia Design. Enrollment of each semester is typically 20-25 students. It was thus decided that instructors would search for organizations on campus that would provide venues for students to compose documents in response to real-world rhetorical situations.

In the Fall Semester 2011, 22 students in the course were divided into four presentation teams. The task of each team was to make contact with the Faculty Advisor and the student officers of the four major international student organizations on campus—the International Club and the Caribbean, Nepali, and Nigerian organizations—to determine the needs of each organization and work with the organization on devising a writing
and/or communication project that might meet those needs. The actual “deliverables” for each Team would be determined by the agreement each Team forged with the Faculty Advisor and student officers of each organization. For example, the Nepali organization wanted their Team to publicize an upcoming event for them, while the Nigerian association wanted detailed information on university policies concerning plagiarism. Each team was responsible for weekly progress reports, weekly reflective assignments, the project itself that they committed to perform, and an end-of-project report. Students in the class had five weeks to complete the project.

The instructional goals for the projects were: (1) to allow members of the presentation teams to engage in an authentic audience analysis through the interviews with Faculty Advisors and international student officers; (2) to provide students with the opportunity to compose documents or deliver presentations based on these audience analyses; (3) to encourage collaboration; and (4) to foster understanding of members of another culture. It was hoped, as well, that the international students might also derive some benefit from collaboration with US-born students.

Results

All four teams completed the assignment within the allotted five-week time frame. There were, however, significant obstacles each group had to address. For one thing, collaborative assignments often lead to conflict. Perceptions of the relative effort (or lack thereof) exhibited by team members were alleviated to some degree by having each member assume leadership for his/her team for an equal length of time. This “rotating chair” strategy was still insufficient for doing away with conflict altogether. Regular progress reports from each team did, however, alert the author to problems as they arose.

The team assigned to the International Club faced some interesting obstacles. The club, which is open to all international students, is moderated by a staff member and a faculty member from our Music Department. When the team attempted to contact the staff member, she wasted no time in contacting the author to inform that the author’s students were attempting to provide information that she insisted coming only from her. When the author explained to her that she would have control over that information, she continued to express her reluctance. Her faculty counterpart, however, made the team’s task impossible when she informed them that she was too busy to participate. The team, however, met with the author to discuss alternative plans. One of the members was aware of a Freshman Orientation class composed of international students, and she made contact with the instructor teaching that class. An agreement was reached in which the team would provide a short presentation on adjusting to campus life as well as publish a pamphlet outlining that information. Both the document and presentation were well-received and the instructor indicated that she would be interested in having technical writing students assist her in the future.

The Nigerian Student Association President and their faculty advisor met with one of the other presentation teams, and they decided that a presentation at one of the organization’s meetings on plagiarism and academic dishonesty was what their group could benefit most from. Bamford and Sergiou (2005) indicated that African students studying at foreign universities did not understand plagiarism as did students in the West or in China. The concern expressed by the advisor and student officer in our sample seemed to reflect that finding. The presentation team, thus, devised a handout on paraphrasing from sources and delivered a 10-minute presentation for a meeting of the Nigerian students. A discussion of plagiarism followed the presentation, and although several of the Nigerian students found the Western view of plagiarism a bit obsessive, the discussion was characterized as fruitful.
The Cameron University Nepali Association is one of the oldest and best-organized student associations on campus. It features a set of bylaws that ensure continuity of leadership (the Vice-President automatically becomes President when his/her term as Vice President ends) and boasts a larger bank account than almost all other student organizations. One of the biggest fundraisers for the group is the Dashain celebration (a major religious holiday in Nepal), during which traditional foods are served and students provide entertainment with traditional dances and music. This is well-attended each year as university students, faculty, and staff purchase tickets to attend. As a result, when the presentation team met with them, the faculty advisor chose not to be present, but the association’s officers came to the meeting with a well-defined plan. Instead of information delivered from the team, the Nepali students wanted information delivered by the team. They asked the Presentation Team to advertise the upcoming Dashain celebration. The team, thus, composed fliers, a press release, and, as one of the author’s students worked on the campus newspaper, an article in the Cameron Collegian.

Finally, the Students of the Caribbean Alliance had not met that Fall and their newly-elected President had not returned for the Fall Semester. As the group was without leadership, the Presentation Team met with much frustration in their task. While the faculty advisor was quite helpful, there was no student input until the team was able to identify those Caribbean students who seemed to possess the social status to influence their peers. This was done rather painstakingly by members of the team simply asking Caribbean students in their classes about who they believed were the “informal leaders” in the organization. These leads were then asked for their recommendations, and after about two weeks of this process, the team identified two students, a Senior Business major from Grenada and a junior Chemistry major from Trinidad and Tobago, who seemed to be well-known and well-respected by other Caribbean students. These two students called a meeting which was remarkably well-attended for an organization that had no formal leadership for the year. Approximately, 35 students listened to a presentation on the resources provided by the university to help organize and maintain student organizations, particularly those that were experiencing a change in leadership. It is interesting to note that, following the meeting, a group of Caribbean students, along with their faculty advisor, met with the university’s Director of Student Affairs and were able to hold an election (even though the deadline had passed) and re-institute the good standing of the Students of the Caribbean Alliance.

**Reflective Comments and Follow-up Input From Technical Writing Students**

After the projects were completed, the students in the English 2333 class were required to provide Project Completion reports and the class engaged in an-hour-long discussion about the projects. Several themes and observations emerged from both the written reports and the discussions. For one thing, language itself did not appear to be any sort of barrier to communication. International students (non-native English speakers) must score to a specific standard on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) (61 iBT, 500 PBT). Additionally, over 80% of all Cameron international undergraduate students have taken at least one additional semester of a freshman English course (i.e., a remedial course prior to taking the requisite freshman composition courses). Thus, the international students interviewed and served in the present study all exhibited a fairly high degree of fluency in English. The technical writing students also denied that the accents or dialects of the international students posed any communication challenges in either the interviews beforehand or during the project presentations. Seven of the technical writing students, however, admitted to some misgivings before their
projects began. They admitted to being uncertain as to whether they would be “able to understand foreign students” or not. While the technical writing students discussed the projects as worthwhile, they also admitted to knowing very few of the international students that they were to interview and compose documents for. Interestingly, one of the students in the technical writing class was a native of Ghana, was a part of the team that was to work with the Nigerian students, and yet, explained that he knew none of the Nigerian students.

These somewhat uneasy feelings on the part of the technical writing students are reflected in other studies of international students on American university campuses. International students routinely describe an atmosphere in which they perceive few opportunities to develop friendships with students from other cultures, and in the event that such a relationship does develop, the cross-cultural friendship will likely not include a US-born student. In the present projects, it was the case that our international students had only superficial relationships with their US-born counterparts, if any relationships at all, while the members of our technical writing presentation teams themselves knew very few international students. It should be noted, however, that all the participants in the project believed it was a valuable endeavor.

The technical writing students also described what they perceived as a challenge from an assignment that provided fewer parameters than they were used to. The assignment required them to compose a text (document or presentation) based upon information they uncovered was something that created a great degree of anxiety. The lack of a “template” for this assignment made it quite different from all the other assignments in the course. They also understood that the assignment asked them to respond to more “real-world” or authentic audience demands than most courses they had taken. Thus, the assignment asked students to take information they had learned from lectures and the textbook and apply it to particular rhetorical situations.

For the most part, students expressed rather positive feelings toward the assignment. The most negative comment most of them made was that they did not believe that five weeks was an adequate amount of time to complete the assignment as they would have liked to have done.

Implications and Discussion

The challenges faced by international students at American and other universities throughout the English-speaking world have been well-documented. Bisenbach-Lucas (2005), for example, found that unfamiliarity with the conventions of email in the United States led to less positive social and academic outcomes and experiences for international students than for native-born students. Khawaja and Dempsey (2007) found that international students at a Queensland, Australia university reported significantly greater psychological distress on nine different measures of that construct than did native Australian students. H. Tompson and G. H. Tompson (1996) suggested that lack of opportunity and unwillingness to interact with students from other cultural groups was a primary reason for lower retention (i.e., continuing enrollment at a university) rates among international students at universities in English-speaking countries. Thomas (2002) suggested that, while a diverse student body might positively affect the retention of native-born students, but absent any interventions, international students were often negatively impacted. For reasons such as these, retention continues to be problematic at U.S. universities when it comes to international students (Kwai, 2009).

To address the problem of retention at American universities, university administrators have devised programs that encourage international students to participate in the activities already practiced by students at that particular university. Robertson, Line, Jones, and Thomas (2000) found that activities that were already part of
the “everyday” at a university did not often attract great participation by international students as such activities were perceived as culturally restrictive. Indeed, such activities can have the effect of isolating international students as they had little or no input in their planning or execution. The assignment in the technical writing class attempted to give the officers of the international student organizations the opportunity to plan activities and solicit information that was meaningful to them and their members. Here, it was hoped that the technical writing students would be forced to concentrate on the needs of the international students, as opposed to participating in a setting in which the international students had to assimilate.

For the students in the technical writing course, the assignment was designed to introduce those skills needed for participation in private or public enterprise. As Speck (2001) suggested, service-learning projects helped students to acquire workplace skills and reasonable expectations about workplace life. Such projects are, however, time-consuming for faculty, and in the case of our university, perhaps more of challenge as the university is situated in a region where there is little economic growth and little variety in terms of occupations. Indeed, the venue that offers the greatest variety is the military installation and internships there in many cases would be closed to students without necessary security clearances. Using the university as the venue for service-learning, thus, responds to these concerns. Further, while most of the introductory textbooks used in undergraduate service-learning courses contain information about working with international clients (Markel, 2012), the information is often anecdotal and scattered throughout the textbook and may be of limited use to students who may have little or no experience with people from other cultures. Thus, we attempted to provide our students with “clients” from other cultural groups and to ask them to listen to compose according to the clients’ needs. It seemed a reasonable response to our university’s initiative for service-learning and provided a rather efficient way to expose students to audience-oriented writing and intercultural communication.

References


Insights Into Pedagogical Aspects of E-Learning

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The author’s intention is to study pedagogical aspects of e-learning on a larger scale—to look at them on the world scale, through the articles published in the proceedings of the conferences which take place regularly in different countries of the world, and to look at not only the instructors’ attitude but also the business people’s point of view toward such a form of study as e-learning is, and to illuminate the necessity of the instructors’ encouragement in Latvia and other countries as well to use e-learning as a new approach to the study process or only as a new form of study. The author also tries to draw Latvian instructors’ attention to the form of foreign educators’ publications on the topic in a modest and inconspicuous way in order to encourage discussion.

Keywords: education, technologies, e-learning, instructors, motivation

Introduction

The IT (Information Technologies) boom in the world has contributed to the wider application and development of e-learning/e-studies in the higher education of Latvia as well. E-studies are the studies, which take place with the application of electronic technologies: telecommunication and computer networks, radio and TV, video records, interactive TV, and multimedia CD-ROM. In some countries e-studies are understood as online studies in the network. An especially organized virtual environment of e-studies, interactive study materials for instructors’ and students’ self-study, possibilities of self-assessment for both, and the support of instructors in the study process, are their essential features. E-study principles enter Latvian higher education institutions slowly, however. It is stressed by specialists—during next years more and more students and lecturers will discover the opportunities offered by modern technology. Practically it is—the instructor is reading the lecture face-to-face, but the variety of study materials, tests, group-work, and project development is organized virtually—discussion forums, chats with instructors and classmates, etc.. Twenty years ago, the telephone and fax, radio and TV, audio, and later video were technologies characteristic of distance learning. It was possible to achieve a remarkable improvement in the quality of studies. E-studies/e-learning is more than only business. The new teaching methodology is a characteristic to this form of learning, which differs from full-time study. The student acquires the necessary information society added value of education—learns not only the subject matter, but also how to work with new technologies via e-learning. E-studies are realized in different versions in Latvian universities. One of the most common is the acquisition of study courses attending lectures in person at the university as well as working in a virtual environment. The problem with e-studies is that in Latvian universities,
it is necessary not only to explore new technologies and to acquire new study habits, but also to encourage not only students but also the lecturers themselves to use the new study technology. The latest trends show that study work is increasingly switched to virtual environment, but that does not mean that, thinking about the quality of studies, the “effect of presence” will disappear, which cannot be provided by e-studies without sufficient “effect of presence” of the lecturer. Students wish to mix face-to-face lectures where the teacher can be asked about all the vague issues and also work in a virtual environment. That is the way to make study process more effective and to improve the quality of specific courses. E-study is becoming more and more popular in the world. However, the aim for maximum quality, to offer such studies, requires large capital investments in different sectors as well.

E-studies or e-learning or e-training is used to describe similar form of study which takes place in virtual environment and application of electronic technologies makes the study process interactive. The definition of the process allows recognizing it as web-based learning taking place simultaneously all over the world for about 20 years already. The study was carried out to investigate pedagogical issues concerning encouragement of students and lecturers to apply new study technologies and also to touch upon and to examine pedagogical issues, to reconsider them, therefore, different literature sources revealing different views of different authors from all around the world were analyzed.

The aim of the research is to review pedagogical aspects of e-learning most discussed in proceedings of the conferences abroad in order to introduce (tell about) them to Latvian academic community, revealing their similarity all around the world, and their similar reflection in proceedings, mainly focusing/drawing attention to some that the instructors have, while dealing with technologies as well as with students’ motivation and encouraging them to apply e-training in their studies.

**Research Methods**

Case studies reflecting e-learning in the world and illumination of the published materials in the proceedings of the conferences devoted to application of technologies in study process, analysis, and selection were carried out. The author of the given study reviewed conference papers published during the last years, articles, and other kinds of publications on the topic under discussion related to e-learning and blended learning environments. The literature analysis is presented to assist the reader to reveal and appraise the importance of instructor’s and the learner’s motivation as well, and to facilitate the acquisition of e-learning and blended learning courses. From the selection of evidences, it is expected to conclude that student’s motivation is resulting from the lecturer’s willingness and competence to apply technologies in the study process being a major factor for e-learning and blended learning success. The results of the report have to alert the reader that student’s success and quality of the study process, in e-learning environment, is heavily related to the course layout and accessibility as well. The author of the paper tries to provide a summary of current research on the topics of e-learning and blended learning, while also the role of instructor in encouragement of students is stressed.

**Results and Discussion**

Not only in Latvia and other European countries but also in America, application of the latest technologies in e-learning in corporate, government, healthcare, and higher education is widely discussed at forums of different
scale, as well as on regular basis at the world conferences on e-learning. The Canadian scholar Daniel (Commonwealth of Learning, Canada, 2009) at “World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education 2009” proposed the following issues for discussion:

What is technology and what are its strengths? … Technology in a people-centred way and Adam Smith’s analysis of technology in terms of division of labour, specialisation, economies of scale and machines. In other areas of life technology has used these principles to increase access, improve quality and lower costs. Is this true of e-learning?

E-training is considered nowadays as a very important issue for business organization even in such a remoted country for Europeans as Jordan is in the Arabian world. Harfoushi and Obiedat (Jordan) (2011) have researched organization’s acceptance of the new training system before implementing it. System’s functionality of organisation, finance resources, human resources, and their potential/capabilities, regarded as pedagogical preconditions of the successful study environment, in their research were proved to be the main factors which affect e-training acceptance.

E-training is considered nowadays as a very important issue for business organization because of the benefits it can bring. Unfortunately, e-training is not fit well in most of Jordanian organization. In order to implement e-training successfully in an organization, you need the right people at the right place using the right resources. Furthermore, it is essential to measure the organization’s acceptance for the new e-training system before implementing it in order to gain its full potential. The research proposes a model to measure an organization’s acceptance for a new e-training system. The model has been developed from various previous studies and then it has been tested using quantitative methods (questionnaire). The studied factors which are believed to affect the e-training acceptance are: System Functionality, Finance Resources and Human capabilities. (Harfoushi & Obiedat, 2011)

Not only for a business organization but also for a university, which nowadays is also regarded as a business organization, e-studies/e-learning is more than only a business. New teaching and learning methodology becomes a challenge in this form of learning, which differs from full-time studies at the university. Via e-learning, the student is encouraged to acquire added value of education, so necessary for web-based learning in information society, to learn not only the subject matter, not only to acquire the content, but also to learn how to work with new technologies.

Many colleges and universities are now investing more in e-learning and blended learning courses. For a course to be worth the investment the institution must first recognize the most important factors to consider while developing the course. Of all the factors considered while developing a course the student must be considered as the most critical. (Shivetts, 2011)

Web technology is changing higher education in many ways. Distance education has become common. Bonk (2009), professor of instructional systems technology at Indiana University (US), surveyed the landscape in “The World Is Open: How Web Technology Is Revolutionizing Education (Jossey-Bass)” and drew educators’ attention to the development of instructional systems technology market and education expenditure on e-learning acceleration from 5% of total expenditure to 50% and the capacity of quality improvement and frameworks which had to have some “innovative consideration” as well. The processes taking place in Latvia and the Baltic states in the field of e-learning are similar (see Figure 1).

Acquisition of the technology of e-learning instructional system and training of the skills of e-learning courses development by the lecturers have become prerequisites of students’ active involvement into e-studies in
insights into pedagogical aspects of e-learning

Latvia according to the data from the Latvia University of Agriculture.

Figure 1. Dynamics of the students’ use of e-studies.

Harness Disruptive Technologies

With the present changes taking place in both the US and the UK (read: also European) education systems, it is interesting to look back to see where they have arrived at in, as called by some authors, “Harnessing Technology” or “Disrupting Class” as education systems looked to adaptation and evolvement, according to their opinion, to “the massive changes technology is bringing to learners lives and how they live them and consequently how and where they learn” (BECTA, 2008). It is almost full marks to the BECTA research team in their analysis of the trends most likely to impact upon young people, while they certainly pick up the trend toward mobile devices. The BECTA’s research related to the learner and the learner’s context identified four emergent or potential future trends: (1) consumption of multiple technologies by young people; (2) increased dependence of young people on mobile technologies for online social networking; (3) increased parental encouragement of their primary age children’s educational uses of computers at home; and (4) increased use of TV-on-demand by young people at home. The American scholar Christensen (US), by contrast, had delved deeply into the malaise he believed that was effecting the US education system at that time and the Latvian one at present, beyond simply looking at the impact of emerging technologies on the lives of learners and how they could be used to support learning. Interestingly, his solutions were aimed not at harnessing emerging technologies for learning, but at the school system itself (by disrupting it) and centred principally on giving schools the right framework to innovate. Learning platforms creation was regarded as one of innovative intuitive tools to create learning content with modes to allow, for delivery, in some form of content exchange and model emerging. Into the concept of the platforms, social learning environments were included to allow collaborative content development, collaborative learning, and collaborative peer-to-peer sharing of learning, and also to support the exchange and delivery of learning over a multitude of differing devices at the Latvian universities as well. It should be noted that the next generation of learning platform, given the speed of technology, and in fact all (and much much more) of the requirements, could be met in the corporate e-learning market already. The challenge was in firstly giving the universities in Latvia the right infrastructure in which to innovate in: academies, free schools, or virtual schools, etc.

Consequently, pedagogical aspects concerning schools to discuss were: (1) exploration of new technologies;
(2) motivation and encouragement of teachers to use new study technology; (3) encouragement of pupils to use new study technology; (4) acquisition of new study skills using new study technology; (5) making of the study process more efficient (personalizing it); (6) the quality of schooling; and (7) improvement of the quality of specific courses. It should also be noted that knowledge and training skills acquired at school form basis for university studies. Learning outcomes are of the utmost importance for school, for well-developed content and information exchange mechanisms in the form of acquired information technology skills as study links are important for students, therefore, it is so important for the assessment of university study outcomes to examine learning process at school.

Technology Assists to Develop Study Skills

A developed content and exchange mechanism was viewed by Christensen (2008) as the second stage disruption of the classroom. Indeed, the work of professor Sugata Mitra’s “Hole in the Wall” experiments had shown that, “In the absence of supervision or formal teaching, the children can teach themselves and each other, if they’re motivated by curiosity and peer interest” (Christensen, 2008). The first stage of disruption in Christensen’s model was broadly how ICTs (Information Communication Technologies) were deployed in the classroom, with computer-based learning replacing monolithic learning. As it was pointed out by him, this was driven or rather made possible by the falling prices of computers and e-learning content (and a parallel recognition that e-learning had improved in quality), but was driven ultimately by budgetary constraints (and looming teachers’ shortages in the US)—in short—technology was substituting the teacher at school and the instructor at the university. Christensen predicted that technologies share of the education budget in the US would grow from 5% to 50%, and the flip in the substitution curve would begin in 2012. It would be noted that a new virtuous circle of demand emerged that promoted both: a growing demand for e-learning content due to its cost saving, leading in turn to a fall in e-learning content prices due to the rise in demand and an ever improving quality of learning materials (development of e-study content in the form of study courses) and technology (including the development of students’ self-directed study skills) to create e-learning.

![Figure 2. Commencement of studies at the various study stages (years). Source: Emse and Vaidesvarans (2011).](image-url)
The demand to satisfy specific needs of Latvian students abroad for e-learning content was also the reason for e-studies development in Latvia as well (see Figure 2). Access to study content made the students to change the form of studies.

Part of the Latvian students came over from traditional forms of studies (full-time studies in person) to e-learning enabling them to continue their studies while living and working abroad (Emse & Vaidesvarans, 2011).

In the Corporate Market

In the corporate market of the world, the impact of the 2008-2009 economic crisis saw massive downward pressure on corporate training budgets and a consequent strong uptake of e-learning and other web-based communication technologies. Technology did, in some ways, replace the trainer. Will technology now replace the teacher, or, at least, fill any of the gaps? Time will tell. Perhaps the US education system would benefit by looking at many of the excellent research papers to give learner perspective and explain how education systems can harness new technologies for learning. And, perhaps, the UK schools could look toward the US for new school models for the emerging academies and free schools as how to innovate and differentiate disruptively!

Any company or organisation that can bridge countries in learning technologies should be highly valued as the opportunity to share best practise from both education systems which would be of huge value (BECTA, 2011).

Not only European but also the Latvian education system would benefit by studying the experience of both: the UK and the US schools and new school models not only in secondary but also in higher education.

However, it is interesting to note that while the BECTA researchers focused on how emergent consumer technologies could be harnessed to support learning, Christensen looked for the development and adaptation of new solutions from the software developer market as opposed to the consumer market and in particular “Applications”—pieces of sophisticated software developed for specific purposes. To Christensen, the ability to deliver personalized learning or student-centred learning is paramount and to provide platforms of tools that will enable non-professionals (by this he means non-professional software developers) “to create software that helps different types of learners” is one of key themes. Christensen (2008) argued that “These tutor tools are likely to emerge as some form of virtual tutoring”. According to the research published by Ambient Insight (Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtVYkEdGtfo), tools and vitally mechanisms for their exchange—via learner-user networks—will grow in the future and become enhanced as learners and teachers will also contribute to content development and cater all types and styles of learners.

In virtual schools, already a strong trend in the US model is believable and likely to only accelerate and can be regarded as a leading e-learning model in Latvian higher schools as well. When asked about the most convinient form of schooling, 33% of the enquired Latvian students pointed out that the most advantageous condition in virtual school was that it was not necessary to attend lessons, 28% of the respondents virtual schooling was the possibility to study at an individual pace, and 24 % of the respondents recognized the possibility to combine studies and work (see Figure 3). Nine percent of students had opted for e-learning in order to continue studies while living and work abroad.
Virtual schools have made it possible for 6% of the respondents to combine studies and upbringing of a child (Emse & Vaidesvarans, 2011). After the opening of labour markets and under the impact of the economic crisis, the reasons to commence e-studies in various conditions have changed in Latvia (Emse & Vaidesvarans, 2011).

Two Sides of the Same Coin

Many excellent BECTA reports addressing school and college use of e-learning and learning technologies offered a vision of an insightful vision of the future (see the 2008 report “Analysis of Emerging Trends Affecting the Use of Technology in Education. Research to Support the Delivery and Development of Harnessing Technology: Next Generation Learning 2008-2014”) and were perhaps one of the most accurate and forward looking pieces in terms of highlighting the up and coming trends. BECTA (and its researchers) looked at, toward the US and into the UK, to highlight what is believed the key trends in technology’s use in learning and education would be. By contrast also in 2008 Christensen published his work “Disrupting Class”—with the sub-title “How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns”.

While Christensen’s sub-title talks about how the world would learn, his work principally addressed the challenges and issues faced by the US education system. Indeed Christensen’s introduction painted a bleak assessment of the US school system of that time. As two sides of the same coin, it also has to be noted that there still exists instructors’ negative attitude toward introduction and application of technologies in study process. Not only in Latvia but also in the United Kingdom voices of opposition can be heard. Greener (University of Brighton, Brighton, UK), B.A., MBA, Ed.D., FHEA, and chartered fellow CIPD, at present works at Brighton Business School as a lecturer in HRM, business context, research methods, and learning and development. She is a course director of the fully online final year undergraduate course, validated by University of Wales, with international students. Her research interests are in e-learning strategy, teachers’ support and development, and reflective learning. In her research study, she had pointed out that there would always be academic staff who manifested resistance to changes and innovation, referring to/dealing with technology enhanced learning which was the issue of pedagogics.

Traditional management approaches suggest that resistance is an enemy of change. However there is an increasingly attractive counter view which suggests, that, resistance is something to be explored and understood, in order that communication and understanding about the proposed change is better implemented. This is the approach taken in the
paper, which seeks to explore resistance among academic staff to the adoption of technology affordances in higher education teaching and learning. The initial hypothesis based on survey research suggests that there will always be faculty who eschew information and communication technologies (ICTs)—beyond basic PowerPoint™ and email—and thus will be unable to take advantage of learner engagement through the pedagogical affordances both of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and of Web 2.0. Institutions increasingly require staff to adopt basic engagement with VLEs, but that is as far it goes with many teachers. Rather than just have to put up with this situation, or make people participate despite their personal views, we should seek to understand better what causes such resistance, what underlying personal pedagogies are driving this perspective, and how best to accommodate strongly held personal pedagogic diversity amongst teaching staff. As part of a larger project to explore and map academic staff stances in relation to e-learning and e-teaching, the preliminary research discussed in the paper analyses initial qualitative unstructured interviews with staff, selected for their reluctance to explore the possible learning and teaching affordances of ICTs. Results from the initial study have been analyzed in relation to current thinking on change management discussions of resistance (Waddell & Sohal, 1998, Ford et al., 2008), in order to offer some tentative recommendations on how the phenomenon may be further studied and how institutions wishing to develop staff adoption of ICTs in learning and teaching may proceed. (Greener, 2010).

Conclusions

Currently wide-ranging discussion of the wide-spread use of technology in the study process takes place in the world. Technology in a students-centred way and in terms of division of labour, specialisation, economies of scale, and machines is used in all areas of life. Technology principles have been used to increase access, improve quality, and lower costs in e-learning as well.

Before implementation of the new training system at the university, the existing organization’s functionality, finance resources, human resources, and their potential, regarded as significant pedagogical preconditions of the successful study environment, have to be examined. That will provide sound basis for acquisition of new study skills using new study technology.

The ability to deliver personalized learning or students-centred learning is paramount and to provide platforms of tools that enable non-professionals to create software that helps different types of learners at the university study process is important. These tutor tools are likely to emerge as some form of personalized virtual tutoring as well.

Educators/Instructors/Teachers contribute to content development and catering for all types and styles of learners and their skills’ development and promote acceleration of the virtual schools and virtual study environment as well.

Resistance, as psychological aspect in education, is something to be illuminated, explored, and understood in students, instructors, and administration as well, in order that communication and understanding about the proposed change is better implemented. To explore resistance among academic staff to the adoption of technology affordances in higher education teaching and learning is significant, too.

References


The Essence and Structure of Information Competency of an Interpreter in the System of Continuing Education

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The paper highlights the problem of training of interpreters in the system of continuing education in Russia. The theoretical analysis of the essence and structure of the information competency of an interpreter in continuing education as subjects is proposed. The research techniques were document analysis, interviews, participant observation, work process analysis, and focus groups. This paper presents a brief overview of the information competency of an interpreter. The importance of the information competency in the structure of professional competency of an interpreter is acknowledged by the majority of modern experts. But there still exists the problem of determining the set of skills which present the information competency of an interpreter. This paper introduces the author’s view on the problem of defining the essence and structure of the information competency of an interpreter.

Keywords: professional competency, information competency of an interpreter, structure, ICTs (information communication technologies)

Introduction

Global integration processes, Russian assignment of the Bologna agreement, the adoption of the Concept of Modernization of Russian Education, Strategy of Information Society Development in the Russian Federation, the Concept of the Federal Program “Scientific and Pedagogical Personnel of Innovative Russia for 2009-2013”, and other legal documents guide the system of Russian education to the training of a qualified, competitive, competent, and responsible for the matter entrusted to him/her specialist, capable of continuous professional growth. The above mentioned strategies of development of Russian vocational education form a social order for the professional competency of a perspective specialist in cross-cultural communication, an interpreter, a member of the Information Society. The National Doctrine of Education in the Russian Federation, which defines the goals of education and training, ways to achieve them through public education policy, and the expected results of the education system in 2025, postulates that one of the main aims and objectives of education is “… a systematic update of all aspects of education that reflects the changes in culture, economics, science, engineering and technology, continuing education throughout a person’s life” (National Doctrine of Education in the Russian Federation, 2000, p. 6). So, one of the modern tendencies of the vocational system of education is continuity, which is a system of interacting educational programs aimed at development of professional qualifications of the graduate in accordance with his/her personal needs and socio-economic. Thus, taking into consideration the above mentioned tendencies and objectives of modern system of education, we

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state the problematic issue of our research, “the formation of the information competency of interpreters in the system of continuing vocational education”.

Methodology

The need for development of effective technologies of achieving innovative aims and objectives represented in the concept of modern Russian education, namely, the formation of professional competency, leads us to a systematic analysis of existing theoretical developments and practical experience in this field. The basis of all scientific researches is the methodology. Turning to the issue of our study—the formation of information competence of interpreters in continuing education—on the basis of theoretical analysis of psychological and educational literature, according to the concept of multi-methodological knowledge (P. Alekseev, A. Panin, V. Shvyrev, E. Yudin, etc.), and taking into consideration the idea of complementary complex development of methodological approaches in accordance with their hierarchical importance to the subject of scientific study (Yakovlev, 2006), we develop the general scientific basis, theoretical and methodological strategy, and practice-oriented tactics of our research. Thus, the process of formation of information competency of interpreters should be based on methodological approaches that suit the main characteristics of the process. Properly selected methodological approaches define a set of strategic directions of the research that leads to a solution of a number of issues, for example, working out the definitions in the field of research, identifying the specific characteristics of the object of study, and laws and principles of its development (Salamatov, 2011). Thus, on the basis of the analysis of contemporary tendencies in development of vocational education, especially considering the main features of training of perspective interpreters, we have chosen a system approach as a general scientific basis of our research, competence approach—as a theoretical and methodological strategy and context-modular approach—as a practice-oriented tactics.

General scientific level of methodology represents the theoretical concepts, applicable to all or most of the research types. The system approach, which is the basis of our research, is one of the most important general scientific levels of methodological approaches used to solve theoretical and applied problems in the field of pedagogical science. The systematic approach postulates the systematic manner of studying, complex consideration of the phenomena studied by a researcher. In this regard, the main instrument of system approach is a systematic analysis, which is a combination of methods and techniques for the study of complex objects. This group includes the methods of modeling, decomposition, heuristic, graphical methods, and others.

A theoretical and methodological strategy of our research is a competence approach. The competence approach to vocational education is understood as a set of general principles for determining educational goals, selecting the content of education, organization of educational process, and evaluation of educational outcomes in terms of competencies and learning outcomes. This approach allows clarifying the structure of the professional competency of an interpreter, states the content of key, general, or special competencies, and in its turn, provides the necessary conditions for the professional development of perspective specialists at all stages of their training.

A practice-oriented tactics of formation of interpreters’ information competency is a context-modular approach. Context-modular approach is one of the most promising directions of development of modern education, the essence of which is determined by its constituent approaches. The basic principles of contextual learning are: the unity of teaching, education and development, and integration of theory with practice; personal activity; modeling the contents and conditions of professional activities in the process of studying. Switching to
the modular approach, let us present the essence of modular technology education. As for core principles of its functioning they are principles of modularity, agility, flexibility, perceived opportunities, and parity. Modular technology education involves structuring the learning content into separate, logically complete elements—modules. Inside each module learning material is structured in the form of training elements. Elements within a module are interchangeable and movable. The flexibility of this solution is based on the variability of content and levels of training.

Data Analysis and Definitions

The latest tendency of Russian education policy is shifting the priorities from information-oriented approach to competence-oriented. Therefore, one of the most important goals of higher linguistic education nowadays is the process of formation of the professional competence of interpreters. As far as the main aim of our research is a systematic study and development of the process of the formation of information competency of interpreters in the system of continuing education, let us analyze and define the principal terminology of our research.

The first term under analysis is “interpreter”. While the term “interpreter” is often interchanged with the term “translator”, they seem not always clearly defined and used, though interpreting and translating skills are quite different from each other. Both professions compliment each other, but competency in one skill does not necessarily mean competency in the other. Interpreters render speech from one language into another verbally. They have an oral command of both languages being spoken, including slang, catchphrases, and cultural terminology. They possess good listening and interpersonal skills and employ short-term memory to ensure accurate interpretation. Interpreters face more pressure than translators, because they are bound by the time constraints of individual sessions. They do not have time to review and reflect upon their work or draw on outside resources; instead, they must monitor themselves for accuracy in the moment. Alternately, translators render written messages from one language into another. Instead of needing an accurate oral command of both languages, this type of professional must have strong writing and grammar skills as well as large vocabularies in both languages. Translators have time to think and review translations as well as access to reference materials, such as dictionaries and the Internet, with which they can confirm their word choices. They can also enlist the assistance of other people for feedback. Unlike interpreters, translators do not have to pay attention to body language or other interpersonal communication while doing their jobs, because their focus is on documents instead of people.

Having stated the main difference between the terms “translator” and “interpreter”, we switch to the term “professional competency”. As the professional competency is an integrative characteristic, the process of its formation is closely connected with formation and further development of each component of professional competency.

Belkin (2004) stated that “Professional competency of an interpreter—is an integrative characteristic of the student, including linguistic, socio-cultural, psychological and informational competency and allow the interpreter to carry out professional activities effectively” (p. 27). According to Zimnyaya (2002, p. 145), the linguistic competency of an interpreter is a combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities in verbal and non-verbal means necessary for understanding of people speaking foreign languages and creating their own programs of verbal behavior, setting appropriate objectives in situations of professional communication.

However, the linguistic competency is stayed as the first but not the only condition necessary for the professional success of an interpreter. This idea is proved by R. K. Mignyar-Beloruchev in the book How to
Become an Interpreter? (2000). There he (2000) admitted that in order to become a full-fledged interpreter, the specialist must “know the depth of culture of the people, whose language he learns” (p. 11). Therefore, an important role in the structure of the professional competency of an interpreter assigned to social competency, which according to Safonova (1996, p. 113), includes: knowledge of the national heritage and national mentality of the foreign country, and the ability to interpret the meaning of utterances and texts based on cultural characteristics of the communicants.

According to Chuzhakin and Palazhchenko (2002), in the process of professional communication, an interpreter has to overcome not only the linguistic and socio-cultural barriers, but also the psychological one. Obviously, in the course of their professional activities, interpreters, like nobody else, are always in an emergency. He/She is forced to control his/her emotions and conquer anxiety. Furthermore, an interpreter must control not only his/her own emotions, but also the external situation, and must keep in contact with both negotiators involved in communication. The research of Chuzhakin and Palazhchenko (2002) supports the existence of one more component—psychological competency—in the structure of the professional competency of an interpreter. Thus, psychological competency is an ability of an interpreter to create and follow the unified strategy of perception and understanding of another person in the process of professional communication (Chuzhakin & Palazhchenko, 2002, p. 112).

The fourth component in the structure of the professional competency of an interpreter—information competency—was added in the structure in last 10 years. It is obvious that the process of globalization and technological change was a key-factor for that vital addition. Thus, according to Belkin (2004), the information competency is “knowledge and skills in dealing with the relevant information (search for necessary information and its further analysis, processing, storing, sharing) based on ICTs (information communication technologies)” (p. 189). Nowadays, information competency is considered by the majority of scholars as a system generating component in the structure of the professional competence of an interpreter.

According to Miranda and Tarapanoff (2007), information competency is a group of competencies put into action when one is working with information. It could be expressed by the expertise forged when someone works with the information cycle and technologies and with different information contexts (Miranda & Tarapanoff, 2007). This competency, put into operation in work situations, can be seen as one of the requirements for the necessary professional profile to work with information. It crosses different business processes (managerial and technical) and different parts of an organization or activity. It can be compared to basic competencies that are acquired in educational situations and formalized in cognitive and behavior conquests. It is necessary to face problematic situations where information work has a primary role. Information competency can be identified on three dimensions: cognitive (knowledge); affective (attitudes); and situational (abilities). They correspond to knowing, know how, and know how to act in work situations when one is dealing with information problems that need solving on a daily basis.

The information competent student determines the nature and extent of the information needed, defines and articulates the need for information, identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources for information, considers the costs and benefits of acquiring the needed information, and reevaluates the nature and extent of the information need.

The information competent student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently, selects the most appropriate investigative methods or information retrieval systems for accessing the needed information, constructs and implements effectively-designed search strategies, retrieves information online or in person
using a variety of methods, refines the search strategy if necessary, and extracts, records, and manages the information and its sources.

The information competent student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his/her knowledge base and value system, summarizes the main ideas to be extracted from the information gathered, articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources, synthesizes main ideas to construct new concepts, compares new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine the value added, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information, validates understanding and interpretation of the information through discourse with other individuals, subject-area experts, and/or practitioners, and determines whether the initial query should be revised.

The information competent student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, and revises the development process for the product or performance.

The information literate student communicates the product or performance effectively with others.

The information competent student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally, understands many of the ethical, legal, and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology, follows laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources, and acknowledges the use of information sources in communicating the product or performance.

**Conditions of Realization**

Having set the goals of the process of continuing linguistic education—the formation of professional competency of interpreters, which includes information competency as a system generating component—we intend to speak about conditions of the effective realization of education process leading to the declared results. In this paper, we will speak about integration of ICTs in university practice as a necessary condition of training of the perspective interpreters.

According to Canadian scientist Penny Milton (2010), integration of ICTs in university education is “a complex proposition” (p. 2). The word “integration” means combining parts which work together and making a whole. The “parts to be combined” include the university context in which integration is to take place, the technologies provided, the technical skills of teachers, the technical support provided for the installation, maintenance, and upgrading of hardware and software, the pedagogical preferences and skills of teachers, the availability of appropriate electronic resources, and the skills and motivations of students.

Here we will highlight only one side of the problem of ICT integration, that is, types of ICTs used in education and ways they can be used in the process of formation of the information competency of perspective interpreters. ICTs are often categorized into two broad types: (1) the traditional computer-based technologies; and (2) the more recent and fast-growing range of digital net technologies. Let us take a brief look at these two categories to demonstrate the kinds of products and ideas that are covered by ICTs.

Traditional Computer-Based Technologies include: (1) Standard Office Applications like Word processing, Spreadsheets, Database software, Presentation software, Desktop publishing, etc.; and (2) Specialist Applications like Accounting package, Computer Aided Design, and translation system.

The second type of ICTs—digital net technologies—refers to the transmitting and receiving of data by electronic means, usually over some distance. They include: internal networks—usually referred to a local area network (LAN); external networks—communication technologies like e-mail, skype; search engines like google, yandex, yahoo; and publishing technologies like pubtoweb.
Introduction of ICTs into process of Higher Education is not a new scientific field of study. This issue has been the object of studying for lots of Russian and European scientists. In this connection, we can mention such Russian scientists as Elena Polat, Rodmona Potapova, Ekaterina Yastrebtseva, and European ones: Tom Reeves, S. Wills, Penny Milton, etc.. In this connection, Polat (2000) stated that ICT-integrating in the process of education should be complex. It can be considered as complex only if it involves the following principals: Firstly, the ICTs should be used in a didactically appropriate system, where various tools are complementary and enrich each other, and secondly, the ICTs should be used in various training activities (Polat, 2000, p. 8).

While complexly-used ICTs are a potentially powerful tool for extending educational opportunities, the opportunities of ICTs in formation of information competency of interpreters are as follows: (1) the accumulation of grammatical knowledge of a foreign language through the use of specialized computer programs; (2) enriching vocabulary of modern English language on the basis of e-mail communication with native speakers; (3) improving reading skills through the use of multimedia computer books or online materials; (4) improving the skills of listening comprehension on the basis of computer training programs or sound authentic texts on the Internet; (5) improving the speaking skills on the basis of the problematic discussion of the network materials; (6) development of self-regulation skills, in the process of live communication with native speakers; (7) acquiring the skills of network communication; and (8) the inclusion of students in the translation community through networking.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to study the content and structure of the information competency, and to analyze the theoretical aspects of the process of formation of interpreters’ information competency in the system of continuing vocational education. The data collection provided information to identify the meaning of the basic terms involved in the research. It was also possible to identify the exact skills and the competencies related to the information competency, and to realize the importance of ICT integration into the process of higher linguistic education. It is obvious that this scientific issue needs concretizing and implies further development.

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Writing Haiku in a Second Language: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Emotions of Second Language Learners

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The aim of the current study is to discuss the value of poetry writing in an L2 (second language) by investigating perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of 20 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) college freshmen regarding writing Japanese poetry, haiku in English. This paper first discussed issues and uses of literature in L2 contexts and addressed the current empirical inquiry into L2 haiku writing as a method for L2 learning. The study was designed as a qualitative research which investigated the participants’ reflection on writing L2 haikus for six weeks in an EFL college writing course. The data obtained was analyzed by using the coding system and showed that writing haiku in the target language was a challenging but valuable task for L2 learning among the EFL students. Especially, haiku composition allowed them to develop their L2 linguistic awareness.

Keywords: poetry writing, haiku, perceptions and attitudes, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts

Introduction

Many language teachers understand that studying and composing literature helps English learners to develop their voice and sense of audience, and express important social functions in the process (Iida, 2010). Poetry, in particular, offers special challenges, but one type of poetry that is manageable for English classrooms is haiku, a three-line Japanese poem with a specific number of syllables in each line. The fact is that using haiku is not restricted to Japanese language in L1 (first language) contexts. It is used in different educational contexts in the United States: understanding Japanese culture while studying haiku at the secondary level in an English classroom (National Endowment for Humanities, 2000); reading and writing haiku as a study of Japanese literature in the fourth grade (Stokely, 2000); and writing haiku as creative writing in an English classroom at the secondary level (Cheney, 2002). These studies have provided practical implications for using haiku at the primary and secondary levels.

As of now, however, there is a scant reporting on the theoretical framework for teaching haiku in an L2 (second language) and very little empirical research on haiku writing in L2 contexts (Iida, 2010). Lack of empirical evidence of poetry writing is a principal issue in the field of literature in L2 education (Hall, 2005; Paran, 2008), and it remains a question from the perspective of L2 literacy study: What is the role of poetry writing in L2 learning?. It is, therefore, crucial to conduct empirical research on the effects of poetry writing on L2 learning.

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This paper aims to address the value of poetry writing through EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students’ perceptions of haiku writing in an L2. Initially, it reviews previous studies of using literature in L2 contexts. Secondly, it describes empirical research on the perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of Japanese EFL college students concerning L2 haiku. Based on the results of this study, this paper discusses some ramifications of haiku writing into L2 writing classrooms.

**Use of Literature in L2 Contexts**

The application of literary learning in L2 contexts is not as popular as it is in L1. This is due to the difficulty in dealing with literature as a material for L2 learning. Eventually, the use of literature offers some challenges in the L2 classroom: Vocabulary, grammatical structures, and syntax in literary texts make it difficult for L2 learners to understand the content (Lazer, 1994); the focus of L2 learning is more on producing the target language accurately than on using it fluently (Zyngier, 1994); L2 students are expected to learn to write academically rather than creatively; there seems no connection between literary learning and the development of L2 proficiency; literary reading is time-consuming; and it can demotivate L2 students.

With these challenges, however, previous studies of L2 literary education have reported on the potential of using literature for L2 literacy development. Applied linguists regard literature as an useful material for L2 learning from the five aspects: developing L2 cultural awareness (Hanauer, 2001, 2004; WANG, 2009); enhancing L2 linguistic knowledge (Hanauer, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2010; Paesani, 2005; WANG, 2009); promoting L2 communicative competence (Kim, 2004); gaining awareness of critical thinking (Lasker, 2007; WANG, 2009; Vandrick, 2003); and helping self-discovery or personal growth (Hanauer, 2004, 2010; Lasker, 2007). The principal theory is the usage of literature as social practice (Allington & Swann, 2009; Hall, 2005; Kim, 2004; Zyngier, 1994). Of particular importance is to learn the target language as well as literature itself with consideration to its culture left behind the literary texts (Paran, 2008). Doing so allows L2 learners to develop literary, textual, and cultural knowledge of the target language in the process of constructing meaning in the texts. Paesani (2005) also supported this thought and asserted the significance of the usage of literary texts “as comprehensive input for the acquisition of grammatical forms and as the basis for meaning, form-focused communicative language use” (p. 22). This theoretical position, which refers to the use of literature as a means, not as an end, is fundamental in L2 contexts, because language learning is “not about simply learning new linguistic forms, but it is about learning how to construct, exchange, and interpret signs that have been created by someone else” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 22).

From the aspect of L2 writing, a limited number of empirical studies of literary writing have been conducted (Hanauer, 2010; Paran, 2008). Previous studies of L2 literary writing have suggested the use of literature as an integrated approach for reading and writing literary texts in L2 composition classrooms (Hirvela, 2005). Hanauer (2010), on the other hand, conceptualized a methodological guideline for poetry writing in an L2. His empirical research on poetry writing and ESL (English as a Second Language) learners allowed for the understanding of both lexical and textual characteristics of 844 poems written by 81 advanced ESL learners in an American state university. This study showed that L2 poetry is characterized as short, direct, descriptive, and personal, and that ESL learners can write poems by bringing “the individual perspective on particular events and experiences” and “the emotional states of the writer” (Hanauer, 2010, p. 53). It not only provides empirical evidence that L2 writers
have the ability to write poetry in the target language but also opens room for conducting further research on poetry writing and L2 writers.

Now, what needs to be investigated is the value of poetry writing as a tool for L2 learning from learners’ viewpoints, especially how L2 learners feel about poetry writing. This perspective leads to Hirvela’s (2005) assertion of the use of literature in an ESL writing class: “the degree of [ESL students’] acceptance [of reading and writing literature] may rely on the extent to which writing about literature is linked to academic literacy development” (p. 75). In this sense, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between poetry writing and L2 learning. Clarifying, with some empirical evidence, the positive impacts of poetry writing on L2 learning can lead to the expansion of theoretical rationale for the teaching of poetry writing in the L2 composition classroom.

The aim of the current study is to examine the potential of using haiku as a way for L2 learning in a Japanese EFL context. Specifically, two questions will be addressed: (1) What are the perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of EFL students concerning L2 haiku writing?; and (2) What are the potential contributions of haiku writing to L2 learning?.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 20 EFL students who registered for first-year English writing in the 2010 spring semester at a Japanese private university. Their English proficiency level ranged from 435 to 470 points on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) paper-based test. The participants were 17 Japanese, one Korean, one Brazilian, and one Myanmarese.

All Japanese students had studied English in middle and high schools under the Japanese educational system. No students who had lived in English-speaking countries were included in this group of participants. Several participants, however, had experiences of participating in a homestay program or short-term studying abroad ranging from 10 days to three months in English-speaking countries.

On the other hand, the three non-Japanese students had different backgrounds. The Brazilian male student had moved to Japan when he was six years old. He commuted to a Japanese elementary school and started to study English in a middle school, as the Japanese participants did. He had not studied English in Brazil. The Korean male student moved to Japan when he was 14. He started to learn English in the third grade in a Korean elementary school and had studied the language in Japanese middle and high schools. The Myanmarese male student moved to Japan when he was 15. He started to learn English in the fourth grade in Myanmar and had studied the language under the Japanese educational system since he moved to Japan. These three participants had never been to English-speaking countries.

The participants, regardless of being Japanese or non-Japanese, had experiences of reading and writing haiku at the primary and/or secondary level in Japanese schools.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Participants’ journal entries, self-reflection forms, and the transcription of interview were used as data collected for the current study.

Based on a pedagogical framework of poetry writing in ESL contexts (Hanauer, 2010) and during six weeks, the participants reviewed the concept of haiku, read some haikus in English, wrote 20 haikus concerning
unforgettable moments in their lives, and revised them based on the feedback from their classmates or the investigator. As a final product, they created a book of haiku consisting of the table of contents, an introduction, and 10 haikus chosen out of 20 written by the participants. While creating the book, they were asked to keep journals, in Japanese, of their learning experience of haiku writing in each lesson.

After six weeks, the investigator gave each participant an interview outside the classroom. It was tape-recorded and then transcribed. The purpose of interviewing was to examine “the hidden conceptual and emotional world of the individual” (Hanauer, 2003, p. 78) and to clarify how haiku writing had the impacts on L2 learning.

Data Analysis

The analysis entailed the categorization of the participants’ responses by using a coding system. The coding system allowed for the analysis of the participants’ individual utterances or explicit statements (Hanauer, 2001). This approach required a procedure of typing, translating, and transcribing the above self-reported documents, carefully reading the transcripts, establishing a coding system, setting internal categories, evaluating and interpreting the data, and reaching conclusions for the value of writing haiku in L2 learning. Overall, data analysis consisted of four stages.

Stage 1: Data preparation. The first stage of data analysis consisted of typing, translating, transcribing, and carefully reading the written documents on the task of writing haiku. The researcher first extracted the participants’ written responses regarding the task from their journal entries and self-reflections and then typed and translated the descriptions. As for the interview data, they were transcribed in Japanese and then translated into English. During the process of transcribing, the researcher tried to focus on a body part of the transcripts in order to keep the original meanings made by the participants. Essentially, all transcripts were produced for readable purposes. The aim of data analysis at this preliminary stage was to prepare written texts to build up a coding system.

Stage 2: Initial analysis. The second stage of analysis comprised careful reading of all the transcribed documents. The aim of this initial analysis and reading process was to propose a coding system which could be used to analyze the participants’ responses for the task of writing haiku. In doing so, the researcher carefully read each description and examined the type of responses provided by each participant. The result of this stage of analysis was the creation of a tentative coding system.

Stage 3: Establishing a coding system. The third stage of analysis involved the modification and verification of the tentative coding system generated in Stage 2. During this stage, all the participants’ transcribed documents were re-read and re-analyzed with the tentative coding system. Each description was compared with the coding system and new categories (and subcategories) were added to it, if necessary. The aim of this analysis was to make a clear differentiation between one category (and subcategory) and another in the coding system. The result of this stage was an exhaustive and exclusive coding system which could be used as an analytical tool for the descriptions of the participants.

Stage 4: Pattern analysis and results presentation. The fourth stage of analysis was to evaluate the reliability of this coding system. The researcher first re-analyzed and categorized all transcripts using the coding system produced in Stage 3 and then compiled a summary table of the frequency of the participants’ responses for the task of creating L2 haiku. The aim of the analysis at this stage was to find the patterns and identify what was learnt from haiku writing.
Results

This results section discusses perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of EFL students concerning L2 haiku composition. The first section presents the coding system and its set of internal categories and subcategories. The second section presents the summary table of the frequency of the participants’ responses for writing haiku.

The Coding System

All responses of the participants were divided into four categories: difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude. The first category, difficulty, consisted of six subcategories: syllables, seasonal references, self-expression, remembering, vocabulary, and previous learning experiences. Value was the second category including four subcategories: self-expression, vocabulary, audience awareness, and applicability to other genres. The third category, emotions, was based on the participants’ feelings of writing L2 haiku: anxiety, frustration, reluctance, surprise, interest, and sense of achievement. The last category, attitude, consisted of three subcategories: acceptance, resistance, and unsureness. Each category and its subcategories will be defined with specific examples from the data. All names shown in the examples are pseudonyms.

Difficulty. The first category of the coding system is difficulty. This category involves the statement regarding the problems, troubles, or challenges the participants encountered in the process of writing haiku in English. Difficulty of haiku composition is attributed to various factors ranging from lexical, structural, and pragmatic issues to the writer’s previous experience of English language learning.

Syllables. The difficulty of syllables is defined as statements in which the participants address the issue of the 5-7-5 syllable pattern which is a fundamental concept of haiku. The difficulty of syllables is attributed to the way to count syllables in English words, the use of exact number of syllables, and the adjustment to the syllable pattern. The following comments illustrate the difficulty of syllables:

   It was really hard to express my feelings for an unforgettable moment with only 17 syllables. My haiku never got 17 syllables, but in most cases it was 16 or 18. Anyway, it was challenging. (Takako, journal, May 20, 2010)
   It was difficult to count the syllable in each word and to follow the 5-7-5 pattern. (Maki, journal, May 20, 2010)

Seasonal references. The difficulty of seasonal references is based on statements the participants make to identify another structural issue of haiku, the use of a season-related word. As the following excerpts illustrate, this difficulty results in the integration of a seasonal reference to a haiku, the limitation of using a wide range of seasonal references, the decision-making of what seasonal reference should be used, and a lack of understanding of where and how to use it in texts.

   My challenge is to understand where to put a seasonal reference in texts. I wonder where a good place is to add it to my haiku. (Maho, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)
   I didn’t know a variety of seasonal references. It seems that seasonal references in my haikus were all whether cold or hot. (Maki, interview, July 1, 2010)

Self-expression. The difficulty of self-expression is described as responses in which the participants describe the issue of expressing themselves in writing haiku. This type of difficulty includes the uncertainty of integrating the writer’s ideas, the limitation of self-expression due to the pre-determined form, the challenge for how to express emotions, and a lack of repertoires to describe feelings in English. These features are shown in the following excerpts:
My challenge is to express my emotion without any exact emotional word, such as “happy” or “beautiful”. (Ayaka, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

I really wanted to avoid using the words directly represented my emotion, such as happy, sad, or disappointed, but I ended up in using them to express my feelings. That’s why my haikus have almost the same pattern to describe my emotion. (Saori, interview, July 1, 2010)

**Remembering.** The difficulty of remembering refers to comments the participants make concerning the issue of collecting information or materials to write a haiku. It is attributed to the problem of accessing past experiences and the number of memories the writer needs to reflect on. This happens at the very beginning stage of composing haiku. The following statements illustrate this type of difficulty:

First of all, it was difficult to remember ten memories to write haikus. (Takako, interview, June 29, 2010)

At first, I couldn’t remember ten memories. I didn’t have enough memories to remember, and... few memories came to my mind. (Rie, interview, June 29, 2010)

**Vocabulary.** The difficulty of choosing vocabulary is defined as comments in which the participants encounter lexical problems in the process of writing haiku. This difficulty results from both the writer’s individual lexical proficiency level (e.g., the limited amount of vocabulary) and the process of decision-making for using appropriate words to express emotions. The issue of vocabulary is related to the meaning construction and self-expression. The following excerpts illustrate this lexical issue:

Due to the very limited number of English vocabulary I knew, it was difficult to find appropriate words to express my emotions. I had to look up words, check the syllable, and understand the idiomatic expressions in a dictionary to write haiku. So, it took long time to write just one haiku. (Ayaka, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

I sometimes had a situation in which I looked up a word in the dictionary but I couldn’t find any word I wanted. So, I had to choose other Japanese phrases which had the same meaning and then to translate them to English. This process was really tough. (Takako, interview, June 29, 2010)

**Previous learning experiences.** The difficulty of writing haiku is also attributed to the participants’ previous English learning experiences. This type of difficulty is defined as the response in which the writer’s previous learning experiences have a negative effect on haiku composition. As the following excerpts illustrate, the difficulty comes from the writer’s insufficient experience of creative writing in English and Japanese, and the grammar-focused English learning in middle and high schools:

Although I didn’t have to worry too much about grammar during these haiku lessons, I couldn’t help caring about it. This prevented me from expressing my ideas clearly. (Ayaka, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

This was my first time... I had little experience of writing haiku even in Japanese, so I felt struggle with doing this activity in English at the beginning of the course. (Miyuki, interview, June 30, 2010)

**Value.** The second category of the coding system is the value of writing haiku in an L2. This category regards haiku writing as a beneficial and useful learning tool and as having positive impacts on L2 literacy development. Haiku writing is recognized as a valuable task in terms of self-expression, vocabulary, audience awareness, and applicability to other genres.

**Self-expression.** The value of self-expression is defined as statements in which the participants gain a greater awareness of expressing themselves and presenting voice in haiku. It involves the writer’s learning to express thoughts and feelings succinctly and specifically, becoming aware of meaning-making to represent
emotions, paying attention to his/her way for self-expression, and developing a sense of voice in texts. The following excerpts illustrate these features:

When I wrote haiku, I wondered if my image of “happy” and other readers’ images of “happy” were different. So, I started to think that I could convey, to readers, what I really wanted to say more clearly, if I said it with different expressions, not using the word, “happy” directly. (Ayaka, interview, June 30, 2010)

This haiku writing gave me chances to think about how I can express my feelings in more appropriate way in a short sentence. Although there are many words which have similar meanings, I learned to consider what word is best suitable for the representation of my emotion. (Naomi, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

**Vocabulary.** The value of vocabulary is seen as comments that the participants make to identify the relation between haiku writing and vocabulary acquisition. This value involves the learning of new vocabulary items, the study of vocabulary in terms of sounds and pronunciation, the acquisition of synonyms for a specific word, the awareness of the potential meanings of a word, and the attention to the pragmatic use of vocabulary. These aspects are seen from the following excerpts:

I had never paid attention to syllables in English learning. Through haiku writing, I started to study vocabulary with great awareness of syllables and pronunciation. I have realized that various English words suit my expressions that I produced in Japanese: I found many English words to refer to just one Japanese phrase. This task is valuable to increase vocabulary. (Kiyoshi, interview, June 28, 2010)

Through the process of creating a book of haiku, I have realized that there are different words and phrases which can be used to describe even one expression. I studied various expressions I could use in my daily life. For example, to describe summer, “hot” can be used, but if I use “humid”, it implies hotness and high level of water vapor. So, it was a good approach to develop vocabulary in English. (Ayaka, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

**Audience awareness.** Audience awareness is defined as statements in which the participants mention the importance of becoming aware of readers in the process of writing haiku. This value is related to the development of awareness of readers, the attempt to write haikus which make sense to readers, and the increase in a sense of reader-writer interaction. These features are reflected in the following responses:

I learned to understand the meaning of conveying my message in haiku. Different from making sentences, haiku comes from indirectness so that we can freely make meaning. An interesting point of writing haiku is to write for readers and wonder if “my haiku is interpreted as I thought”. (Megumi, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

The interpretation of a haiku can be taken as this or that. We can have our own interpretation. Writers can also have a new finding that their haiku is interpreted differently. This is what I studied and this is useful next time when I write. Italians may have interpretation this way. Americans can interpret that way. I should pay more attention to readers in a writing process. (Maho, interview, June 28, 2010)

**Applicability to other genres.** The value of applicability to other genres writing is defined as responses in which the participants think that the knowledge, processes, and strategies acquired through haiku writing can be transferrable to other genre writing in English. The statement includes the effect of haiku composition on the argumentative essays in the post-test, a series of writing processes of writing haiku, the techniques and strategies to integrate the writer’s ideas to the written texts, and the negotiating skill to construct, develop, and present his/her ideas. The following comments illustrate the value of applicability to other genre writing:

Haiku has restriction, 5-7-5, right? So, the process of negotiating what to say and how to say it in a restricted format and writing my emotions… This is all I studied in haiku lessons. I think I could use these techniques to write this essay [post-test]. You see my experience in this essay, right? (Kyine Nanda, interview, July 1, 2010)
I learned to express what I wanted to say more clearly. I had something I wanted to say, but I couldn’t write it in the first essay [pre-test]. But, in the second essay [post-test], writing haiku allowed me to develop a skill to write whatever I’m thinking in English. When I wrote it [post-test], I put my experience. I tried to describe a particular moment in which I actually sat and listened to the lecture in an English class. (Hyun-Jyung, interview, July 8, 2010)

**Emotions.** The third category of the coding system is emotions. It refers to the participants’ reactions, responses, and feelings for writing haiku in English during six weeks. Emotions are divided into six subcategories: anxiety, frustration, reluctance, surprise, interest, and the sense of achievement.

**Anxiety.** Anxiety is defined as the participants’ negative feelings, such as worry, nervousness, or unease about writing haiku. This type of feeling is attributed to the uncertainty of writing L2 haiku, the difference between Japanese and English haiku, and a lack of experience of writing creatively in English. The following excerpts illustrate the participants’ different types of anxiety:

- Japanese and English are two different languages, and I wonder how I can write haiku in English. (Ayaka, journal, May 20, 2010)
- I can manage to write Japanese haiku with a seasonal reference and the adjustment of 5-7-5 syllables, but it looks difficult to do so in English. I’m not sure if I can write haiku in English, because 5-7-5 in English haiku consists of the number of syllables, not the number of letters. (Saori, journal, May 13, 2010)

**Frustration.** Frustration is described as the participants’ feelings of being upset and irritated in the process of writing haiku. This emotion results in the struggle of writing haiku, the uncertainty for handling issues they face, and the unsuccessful in writing poems. The following responses reflect the participants’ frustrations:

- I cannot write at all!! It is very difficult, and today I actually have troubles in writing haiku. Using 5-7-5, … but how can I do it? I wonder if this syllable pattern is an interesting point in haiku… I try to think and write, but I cannot write a haiku. (Miyuki, journal, May 27, 2010)
- It was very difficult and I kept asking myself, “What, what’s this? What is it for?” Once I encountered a problem, I had no idea how to express what I want to say. So, it had been really tough. (Takako, interview, June 29, 2010)

**Reluctance.** Reluctance is categorized as the participants’ unwillingness or hesitance to write haiku in English. It is a more negative feeling than frustration and it decreases the motivation to write poetry. As the excerpts illustrate below, reluctance results from the writer’s encountering linguistic and structural problems concurrently which prevent him/her from writing and increase his/her disinterest in this genre:

- From the beginning, I didn’t like to write haiku. (Rie, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)
- It’s difficult to write a haiku even in Japanese, and it’s obviously certain that writing in English is more difficult. In Japanese, I can just write down any words which come to my mind and easily adjust it to 5-7-5 syllables, but in English, I must consider the vocabulary and its syllables. … When I don’t know any specific word I want to use in haiku, I must look up the word in the dictionary. What’s the worse, I cannot easily start to write what I’m thinking about. So, I hate it. (Kana, journal, May 20, 2010)

**Surprise.** Surprise refers to the participants’ positive comments based on their unexpected reactions or new discoveries for English haiku. Surprise is attributed to the fact that the writer creates L2 haiku in the writing class, the understanding of the notion of multiple interpretations, and the noticing of haiku making sense even in English with the same format as Japanese haiku. This emotion is seen especially at the early stage of this course. The following statements mirror the above points:
I’m so surprised to know that there were different interpretations depending on people even when we discussed the same haiku. (Hitomi, journal, May 13, 2010)

I’m surprised to know that English haiku also consists of a 5-7-5 syllable pattern and a seasonal reference. (Naomi, journal, May 13, 2010)

**Interest.** Interest is defined as the statement the participants make to show his/her curiosity or enjoyment for writing haiku in English. As the following excerpts show, this emotion includes a new approach of English language learning referring to the use of haiku as a learning tool, the difference between Japanese and English haiku, and the expectations for working on and understanding more about this genre.

English haiku seems different from the one I know. Haiku was rigidly formal to me, but it’s actually not. I feel more freedom to express my idea in English haiku!! I want to express my feelings with some words I like. (Hyun-Jyung, journal, May 13, 2010)

It’s interesting to know that English haiku is interpreted differently depending on readers. I had felt that Japanese haiku was old-fashioned, but I didn’t feel that way in English haiku. Rather, I want to read English haiku more. (Maki, journal, May 13, 2010)

**The sense of achievement.** The sense of achievement is described as the participants’ satisfaction or fulfillment of writing haiku or creating a book of haiku in English. This feeling involves the completion of writing each haiku, the accomplishment of creating a book of haiku while overcoming linguistic and structural difficulties, and the increase in confidence in English writing. The following statements reflect this type of emotion:

English haiku is different from Japanese one, right? So, I felt difficulty in writing haiku at the beginning of this course. But, when I got used to it, I came to look up words in the dictionary and willingly use them in my haikus. Using these words allowed me to gain new knowledge and I could finally create a book of haiku. It was a good experience. (Satomi, interview, July 1, 2010)

When I first wrote a haiku, I couldn’t make it. But, as I kept writing haiku, I started to feel that the activity was great fun, and I could finally create a book of haiku. I learned to feel more comfortable writing in English. (Kana, interview, July 8, 2010)

**Attitude.** The last category of the coding system is attitude. Attitude is defined as the participants’ thoughts, perceptions, and position-taking for the use of haiku as an L2 learning method reflecting on their poetry writing experience. It consists of three subcategories: acceptance, resistance, and unsureness.

**Acceptance.** Acceptance is described as statements in which the participants take positive attitudes toward writing haiku in English. As the following responses illustrate, it involves the desire to keep writing haiku, the satisfaction with haiku writing, and the recommendation of using haiku as a learning method to other EFL learners:

Haiku is based on your experience, right? You keep writing your own experience in haiku and consequently, you learn to write your experience as your ideas or feelings. … so, … I recommend haiku writing to other Japanese students because they can write their experiences, express their feelings and apply some techniques of writing haiku to other English essays. (Maho, interview, June 28, 2010)

I have realized that English gets closer since I wrote haiku. Before I took this course, my perception of English writing was just difficult. As I had to write sentences paying attention to grammar, it made me feel difficult. Though I still have difficulty in writing, English gets familiar to me. Writing haiku allows me to notice that I can use English. I realize I can express my emotions in English. (Asami, interview, July 1, 2010)

**Resistance.** Resistance is defined as the participants’ negative attitudes toward haiku composition. It is illustrated by the writer’s dissatisfied comments in writing haiku including the following aspects: the difficulty in
negotiating the process of writing haiku, the judgment that haiku is not a useful task as a learning tool, and the
doubt that haiku writing contributes to the development of English writing skills. The following responses reflect
the participants’ negative attitudes:

I wouldn’t recommend this learning approach to those who resist writing haiku, like me. I stumbled along the way.
Due to the limitation of syllable use, they might use only simple word. … I wonder if it would be a good exercise to
express their emotion in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. (Rie, self-reflection, June 24, 2010)

Haiku was difficult. When I wrote haiku, I had to look up words in a dictionary because of a lack of vocabulary, and
it was impossible to write something only with 17 syllables. So, it’s much easier to write my idea freely. (Takako,
interview, June 29, 2010)

Unsureness. Unsureness is categorized as statements to show the participants’ uncertainty of whether haiku
writing is meaningful in English language learning. It results in the uncertainty for the writers to realize whether
L2 haiku composition helps to improve their English writing skills:

I’m not sure if writing haiku helps to develop my writing skills at this point. Later, I will see how much my writing
ability develops. (Takako, interview, June 29, 2010)

Well, I’m not sure whether I learned to express what I wanted to say in haiku. (Rie, interview, June 29, 2010)

Category Summary Table

Using the above category system, a summary table of frequencies of the participants’ responses of each
subcategory is presented. Table 1 shows the frequency counts and percentages concerning L2 haiku composition.

Table 1

Frequency of the Participants’ Responses Concerning Difficulties, Values, Emotions, and Attitudes (N = 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty</td>
<td>Syllables</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seasonal references</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Previous learning experiences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audience awareness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applicability to other genres</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reluctance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of achievement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsureness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 1, the difficulty of haiku writing in an L2 is attributed to various aspects. For
instance, 70% of the participants felt difficulty in dealing with the syllable-related issues. In addition, 50% of the
participants expressed difficulty with seasonal references. These results suggest that more than a half of the participants encountered structural issues in writing haiku. On the other hand, the difficulty of vocabulary covers 40%, implying that several participants faced such lexical problems as choosing words or phrases to express themselves in the writing process. In relation to the construction of meaning, self-expression is a major difficulty which 65% of the participants encountered in writing L2 haiku. The low percentage of remembering (15%) refers to potential problems of the meaning construction in texts, and that of previous learning experiences (30%) indicates that a minimal experience of creative writing or their grammar-oriented English learning prevents them from creating haiku. Thus overall, the difficulty of L2 haiku composition is attributed to structural, lexical, and semantic issues in expressing voices.

Table 1 also demonstrates the value of writing L2 haiku especially in terms of vocabulary, self-reflection, and the applicability to other genre writing. Eighty-five percent of the participants commented on the value of haiku writing for learning new vocabulary. This suggests that haiku writing provides them with opportunities to acquire new lexical items, and to gain awareness of word choice and increase vocabulary. Seventy-five percent of the participants viewed the value of haiku writing as a way for self-expression. As described above, self-reflection involves a series of processes of constructing meaning in writing, and this indicates that haiku composition is a valuable task in developing a greater awareness of the writer’s voice. In relation to the applicability to other genres, 70% of the participants regarded haiku as an effective learning approach. This indicates that the knowledge, processes, and strategies in the process of writing haiku can be transferrable to different types of English texts. The comparatively low percentage of audience awareness (30%) and repertoires (20%) implies that haiku composition is a valuable task for some participants to gain awareness of readers and develop repertoires in English writing. The overall analysis of the value suggests that haiku writing is useful for L2 learning from the aspect of acquiring vocabulary and gaining a greater awareness of self-expression, along with the applicability of knowledge and techniques used in haiku composition to other genre writing.

As for emotions in writing haiku, 55% of the participants showed an interest in studying this genre and 50% of the participants expressed the sense of achievement. This result suggests that more than a half of the participants had positive feelings for writing haiku. The third highest percentage of this category is surprise, at 40%. This means that some participants had unexpected feelings by noticing or finding something new in the process of creating L2 haiku. However, the comparatively low percentage of the participants shows negative emotions for haiku writing, such as anxiety (30%), frustration (15%), or reluctance (10%). In this way, haiku writing is a satisfying task for most of the participants.

In the last category, acceptance covers 70% of the participants. On the other hand, some participants (40%) resist writing L2 haiku. This indicates that the majority of participants took positive attitudes toward L2 haiku composition and they were satisfied with the use of haiku as a way for English learning.

**Discussion**

The results of close analysis of the data show that writing haiku in English is a valuable task for L2 learning. A principal contribution of haiku composition is the development of L2 linguistic awareness. The majority of participants agree with the perspective that haiku writing helps to increase vocabulary, acquire new vocabulary, and choose appropriate lexical items to present emotions in texts. The development of L2 linguistic awareness
can be seen as a result of the participants’ negotiations of meaning construction in a structurally designed format. Haiku composition requires the writers to choose lexical items in order to adjust the 5-7-5 syllable pattern. For instance, when the writers encounter a situation in which their chosen words do not fit the syllable pattern, they are expected to find an alternative, look it up in the dictionary, understand its usage and meaning, confirm how it works, and decide to use it in texts. This process makes it difficult for some participants to write haiku. However, this linguistic negotiation process allows for a greater awareness of L2 knowledge. In other words, the attempt at adjusting the 5-7-5 syllable pattern enables EFL students to carefully look at L2 linguistic items. In this way, the students’ perceptions of writing haiku reflect the theoretical assumption that the use of literature enhances L2 linguistic awareness (Hanauer, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2010, 2011; Paesani, 2005; WANG, 2009).

The analysis of the categories also illustrates the evidence that L2 haiku composition has positive impacts on the awareness of self-expression. Most of the participants perceive haiku writing to be a valuable task for developing a sense of self-expression. Composing haiku is a genre-specific writing to express the writer’s voice and is regarded as a task for the participants to negotiate the meaning to express their thoughts in texts. The fact is that, however, self-expression was a main difficulty the majority of participants faced in the process of writing haiku. This difficulty is attributed to their previous learning experiences (e.g., the minimal experience to write in English or the unfamiliarity with expressing emotions in the target language). However, the challenge of expressing emotions in a predetermined format allows the participants to negotiate the process of constructing, developing, and producing meaning, and as a consequence, it leads to the development of a greater sense of voice. This finding supports the argument that L2 poetry writing emphasizes the importance of self-expression (Hanauer, 2004), and composing haiku assumes this conceptual aspect of poetry writing. In this sense, writing haiku can be a viable approach to develop self-expression with a greater sense of voice in L2 writing.

The complete list of the categories further shows the contribution of writing haiku to other L2 genre writing. The participants’ perceptions that the knowledge, processes, approaches, or strategies in haiku writing are applicable to other text types account for 70%. Some possible transferable factors are the processes of negotiating meaning, the techniques of gathering impressions, extracting necessary information from them, and narrowing down a main argument, the strategies to use their personal experience to develop the argument, and the approaches to write it succinctly. This finding provides some empirical support for literacy transfer theory (Hanauer, 2011) in which literacy skills in poetry writing such as “the ability to handle metaphor, awareness of linguistic structures, conciseness of expression, imagistic description, emotional communication and a range of additional possibilities” (p. 83) can overlap other genres in writing. It also posits the significance of the contribution of writing haiku in interdisciplinary settings, which is the evidence of the L2 literacy development from the perspective of looking across the curriculum at different types of writing.

Overall, writing haiku in English has the potential to expand L2 linguistic knowledge, enhance a better understanding of voice and self-expression, gain a greater awareness of writer-reader interaction, and develop L2 literacy skills transferrable to other genre writing.

Implications

The current study has explored perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of EFL students in a Japanese college context concerning L2 haiku writing. It presents not only the value of composing L2 haiku but the difficulty or
challenge of poetry writing in the freshman college writing classroom. The final section of this paper discusses some pedagogical implications for teaching haiku writing in L2 contexts reflecting on the difficulties the EFL students faced in the process of writing haiku in English.

A major issue is time framework. Since the haiku-related lessons in the current study were administered within a very restricted time frame, an approximately 30-45 minutes’ lesson one class meeting per week for six weeks. This limitation might prevent the participants from deeply understanding how to negotiate and produce L2 written texts in the classroom. From a teacher-researcher viewpoint, the limitation caused a practical decision of focusing on each student’s individual work with minimal chances to collaborate with other classmates, such as peer reading or group discussion during the lessons. In other words, the more opportunities to receive feedback from classmates as well as the instructor might provide the participants with increased chances to create their satisfying haiku in English. This time-related issue implies the need for extending the time period and the incorporation of feedback to the extended framework. The introduction of peer-feedback can enable the students to gain an awareness of writer-reader interaction, which can lead to the development of audience awareness in L2 writing. This might be one approach to decrease the uncertainty of whether their written texts make sense to their audience. Hence, it is important to establish language feedback groups from both peers and the instructor and it can allow L2 students to use the target language for communicative purposes.

Another issue is how to handle L2 linguistic difficulties. As discussed, the difficulty is attributed to the students’ L2 proficiency level (e.g., limited vocabulary) and previous learning experience (e.g., the limited English repertoires or a minimal experience of creative writing). It can also possibly be due to a wide range of linguistic negotiations in the process of writing haiku in English. This linguistic negotiation process consists not simply of meaning construction but of adjusting the number of syllables. These factors seem to make it difficult for L2 learners to write L2 haiku. A possible approach for handling this issue is to present a list of sensory words and seasonal references, both of which are necessary to describe a specific moment and to possibly represent their voices in poetry. Providing L2 students with these linguistic sources to participate in a language-use activity makes it possible to reduce their difficulty, trouble, and even anxiety in writing haiku. This approach will leave room for writers to negotiate the process of constructing meaning with linguistic and semantic choices to articulate their voices. In addition, explicit vocabulary instruction might be beneficial to L2 learners to create haiku in English.

These L2 linguistic difficulties are also related to the issue of self-expression. The result of data analysis shows that the participants are not sure how to express their voices in haiku: Some presented their voices directly using such emotional terms as happy, sad, or angry; others did so describing a moment as visibly as possible and it represented their voices in haiku. In terms of self-expression, both ways of presenting themselves work in haiku. Reflecting on the nature of haiku, however, a more effective way of teaching haiku writing may be to take the notion of multiple interpretations seriously and have L2 learners present their voices by leaving room for the readers to negotiate the poetic texts (Iida, 2010). Using the exact emotional words can prevent the readers from having different interpretations and the writer from developing repertoires for self-expression in the target language. In order to benefit from this genre-specific writing, an explicit instruction for self-expression such as how the students can express emotions without any exact emotional phrases and how sensory words or seasonal references can help to represent their voices in texts, will provide L2 learners with more opportunities to negotiate
meaning and express themselves in a meaningful, satisfying, and intended way, and ultimately to develop their repertoires in L2 writing. Doing so might reduce their L2 linguistic difficulties and facilitate the creation of haiku in the target language.

From a practical viewpoint, it might be better to prepare more sample haikus and provide L2 learners with sufficient time to read them to recognize how voice is manifested in texts. Taking adequate time to teach haiku writing with integration to language feedback group and explicit instruction of lexical choices for self-expression would enable L2 learners to better understand haiku writing and possibly to improve their L2 written performance.

References


Offering English and American Literature Optional Courses to Enhance Humanistic Qualities of Students in Universities of Science and Technology*

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Recently, the universities of science and technology pay more attention to their own specialized subjects and take little notice of humanities. This phenomenon results in the weakness of college students' humanistic qualities. Therefore, cultivating and enhancing students' humanistic qualities in universities of science and technology become the main issues that are viewed intensively by the current educational circles. This paper analyzes the current situation of English and American literature optional courses in universities of science and technology, gives the importance of offering the optional courses of English and American literature, and analyzes the active roles and important significance of optional courses of English and American literature in the course of humanistic qualities of students in universities of science and technology. This paper also gives the necessities and new methods of giving the optional courses of English and American literature under the circumstances of college English teaching reform.

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Keywords: English and American literature optional courses, students in universities of science and technology, humanistic quality, college English teaching

The Current Situation of English and American Literature Optional Courses in China’s Universities

Nowadays, our country’s universities all have the Western literature courses for English majors. English and American literature courses are designed as the compulsory courses or optional courses for English majors, which focus primarily on some famous Western writers and their classic works as well as literary theories and literary criticisms. As we know, the main purpose of literature courses is to cultivate students to grasp the basic literary theories and methods by reading, appreciating, and understanding the original versions of English classic works. From reading and analyzing amount of English and American literature works, students can broaden their minds and enlarge their knowledge structures; they can also enhance their basic skills in foreign languages and humanistic qualities and enhance their understanding of Western cultures. However, non-English majors,
especially some students in universities of science and technology, take little notice of English and American literature optional courses. From analyzing the curriculum designs of general education optional courses of most universities of science and technology, English and American literature optional courses cannot take a slice among humanistic quality courses. Some universities only give students some general optional courses like Western culture and Western literature. The main reason is that “With the rapid development of society, universities are developing new courses” (FAN & RUI, 2005, p. 152). This phenomenon results in the small amount of English and American literature optional courses. Even though some universities have the English and American literature optional courses, they also have some problems like irrationalities of course designs of English and American literature optional courses. Some universities of science and technology of our country are very similar to the course designs of English and American literature of English majors, namely, “literary history + selected readings” (WANG, 2002, p. 10). The knowledge of literary history and classic literary works is general and thorough; in addition, language abilities of most students in universities of science and technology are limited, therefore, students cannot understand the classic points of literary works; they always feel it hard and tough to understand.

Their learning task is condensed to remember the history settings, events, characters, works, thoughts, and assessments of English and American literature. The teaching competence of literature course, like enlightening spirits, broadening mind, recognizing life, enriching spiritual cultural life cannot be realized. (FAN & RUI, 2005, p. 151)

English and American literature courses are so difficult for students to understand that students become indifferent to literature courses, even not interested in them at all. In addition, English and American literature courses have more knowledge of English majors, plus, the hours of literature courses are limited, and students can only learn some superficial and shallow knowledge. As far as the students are concerned, English and American literature optional courses have the low rates of course credits, they are easy to be passed during the examination, and they have almost nothing to do with the postgraduate examination and students’ future careers, hence, students place emphasis on the credits instead of knowledge. They often do not attach importance to the English and American literature optional courses, even absent in the class. “The problems mentioned above are well recognized and being addressed in the deepening educational reform that is gaining unabated momentum in China at the moment” (DU, 2004, p. 211). Therefore, while we have been carrying out the educational reforms, we should reasonably arrange curriculum designs and give students English and American optional courses in more aspects, and we should make English and American optional courses the beneficial compensation of English teaching.

The Current Analyses of Humanistic Quality Educations in Universities of Science and Technology

The universities of science and technology are the main parts of our country’s advanced education. They are the cradles of cultivating high-tech talents of our country. Their basic knowledge made great contributions to our country’s scientific advancement.

Enhancing their humanistic quality education and cultivation is not only beneficial to students’ comprehensive developments, help them construct the right life concepts, value concepts, construct the healthy personalities, and at the same time, it directly influences the developing direction of future society as well. (CHENG, SHEN, & GAO, 2009, p. 56)
However, in recent years, many universities of science and technology pay more attention to the technical and specialized knowledge and ignore the humanistic qualities of students. Consequently, the learning aim of students in universities of science and technology is not comprehensive. Students are indifferent to humanities and humanistic education that are not associated with their specialized courses. This phenomenon finally shows that a bunch of students cannot be cultivated the knowledge of language and literature, although the academic achievements of their specialized courses are excellent. Recently, the English teaching of students in universities of science and technology focuses primarily on English grammar and language skills and attaches importance to the application of English, which results in the students’ indifference of the Western cultures. Therefore, universities of science and technology should pay more attention to tech-knowledge as well as the humanistic education. However, in recent years, some surveys suggest that many students ignore the general optional courses, especially some courses that are associated with the humanities. Universities of science and technology have the tendency to attach importance to specialized courses and to take little notice of humanistic qualities in the course of teaching conceptions, cultivating modes and curriculum designs, and so forth. Their specialized educations make students have the superficial knowledge and lead to the unreasonable knowledge structures. The students cultivated by these universities might be specialized in terms of knowledge, abilities, even thoughts and interests. The specialized education of universities of science and technology should combine the general educational contents of humanities and combine specialized education and general education. In the society under the development of information technology, our country’s universities of science and technology should reasonably carry out the curriculum designs and subject structures, and combine English and American literature optional courses and college English teaching. We should give students the specialized education as well as the cultivation of humanistic qualities, “combine the specialized education and humanistic education, widespread humanistic spirits” (WU, 2007, p. 96), and enhance students’ humanistic qualities.

The Necessities and Feasibilities of Offering English and American Literature Optional Courses in the Universities of Science and Technology

English and American literature taught something; it was a source of knowledge. In any event, once literature was established in the curriculum, it was subjected to the formal discipline of criticism, which ultimately consisted of taking it part (and putting it back together again) to see how and why as well as what it was and meant. (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 2004, p. 1)

English and American literature has a long history of profound cultures. It is not only the cultural signal of life experiences, but also the language arts which are filled with humanistic spirits. It has the profound historic basis, it is the superior art of language, it is the reaction to the realistic life, and it is the humanistic and esthetic course.

It considers the mythology as the origin, considers the religion as the land, considers the philosophy as the spirit, and considers politics, ethics and morality as its social function. The literature embodies the attitude, experience, perception of people and ego, people and objective, and of the relationship of ego and objective world. (WU, 2002, p. 146)

English and American literature optional courses represent humanistic cultures. Not only can they promote English learning, but also they are courses which can cultivate the perfect person. Offering the English and American literature optional courses to students can grasp self, taste life, and enhance self’s cultural quality. “Offering the English and American literature courses to students can better control self, taste life, enhance
cultural spirits of oneself. In a word, literature is the combination of language art and humanity spirit" (WU, 2002, p. 146). English and American literature is the main part of general education. As we all know, general education is also called common education. It means the mutual education which college students are commonly carried out. Its purpose is to make students have the comprehensive knowledge as an integrated person and make students have the free and harmonious development in the aspect of personality and study, sense and sensibility, and body and psychology.

The purpose of enhancing humanistic quality education of students in universities in science and education is to make students’ knowledge structures more reasonable and make students’ qualities more comprehensive, more adaptable, and more creative. The purpose of having English and American literature optional courses in the universities of science and technology is to:

Enlarge the teaching individuals of English and American literature courses, make English and American literature courses be out of the limitation of English majors’ specialized courses, make college students’ humanistic quality courses universal and general… make every student has the opportunity to sense the beauty and spirit of excellent English and American literary works. (FAN & RUI, 2005, p. 153)

Moreover, college English teaching converts to enhancing comprehensive qualities and applied abilities instead of passing the college English test only, which gives the rationality and joint of having the English and American literature optional courses. In addition, English and American literature optional courses become the main parts of the reform of college English teaching. English and American literature optional courses are attached to arts and literary humanistic courses of our country’s general education optional courses. On the whole, humanities first refer to literature, “It is a kind of quality—cultivation course. From reading English and American literature works, students are actively involved in the process of seeking, finding and creating of contexts. Students can grasp strict analytical styles, form and accurate expressions” (WANG, 2002, p. 11). The core of English and American literature optional courses is “to broaden students’ cultural visions and thoughts, to enhance comprehensive humanitic qualities, and to cultivate the consciousness and competence of cross-cultural communication” (FAN & RUI, 2005, p. 151). Since the beginning of the quality education, universities of science and technology should be the mind reader of cultivation goals that can promote people’s all-round developments.

The goal of humanistic spiritual education is to enlighten people’s living wisdom, and deepen the thoughts of life value, so that it can create an integrated personality that is free and all-round developed. English and American literature courses act an important spiritual enlightenment and educational function. (WU, 2007, p. 96)

The goal of English and American literature optional courses must fix on the reading and interpretation of classic works. It should pay little attention to the systematicness and coherence of English and American literary knowledge. It should pay little attention to the theories of literary criticism, either. It should make students experience and inspire English and American literature. (FAN & RUI, 2005, p. 153)

**Suggestions of English and American Literature Optional Courses in Universities of Science and Technology**

When linguists and language specialists sought to improve the quality of language teaching in the late nineteenth century, they often did so by referring to general principles and theories concerning how languages are learned, how knowledge of language is represented and organized in memory, or how language itself is structured. (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p. 14)
Therefore, it is very important and necessary to study how to teach college students to learn English and American literature.

Firstly, in terms of course design, we should combine English learning with English and American literary learning on basis of language and student-centered environment. While we place emphasis on enhancing the development of students’ language skills, we should enhance students’ recognitions of English and American cultures. We should select some literary writers who come from different periods, and their selected reading works on basis of the course design and course schedule of optional courses. At the same time, the difficulties of selected reading works should be in accordance with the English levels of most students from universities of science and technology. The contents of these selected reading works should be concerned with life, emotion, and some other aspects of students’ life. The styles should be thought firstly the long and short novels and then poems or some other difficult parts. Arranging the course contents like this can make students learn the literary knowledge for their future English learning.

Secondly, in terms of curriculum design, we should combine English learning with English and American learning in the course of students and language. We should enhance students’ language skill developments as well as enhance the English and American cultures. We can select some representatives and famous writers and their works on basis of the curriculum design and time arrangement. At the same time, the selected reading parts of works should be simple for students in universities of science and technology to read and understand. The contents of the literary works should be related to their college lives, emotions, ethics, and so forth. Students can read long and short novels first and then the poems and other difficult reading parts. According to this sort of curriculum arrangement, students can apply the newly-learnt cultural knowledge to their later learning.

Thirdly, in terms of teaching methods, “in order to manage a class successfully, the teacher has to be aware of what students are doing and, where possible, how they are feeling. It means being able to move around the class, getting the level of proximity right” (Harmer, 2000, p. 16) first, and teachers can arouse students’ interests in learning English and American literature optional courses by applying to the multimedia instruments. Teachers can also apply to class discussions, morning reports, character switch, and so forth to make students in universities of science and technology touch the art and beauty of English and American literature within the limited class time and the limited language skills, which can make students grasp the humanistic knowledge beyond the specialized knowledge.

The Important Significance of Offering English and American Literature Optional Courses to Students in Universities of Science and Technology

The teaching goal of college English is to cultivate students’ comprehensive and applied abilities of English, especially the ability of speaking and listening. It should make students communicate with others effectively in their future learning, career, and social communications, and at the same time, enhance their autonomous learning abilities, enhance their comprehensive cultural qualities, and eventually be accustomed to the requirements of our country’s social developments and international interactions. Therefore, when we design college English courses, we should take the cultivation of students’ cultural quality and the teaching of international cultural knowledge into consideration as well. According to this, it is necessary to carry out humanity qualities of students in universities of science and technology by giving them the general educational optional courses. English and
American literature optional courses have the important impact on giving humanity qualities of students in universities of science and technology. English and American literature optional courses will be beneficial to the cultivation mode and subject construction of our country’s universities of science and technology in terms of college English teaching. Teachers and students in universities of science and technology should place an emphasis on its development. English and American literature optional courses are the important supplements of students’ English teaching in universities of science and technology, they are also the main framework of humanistic quality education. They are superior to other subjects in terms of humanistic quality education. Therefore, if we want to enhance students’ humanistic education and create humanity spirits, we will enhance the cultivation of English skills, and at the same time, we will attach importance to English and American literature optional courses as well. Offering English and American literature optional courses to the students in universities of science and technology can well arouse students’ learning interests and learning passions, enhance students’ English communicative skills and application skills, deepen their understanding of Western cultures, broaden profound knowledge of students in universities of science and technology and cultural visions, perfect students’ knowledge structures, make students construct new knowledge system, get students combing the arts and science knowledge that are totally different to each other, and form integrated associations and knowledge structures, so that students can enhance their language communicative skills and at the same time enhance their humanistic qualities and their own comprehensive qualities.

Reading some important writers’ selected reading works and appreciating the literary languages that are full of plentiful passions can make students enhance students’ English skills, cultivate their cultural qualities, enhance their humanity qualities as well.

Conclusions

On basis of enhancement of humanistic quality, it is necessary for students to develop on all rounds. It is the basic rule of forming students’ comprehensive qualities. The situations of humanistic qualities of students in universities of science and technology will directly influence college students’ cultivation and enhancement of specialized qualities. The humanistic quality education of students in universities of science and technology has the important significance of cultivating competent social talents. The universities of science and technology should recognize and be aware of the essence and content of general educational optional courses. They should combine general education with specialized education and reform the thoughts of previous teaching goals which were divided by knowledge systems. We should take well notice of cultivating students’ comprehensive qualities, especially the aspect of humanistic qualities, and find a successful way to the development in universities of science and technology.

References


The Impact of Collaborative Reading on Iranian EFL Learners’ Development of Reading Comprehension

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This research was carried out in Iranian EFL (English as a foreign language) reading comprehension classes in an attempt to answer three research questions: (1) Does collaborative reading lead to greater comprehension of a text than private reading?; (2) If so, what strategies are used by the students during collaborative reading?; and (3) In what ways might these strategies contribute to the higher level of comprehension? A quasi-experimental design was used to answer the first question. The participants were pre-tested and streamed into two classes of equal reading comprehension abilities. The intervention consisted of four texts of equal length, comprising two rated in a pilot study as conceptually difficult/linguistically easy, and two rated as conceptually easy/linguistically difficult. The subjects in each class were involved in reading the two types of texts collaboratively and privately for four sessions.

After reading the text, the subjects were asked to answer in writing 10 comprehension questions. Collaborative reading resulted in consistently and significantly higher scores than private reading for all four texts. Qualitative methods were employed to answer the last two questions. Group interactions during collaborative reading were tape recorded and transcribed, and 10 students selected at random from the two classes were interviewed in depth.

Analysis of the group interaction transcripts revealed that the participants were using five major strategies in co-constructing meaning from the texts. These strategies included brainstorming, clarifying the language, summarizing, paraphrasing, and interaction management. Other minor (i.e., infrequent) strategies were also identified, such as making PCU/NCU (positive/negative claim to understand), eliciting confirmation, and confirming.

Keywords: collaborative reading, private reading, EFL (English as a foreign language) reading comprehension

Introduction

It is commonly assumed that collaborative learning is beneficial for students. There is a great deal of research evidence to support this assumption in different parts of the world (Flowerdew, 1998; Roskams, 1999; Lan, Sung, & Chang, 2006; Chen & Hird, 2006; Bejarano, 1987). However, little research has been carried out in Iran. This research investigated the extent to which collaborative learning in the Iranian EFL (English as a foreign language) setting had an influence on the reading comprehension ability of university students majoring in English. The study addressed three questions: (1) Does collaborative reading lead to greater comprehension of a text than private reading?; (2) If so, what strategies are used by the students during collaborative reading?; and (3) In what ways might they contribute to the higher level of comprehension?.

The first two questions can be answered empirically and this is the primary aim of the study. The third is
more speculative and aims at developing proposals for more narrowly focused research in the field.

**Method**

A quasi-experimental design was used to answer the first research question. The major part of the research lasted about seven weeks. In the first week, the participants were pre-tested and divided into two homogeneous classes based on their reading comprehension ability. Each class comprised 18 students all of whom were second-year students studying at the Islamic Azad University of Malayer, Iran. The pre-test, selected from an actual TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test (2004), included four reading comprehension passages, each of which had 10 comprehension questions. In the second week, the subjects were taught four reading comprehension strategies adapted from Collaborative Strategic Reading (Klingner & Vaughn, 1998). The strategies included Preview, Click and Clunk, Get the Gist, and Wrap-up. The students were expected to make use of these strategies while they were reading the texts collaboratively. The intervention commenced in the third week. It consisted of comprehension lessons based around four texts.

In order to minimize the effect of text type on the outcomes, the four texts selected were all popular journalistic essays of equal length. They were chosen to represent two kinds of difficulty: Two were rated by the researchers as conceptually difficult and linguistically easy, and two were rated as conceptually easy and linguistically difficult. These initial ratings were tested and confirmed in a pilot study with Iranian university students and with experienced EFL teachers.

The subjects in each class were involved in reading the two types of texts for four sessions. Each class read two of the texts collaboratively in small groups and the other two privately. Since the focus of the research was on the nature and quality of the students’ interaction, the teacher’s intervention was carefully restricted to introducing the text to the students both orally and in written form. The purpose of this introduction was to provide the students with the relevant background information about the reading passage. The teacher’s intervention was scripted and followed precisely by both collaborative and private readers. It should be noted that the students in both classes were instructed to use one type of dictionary, i.e., *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*. There were four to five students in each group. One of them was allocated the role of the leader on the basis of the pre-test scores. The leader’s main responsibility was to make sure that everybody was actively involved in group interactions.

Another student took the role of the recorder. During the whole class wrap-up, this student reported to the class the main idea(s) of the paragraphs the group had learned. The other members of the group were just collaborators.

**Procedures**

The students in the collaborative reading class carried out the reading task in different stages. After the teacher’s introductory explanation, they were asked to listen to the tape recorded by a native speaker of English to become familiar with the correct pronunciation of the words. Then, they read the text paragraph by paragraph while applying the first three collaborative reading strategies mentioned above (see the section on Method). At the end of each paragraph, students were expected to achieve consensus on what the main idea(s) were. When students finished the whole text, they were engaged in whole-class discussion. In this stage, all groups shared their understanding of the text with the rest of the class. The teacher’s role was to chair the discussion with minimal intervention.

After reading the text, the subjects were asked to answer 10 comprehension questions in writing. The
comprehension questions comprised four items of vocabulary knowledge, one item of grammatical knowledge, and five items related to textual concepts. Apart from varying the method of reading (private or group), identical procedures were followed in each class.

**Qualitative Data**

Qualitative methods were employed to answer the second question. Group interactions during collaborative reading were tape recorded (two groups in each session) and transcribed to identify the processes of collaborative reading. In the seventh week of the study, 10 participants selected at random from the two classes in the study were interviewed concerning their feelings and attitudes towards the two modes of reading.

In summary, the data consisted of: (1) the scores of the comprehension measure; (2) the transcriptions of the student’s interactions in small groups; and (3) the transcriptions of recorded interviews.

**Data Analysis and Results**

With respect to the quantitative data, the comprehension test scores were compared across reading mode using an independent sample *t*-test. Collaborative reading resulted in consistently higher scores than private reading for all four texts. The statistical evidence provided in Tables 1-4 revealed that the difference was significant in three of the tests (i.e., tests 1, 2, and 4) as the significance was less than 0.05.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples T-test for Test 1 (Group Statistics)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAR00002</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAR00001 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAR00001 2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent samples *t*-test was carried out to compare the reading comprehension scores on text 1 for the two classes involved in the study. There was a statistically significant difference in scores for class 1 (M = 6.01, SD = 1.77) and class 2 (M = 3.87, SD = 1.81) (sig. = 0.001).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Independent Samples T-test for Test 2 (Group Statistics)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>VAR00001 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAR00001 2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent samples *t*-test was carried out to compare the reading comprehension scores on text 2 for the two classes involved in the study. There was a statistically significant difference in scores for class 1 (M = 5.37, SD = 2.28) and class 2 (M = 7.25, SD = 1.82) (sig. = 0.01).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples T-test for Test 3 (Group Statistics)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAR00002</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAR00001 1.00</td>
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<td>VAR00001 2.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
An independent samples t-test was carried out to compare the reading comprehension scores on text 3 for the two classes involved in the study. There was a difference between the means of the two classes as follows, but this difference was not statistically significant: Class 1 (M = 5.84, SD = 2.39) and class 2 (M = 6.40, SD = 2.17) (sig. = 0.47).

Table 4
**Independent Samples T-test for Test 4 (Group Statistics)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VAR00002</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>Std. error mean</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

An independent samples t-test was carried out to compare the reading comprehension scores on text 4 for the two classes involved in the study. There was a statistically significant difference in scores for class 1 (M = 7.12, SD = 1.58) and class 2 (M = 4.11, SD = 2.42) (sig. = 0.000).

With regard to the qualitative data, the transcripts of the students’ collaborative interactions were analyzed carefully and it revealed that students were engaged in various types of processes in their attempt to comprehend the texts. There was a preliminary label of the students’ utterances. Then, the two researchers discussed and modified the labels and eventually consolidated them into five major categories as follows: brainstorming, summarizing, paraphrasing, using meta-linguistic utterances, and using interaction management utterances. Other minor processes were also identified such as positive/negative claim to understand, eliciting confirmation and confirming. The utterances made in Farsi are translated into English and italicized in the following data.

**Brainstorming**

Brainstorming was manifested in a number of ways. First, a student made an initial TIU (text interpreting utterance). Then, other students made other types of TIUs such as convergent expanding TIU, confirming TIU, and divergent TIU. Sometimes text interpreting utterances included utterances which asked for explanation, utterances explaining something, and utterances in the form of questions and answers (see Example 1).

Example (1) Transcript 3.2, Paragraph (5)

3.2. A: He wants to emphasize the colour of white here… unfortunately, he forgets that crayon. TIU (initial)
3.2. C: The most important colour for painting on a brown paper is white. TIU (convergent, expanding)
3.2. B: Yes, because this is very visible. TIU (convergent, expanding)
3.2. C: So what it wants to show? TIU (asking for explanation)
3.2. B: It wants to show the importance of white colour on brown paper. TIU (explaining)

**Summarizing**

In most cases, the groups involved in the collaborative reading while applying the “Get the Gist” strategy attempted to summarize the texts paragraph by paragraph. It was the recorder’s responsibility to make a written record of the summary of the paragraphs already agreed by all members of the group. The summary was supposed to include the main idea(s) of the paragraphs (see Example 2).

Example (2) 1.1. B: [probably to the reporter] Write the main idea in this way:

The children from middle classes are more independent than the children from rich families.
Paraphrasing

In their attempts to interpret the texts, the students sometimes resorted to paraphrasing which took the form of either rephrasing the ideas presented by other students or pure paraphrasing of the original sentences contained in the text (see Example 3).

Example (3) Transcript 2.1, Paragraph (3)

2.1. A: In spite of this, nine days after the first burglary she suffered from the second burglary.
2.1. B: It means that the second burglary happened nine days after the first.

Meta-Linguistic Utterances

One noticeable phenomenon observed in the students’ interactions was the use of meta-linguistic utterances to a great extent. This included activities such as asking for the meaning of unknown vocabulary items, providing definition from dictionary or by participant, asking about the word’s part of speech, etc.. This phenomenon discloses the fact that students draw on each other’s linguistic knowledge to comprehend the texts (see Example 4).

Example (4) Transcript 1.1, Paragraph (3)

1.1. C: What does “rely on” mean?
1.1. B: /tekye kardan/ [Farsi equivalent]
1.1. A: Inspire means?
1.1. B: It is a verb…
1.1. B: It means encourage.
1.1. A: Monarchy means?
1.1. B: /saltanati/ [Farsi equivalent]
1.1. C: Their (line 5) refers to what?
1.1. B: —Their refers to multimillionaires.

Interaction Management Utterances

As mentioned before, each group had a leader, a recorder (or reporter), and two or more collaborators. To play their roles appropriately, every student had to make use of certain interaction management utterances. The leader of the group was expected to be the most active person in this respect (see Example 5).

Example (5) Transcript 4.2, Paragraph (5)

4.2. B: [to the others] Read to this point.
4.2. C: Let’s read to the end.
4.2. C: Forget about the details.
4.2. B: Translate the last part.
4.2. A: [probably to the reporter] Read to us what you have written.

Other Utterance Types

Most of the transcripts contained utterances with other communicative functions such as positive/negative claim to understand, “eliciting confirmation” and “confirming”. These, however, were fairly infrequent, and appeared to play little if any part in students’ developing understanding of the text (see Example 6).

Example (6) Transcript 1.2, Paragraph (1)

1.2. B: Is it right? (Eliciting confirmation)
1.2. A: Yes, that’s it. It is correct. (Confirming)
The Interview Data

The recorded interviews held in Farsi were transcribed verbatim and analyzed. In the analysis process, attempts were made to identify and group together the co-occurring and similar statements under some general themes. Eventually, eight themes emerged from the interviews, as discussed below. The first two were dominant themes; a large majority of the interviewees raised them in one way or another. The others were less commonly mentioned, and the last three were raised by only a few of the interviewees (although they are clearly of interest to the research).

These themes represent an initial attempt to answer research question 3 (In what ways might the strategies used contribute to the higher level of comprehension?). Given that they were specifically mentioned as positive aspects of the collaborative (by contrast with the private) reading, it is reasonable to hypothesize that they contributed in some way, directly or indirectly, to the processes by which the students achieved improved comprehension.

Affective Domain

Almost all the interviewees stated that collaborative reading provided them with an enjoyable and relaxed learning environment thus leading to the removal of affective filters. To quote a few of many such comments (in translation):

In collaborative reading students’ anxiety is reduced and students develop more self-confidence.
In my view collaborative reading is a good idea because it decreases students’ stress and anxiety and motivates the students as well.
Collaborative learning helps the students be more sociable.
Working in a group creates some sort of emotional and intimate relationship among the members which can be interesting. (personal communication, December 2, 2008)

Access to Multiple Perspectives

A large number of the students acknowledged that through collaborative reading they could have access to multiple perspectives, which in turn made learning more effective for them. For instance:

We shared our understanding of the text and thus we had a better comprehension. Sometimes, when I compared my interpretation with my peers’ interpretations, I came to the conclusion that mine was wrong.
One advantage of collaborative reading is that you can rely on your better peers when you don’t understand the meaning of a particular sentence, for example. Since different people read the text from different perspectives, less able students may sometimes help the others.
In wrap-up stage groups could refine their understanding of the text by listening to other groups.
We read the paragraph collectively and had different interpretations of it. Then, we discussed those interpretations to reach a consensus on whose interpretation was correct. As a result, sometimes I had to revise my original interpretation. (personal communication, December 2, 2008)

The Social Interaction

A few of the students believed that the mere social interaction available in collaborative reading made learning fun for them.

It was fun to read the text collaboratively and due to this the quality of learning was also better.
In collaborative reading a pleasant learning environment is created.
Collaborative reading is much better because a feeling of cooperation exists among the group members. (personal communication, December 2, 2008)
Efficiency

Some students stressed on the efficiency of collaborative reading especially with regard to saving time and energy. Comments included the followings.

It took me longer to read a text privately. But we managed to save time considerably while we were reading a text collaboratively.

When we read and discuss the text together, every member of the group expresses his/her opinion and we manage to get the concepts more easily and quickly. But, when we read privately, we cannot detect our mistakes. And certainly in collaborative reading if we commit a mistake, our collaborators can correct it.

In collaborative reading it is more probable to learn the exact meaning of Words as they have been used in context than private reading.

Collaborative reading helps students retain the materials longer. (personal communication, December 2, 2008)

Linguistic Development

Some interviewees believed that collaborative reading could help develop their vocabulary knowledge and reinforce other language skills.

Collaborative reading also develops other language skills particularly listening and speaking.

Sometimes when we didn’t know the meaning of some words and we were short of time, we relied on each other’s vocabulary knowledge.

Through collaborative reading we also helped each other with understanding the language of the text, especially the complex sentences. (personal communication, December 2, 2008)

Motivation

A few of the students contended that they were better motivated when they read the English texts collaboratively. One student said collaborative reading could act as a trigger for those mostly in need of a good stimulus for studying.

Development of Team Work Skills

Another theme emerged from the interviews was the development of team work skills. For example, one student maintained, “When you are in a group you learn team work and collaborating with others” (personal communication, December 2, 2008).

Reservations

Despite the fact that almost all the interviewees expressed a positive attitude towards collaborative reading, some of them pointed out some limitations they had observed in their experience of collaborative reading. For example, some interviewees felt they needed more time for reading strategy training and more practice in applying the strategies. A few of them also pointed out that they could have more concentration on text concepts during their private reading.

Implications and Limitations of the Study

This study provides evidence that collaborative learning can be effectively implemented in a reading comprehension class with Iranian university students who are majoring in EFL. It also gives evidence to the potential impact collaborative learning can have on students’ development of linguistic and world knowledge. The linguistic knowledge in this research is interpreted in terms of vocabulary knowledge and knowledge of the grammatical structures. The world knowledge is interpreted in terms of the concepts, overall purpose, or meaning contained in the texts. However, it should be noted that this study was not precisely the test of
collaborative learning format or fully strictly defined collaborative learning. Basically, this research investigated one of the major principles of collaborative learning, i.e., students' interaction.

While this study can contribute a great deal to research on collaborative learning in Iran, there are some limitations to its data collection procedures which need to be addressed. Firstly, the participants are restricted to two classes comprising 36 university students. With such a small sample of students, it is difficult to generalize the results to other populations. Future studies on more student participants implementing collaborative reading in more classes are recommended in order to generate more evidence on the effects of collaborative reading. Secondly, students receive direct instruction on specific reading comprehension strategies for only two sessions. As some of the students stressed in the interviews, they need more time for strategy training. Thirdly, the students experience collaborative reading for only two sessions, which cannot be considered enough as the students need further practice implementing the reading comprehension strategies.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that students reading collaboratively tend to outperform the students reading privately. The effects of collaborative reading appear to be salient in enhancing the reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL university students. These findings corroborate those of Chang’s (1995) that the average scores of students in cooperative learning were about two points higher than those students in a traditional teacher-oriented learning in English reading class. Why should this be so? The gains of the collaborative readers can be grouped under the following categories: (1) the increase of students’ talk in the collaborative reading context; (2) the supportive and communicative learning available in collaborative reading context; and (3) the presence of interactive processes in the collaborative reading context naturally stimulating the students’ cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities.

In collaborative learning, the students were able to maximize the level of their peer interactions, which was an essential feature of learning when the learners were in the action of interacting with people in their environment and in cooperation with their peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The students in collaborative reading groups had more opportunities to interact with their peers, and therefore, had more chances to be corrected by their peers whenever they made mistakes. Collaborative reading created natural and interactive contexts in which students were engaged in interactive processes such as brainstorming, listening to one another, asking questions, eliciting confirmation, asking for explanation, clarifying issues, collective summarizing of paragraphs, and collective paraphrasing of the utterances.

Such frequent interaction among students increased the amount of students’ talk and participation in the classroom, which in turn played a role in developing the students’ world and linguistic knowledge. The private readers, on the other hand, were deprived of these interactive processes.

In the collaborative reading class, students had opportunities to receive feedback and modelling from their peers. According to Vygotsky (1978), an essential feature of learning is that it awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the learner is in the action of interacting with people in his/her environment and in collaboration with his/her peers. Therefore, when it comes to collaborative reading comprehension, the authenticity of the environment and affinity between the participants are essential elements to make the learner feel part of this environment. These elements are absent in private reading. Much of the value of collaborative reading, in effect, lay in the way that group activities encourage students to engage in such high level cognitive skills as analyzing, explaining, synthesizing, and elaborating.
References


Relationship Between English Learning Strategies and Learning Style Preferences: An Empirical Study

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In recent years, research emphasis in the field of SLA (second language acquisition) has shifted to the study of the learning process and behaviors of learners than that of teachers. Researches concerning the learners’ language learning strategies and learning styles have been conducted in different cultural backgrounds. However, comparatively speaking, there are few studies focusing on the relationship between language learning strategies and learning style preferences in English learning among Chinese students. This paper elaborates on the research questions and hypotheses according to the English Learning Questionnaire, which consists primarily of SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) (Oxford, 1990) and PLSP (Perceptual Learning Style Preference) Survey (Reid, 1987) to identify their English learning strategy uses and learning style preferences. Then, with statistical analysis (by SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions)) of the results of the questionnaire, discussions are made on the correlation between learning strategies, learning style preferences, and their gender differences, followed by pedagogical implications for English teaching and learning in the university settings in China.

*Keywords:* language learning strategies, learning style preferences, gender difference

**Introduction**

**Background and Need for the Study**

In the past few years, research emphasis in the field of SLA (second language acquisition) and second language learning has shifted. Linguists and researchers are becoming more interested in the study of the learning process than the learning product, in the behavior of learners than that of teachers (Widdowson, 1978; Ellis, 1982; Taylor, 1983). In the case of teachers, this shift has led to classroom-centered research on the linguistic, discoursed, and interactional structure of teaching events instead of the quest of the perfect teaching method. Without an outstanding of why people need to learn other languages and of how knowledge of a new language is stored and learned, teachers will always be less effective than they could be. Knowledge of the nature of second language learning is a valuable complement to the teacher’s other skills and knowledge. In the case of learners, it has led to the study of how learners approach learning, both in and out of classrooms, and the kind of strategies and cognitive processing they use in SLA. The study of language learning strategies and learning styles can be considered a result of these shifts of emphasis as they are among the main factors that help determine how—and how well—our students learn a second or foreign language (L2).

Language learning strategies are defined as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8).
Stated in another way, learning strategies are “measures that students can take to promote their own learning success” (Franklin, Hodge, & Sasscer, 1997, p. 24). Language learning style (general approach to language learning) has been identified as another key determiner of L2 strategy choice. When allowed to learn in their favorite way, unpressured by learning environment or other factors, students often use strategies that directly reflect their preferred learning styles (Oxford, 1990). Indeed, research findings have suggested an association between language learning strategy use and leaning style preferences. Investigators have found a statistical link between students’ L2 learning strategies and their underlying learning styles (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Ely, 1989). These styles are often directly related to culturally inculcated values. Research has also shown that students can stretch beyond their learning styles to use a variety of valuable L2 strategies that are initially uncomfortable. Strategy training is particularly useful in helping students use new strategies beyond their normal stylistic boundaries. Strategy training that takes learning style into account helps students avoid “style wars” with teachers and fellow students and can reveal deeply held cultural values and increase cross-cultural understanding (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). In spite of all these achievements, there are some problems that need to be solved. Some researchers have found that some learners who have been trained with the learning strategies cannot transfer them to new tasks or other subjects; and that some of them return to their old learning methods in a while after being trained. They have also noticed that a few of them do not use those learning strategies, even though they know the validity, because of their beliefs, motivations, and perseverance, etc.. Besides, there exist a lot of arguments on the definition, classification, and instruction of learning strategies and learning styles. When Reid (1987) found differences among ESL (English as a second language) students of different cultural backgrounds in their tendency to use or avoid certain strategies or approaches to learning (based on their learning styles), he called for more research in this area. In this sense, it is of high necessity to investigate how Chinese learners acquire EFL (English as a foreign language) and the relationship between learning strategies and learning style preferences in Chinese context.

Relationship Between Learning Strategies and Learning Styles

Language learning styles and strategies appear to be among the most important variables influencing performance in a second language. Learning strategy choices are often related to preferred learning styles. For instance, a student who has a strongly visual learning style tends to use the strategies of taking notes and outlining, whereas an auditory learner tends to use the strategies of recording lectures and listening to them after class ends. To better understand their relationship and role in L2 learning, many investigations have been carried out. Two SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) studies have shown a conceptual link between individual students’ language learning styles and their choices of language learning strategies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Rossi-Le, 1989). Ehrman and Oxford (1989) found more than a dozen significant relationships between strategy use and language learning styles as reflected by Myers-Briggs personality types. Rossi-Le (1989) found significant relationships between perceptual learning style (visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic) and strategy use for 7 out of 10 strategy categories. Auditory learners preferred memory strategies, cognitive strategies for authentic language use, and metacognitive strategies such as planning and evaluating their own learning. However, tactile learners revealed a strong preference for using strategies for communicating meaning and for self-management.

Many researchers have asserted that successful language development for any student depends partially on appropriate use of learning strategies that fit the individual’s learning style. Reid (1995) and Ehrman (1996)
focused on the roles of styles and strategies. Vann and Abraham (1990) have found that unsuccessful language learners did not necessarily use fewer language learning strategies than their more successful peers; rather, they simply employed strategies in a haphazard fashion, inadequately relating to the task at hand and their own learning style preferences. Oxford, Ehrman, and Lavine (1991) stressed the importance of recognizing one’s own learning style and finding the most style-comfortable strategies, but also noted the need to stretch beyond one’s favored style occasionally. That is, the most comfortable strategies for a given person’s learning style might or might not be the best for the particular language tasks, so some degree of style-stretching or style-flexing might be needed. This is best accomplished through the conscious use of learning strategies that do not fit one’s own learning style(s) but that might well be relevant to the task at hand.

In contrast, some researchers do not see the value of understanding language learning styles and strategies. For instance, Sparks and Ganschow (1995) disparaged research on learning strategies and learning styles and treated learning style conflicts and poor choice of learning strategies as virtually irrelevant to language problems. These investigations suggest that an understanding of learning strategies and learning styles is relatively useless in terms of improving language development among unsuccessful language learners, that only a very small sub-set of phonologically-based linguistic factors—and no non-linguistic factors—can explain the etiology of learning disabilities related to language (as cited in Oxford & Nam, 1998, p. 59).

Methodology

The current study was conducted at USST (University of Shanghai for Science and Technology) in Shanghai, China. The participants in this study consisted of 111 students who responded to the questionnaires. Among the 111 subjects, 75 were males and 36 were females, majoring mainly in computer science, automation engineering, and architectural engineering. A quantitative and correlational research design was utilized for this study. Language learning strategy preferences and learning styles of the sample population were measured through the administration of the SILL and the PLSP (Perceptual Learning Style Preference) survey. Questionnaires/surveys are employed as data collection instruments in this study. Subjects were asked to complete the English Learning Questionnaire designed by the researcher, which provides the raw data for statistical analysis.

The SILL, version 7.0, was used to operationalize learning strategy preferences. The SILL is a 50-item self-report paper- and pencil-survey developed by Oxford (1990). The instrument measures frequency and patterns of learning strategy use (Oxford, 1990). Version 7.0 is the ESL/EFL version of the test, which is written in English. The instrument consists of statements about strategies used by language learners, such as “I look for words in Chinese that are similar to new words in English”, and “I say or write new English words several times”. Subjects respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Never or almost never true of me”) to 5 (“Always or almost always true of me”). One point was awarded for “Never or almost never true of me”, 2 points for “Usually not true of me”, 3 points for “Somewhat true of me”, 4 points for “Usually true of me”, and 5 points for “Always or almost always true of me”. The SILL is based on Oxford’s classification and consists of six strategy types: (1) memory strategies (items 1 to 9); (2) cognitive strategies (item 10-23); (3) compensation strategies (items 24 to 29); (4) metacognitive strategies (item 30 to 38); (5) affective strategies (items 39-44); and (6) social strategies (items 45 to 50).

The PLSP survey is a self-report questionnaire developed by Reid (1987) on the basis of existing learning style instruments with some changes suggested by non-native speaker informants and U.S. consultants in the
field of linguistics. The questionnaire, which is designed and validated for non-native speakers, consists of five statements on each of the six learning style preferences to be measured: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group learning, and individual learning. The first four constitute the perceptual learning style categories and the remaining two make up the social category. The participants respond on the basis of a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Five points were given for “Strongly agree”, 4 points for “Agree”, 3 points for “Undecided”, 2 points for “Disagree”, and 1 point for “Strongly disagree”. The PLSP survey has a self-scoring system, which has classified these 30 statements into six learning style categories, and there are five statements for every learning category.

Results

Correlation Between Subjects’ Learning Strategies and Learning Style Preferences

One-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) was applied to test whether there was a significant relationship between students’ English learning strategies and learning style preferences, and the significant level was set at \( p < 0.05 \). Table 1 reveals the means and standard deviations of the subjects’ overall strategy use by the six learning style preference groups. The mean scores show that the group learning style subjects use the fewest strategies (Mean = 2.676), whereas the kinesthetic learning style subjects use the most (Mean = 2.834). However, the difference did not reach significance level (\( F = 0.44, p > 0.05 \)), i.e., no significant differences were found among the six learning style groups in overall strategy use. According to “good language learner” studies, good language learners use learning strategies more often and are able to apply the appropriate learning strategies to their own learning style, personality, and the demands of the task. In contrast, the less successful language learners sometimes are not able to match the appropriate strategies with the task during the learning process. In the present study, the results showed that none of the six learning style groups used significantly more strategies than any other group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptual style preference</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.786 ± 0.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.795 ± 0.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.834 ± 0.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.746 ± 0.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.676 ± 0.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.787 ± 0.467</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the results of the SILL demonstrate that an individual’s learning style preferences influences the types of learning strategies that he/she will employ in acquiring a second language. However, Table 2 shows that of the six learning style preference groups, no learning strategy categories reached significant level (\( p > 0.05 \)).

In sum, Table 2 reported one-way ANOVA results and the mean scores for six language learning strategies reported by six learning style preference groups. As can be seen, the total mean revealed that compensation strategies were the most popular strategies among Chinese EFL college students. Along with
cognitive, metacognitive memory and affective strategies were used with medium frequency. Social strategies were the least popular of all. Of the six learning style preference groups, no learning strategy categories reached significant level \((p > 0.05)\). Consequently, there are no significant differences among the six learning style preference groups in learning strategies use.

**Table 2**

One-Way ANOVA Results of Language Learning Strategies Reported by Six Learning Style Preference Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning style preference</th>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Compensation</th>
<th>Metacognitive</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Social</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.679</td>
<td>2.965</td>
<td>3.167</td>
<td>2.914</td>
<td>2.671</td>
<td>2.319</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>0.455</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0.664</td>
<td>0.605</td>
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<td><strong>Auditory</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.709</td>
<td>2.973</td>
<td>3.179</td>
<td>2.795</td>
<td>2.833</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.542</td>
<td>0.602</td>
<td>0.259</td>
<td>0.602</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td>0.550</td>
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<td><strong>Kinesthetic</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.677</td>
<td>3.054</td>
<td>3.396</td>
<td>2.892</td>
<td>2.677</td>
<td>2.313</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.596</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.600</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>0.579</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tactile</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.643</td>
<td>2.949</td>
<td>3.214</td>
<td>2.828</td>
<td>2.560</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>0.603</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.677</td>
<td>2.834</td>
<td>3.174</td>
<td>2.606</td>
<td>2.606</td>
<td>2.152</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>0.445</td>
<td>0.553</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>0.568</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.759</td>
<td>2.967</td>
<td>3.122</td>
<td>2.908</td>
<td>2.602</td>
<td>2.362</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>0.587</td>
<td>0.569</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (1). High frequency strategy use: Always or almost always used, 4.5-5.0; Usually used, 3.5-4.4; (2). Medium frequency strategy use: Sometimes used, 2.5-3.4; (3). Low frequency strategy use: Generally not used, 1.5-2.4; and (4). Never or almost never used, 1.0-1.4. Source: Oxford (1990).

**Gender Differences in Learning Style Preferences**

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Difference in Learning Style Preferences</th>
<th>Female (n = 36)</th>
<th>Male (n = 75)</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>Sig. of T-value ((p &lt; 0.05))</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning style</td>
<td>M SD</td>
<td>M SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual</strong></td>
<td>31.78 6.43</td>
<td>34.69 5.26</td>
<td>-2.37</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>F &lt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Auditory</strong></td>
<td>30.67 4.95</td>
<td>30.21 5.43</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kinesthetic</strong></td>
<td>34.61 7.10</td>
<td>32.93 5.52</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tactile</strong></td>
<td>36.61 5.61</td>
<td>34.24 5.53</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
<td>27.89 8.14</td>
<td>30.96 7.12</td>
<td>-1.94</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>F &lt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td>33.61 5.81</td>
<td>34.72 6.23</td>
<td>-0.92</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>F &lt; M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two-sample \(t\)-test was performed to compare males’ and females’ learning style preferences in this research. The statistical results indicated that there was significant difference between males and females in their tactile learning style preferences. As is shown in Table 3, significance of \(t\)-value in tactile learning style preference is 0.040, which evidently shows significant gender differences in tactile learning style preference at
the alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.040, p < 0.05$). In this sample, females are more tactile than males. However, the results of the current study contradict the results of other studies in which males demonstrated greater preference for kinesthetic/tactile learning style preferences than males.

**Gender Differences in Learning Strategy Preferences**

Table 4 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations of the six learning strategies reported by male and female subjects. The results revealed that females had higher preferences than males in all the six categories of learning strategies. The most popular strategies for both males and females were compensation strategies, and the least popular strategies for both were social strategies. In the present study, judging from the significance of $t$-value, it was found that no statistically significant differences were found between male and female students in the six categories of language learning strategies. This finding was inconsistent with most language learning strategies research (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Yang, 1993; Sy, 1994), which has found significant differences in language learning strategies use by gender. The current study results fail to show the expected significant differences in the use of learning strategies by gender, as the differences did not reach the level of significance.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning strategy</th>
<th>Female (n = 36)</th>
<th>Male (n = 75)</th>
<th>$T$-value</th>
<th>Sig. of $t$-value ($p &lt; 0.05$)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>2.741 0.344</td>
<td>2.681 0.527</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>2.956 0.446</td>
<td>2.927 0.571</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>3.218 0.452</td>
<td>3.189 0.613</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>2.818 0.516</td>
<td>2.803 0.645</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>2.601 0.565</td>
<td>2.573 0.635</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.404 0.525</td>
<td>2.295 0.649</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>F &gt; M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions and Recommendation**

This study utilizes two self-report questionnaires (SILL and PLSP survey) to measure learning strategies use and learning style preferences among 111 EFL college students in China. The primary purpose of the study is to investigate the role of language learning strategies and learning styles on English learning among Chinese EFL university students in the specific setting of USST in Shanghai. Another purpose is to examine the relationship between learning strategies and learning styles, and whether or not differences exist between females and male in language learning strategies use and learning style preferences. Statistical analysis is done employing SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) Statistical Package, version 10.0. One-way ANOVA and two-sample $t$-test are performed to test if significant differences are found among the groups.

The present study has identified Chinese college students’ language learning strategies and their learning style preferences, followed by an investigation of the gender differences in language learning strategies use and learning style preferences. Considering that students’ use of language learning strategies and their learning style preferences are self-reported at one point in time, it would be unwise to make a definite conclusion based on the findings of this study. Thus, more studies need to be conducted, using other types of data such as interviews, observation, and think-aloud procedures over time as well as at one point in time. Nevertheless, this study has shown the followings:
First, there are no significant differences among the six learning style preference groups in learning strategies use. The subjects in this study prefer kinesthetic/tactile, individual, and visual learning styles, while they demonstrate less preferences for auditory and group learning styles. Nonetheless, the mean scores show that the group learning style subjects use the fewest strategies (M = 2.676), whereas the kinesthetic learning style subjects use the most (M = 2.834). Participants report using overall learning strategies at a medium level (M = 2.758), not very high in comparison to the maximum possible score (5.0) of the SILL, which indicates that the subjects do not apply the Oxford’s learning strategies to assist their language learning. In addition, compensation strategies (M = 3.198) are the most popular learning strategies among Chinese EFL college students, and social strategies (M = 2.330) are the least popular.

Second, there is statistically significant difference among students’ learning style preferences based on gender. The statistical results indicate that there is significant difference between males and females in their tactile learning style preference (p = 0.040, p < 0.05). In this sample, females are more tactile than males.

Third, there are no significant differences among Chinese EFL college students’ learning strategies use based on gender. Students’ gender does not have a significant effect on their strategy use. However, results from the data indicated that females have higher preferences than males in all the six categories of learning strategies.

However, due to the author’s limited knowledge and time constraint, this research is only a trial, which is far from perfect. The study has a small sample size and is limited to one site in one geographical location, and it is suggested that in further study a wider range of learners should be included to make the research results more accurate. In this study, questionnaires/surveys are employed, while some other data collection instruments and methods such as classroom observations, dairy and dialog journal analysis, and think-aloud are suggested in order to provide more information in regard to the students’ language learning strategies use.

Moreover, the current study only deals with Chinese EFL college students’ learning style preferences and learning strategies regarding language learning. However, learning differences can include learning styles, learning strategies as well as affective variables. Other areas of individual differences such as learning aptitude, motivation, culture, age, and other demographic variables should also be considered. Therefore, further research is recommended to investigate the relationship between these different factors to provide a better understanding of individual differences in second language learning.

Besides, the suggestions put forward for conducting classroom teaching in accordance with different learning styles and strategies are merely tentative, and there are supposed to be a number of other feasible and appropriate approaches. In effect, the problem of balancing teaching methodologies with students’ learning styles and learning strategies is quite flexible rather than unique, and it should be solved in practice by college English teachers.

References


The Effect of Integrating Inductive Approach and Deductive Approach With Multimedia Assistance Into Acquisition of Subjunctive Mood

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This study applied both inductive approach and deductive approach with multimedia assistance into an English grammar class on the acquisition of subjunctive mood. It aimed to investigate whether this kind of teaching approach, as a general grammar pedagogy, would improve the efficiency of students’ acquisition of certain grammar points. This study results from comparison and contrast between one same class on the acquisition of subjunctive mood to 70 students in total, employing three different teaching methods: inductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 1), deductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 2), and both inductive approach and deductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 3), based on self-reported reflection on the experiment, observation of students’ learning process, students’ pre-test and after-class evaluation test results, and surveys. Two identical experiments were conducted to two groups of students of different levels of language proficiency to increase the generalizability of the results. Findings revealed that the evaluation test score of the grammatical points taught with method 3 is much higher than those taught with the other two methods, and most students felt positive about method 3. Students nevertheless encounter obvious difficulties in inductive approach, indicating certain lack of self-learning skills in Chinese students.

Keywords: inductive approach, deductive approach, multimedia assistance, subjunctive mood, grammar teaching

Introduction

Since the recognition of language teaching as a field, the acquisition of grammar has always been a loophole for Chinese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners. Among which, the acquisition of subjunctive mood remains a recognized difficult grammatical point (Green & Hecht, 1992; ZHANG & HU, 2008). And various researches have been conducted by SLA (second language acquisition) researchers and practitioners to address grammar pedagogy. One of the controversial issues rests on the preference of learner-oriented inductive approach or teacher-oriented deductive approach (Ellis, 2006; Shaffer, 1989; DeKeyser, 1995). There are numerous researches about the origin, theory, and effect of either approach. However, empirical researches on fabricating both approaches are still immature (Rose & Kwai-fong, 2001). As a result, it is subject to criticism and future revision.

The paper determines to examine whether the targeted grammar teaching approach would help students’
acquisition of certain grammar points. The study is to employ grammar teaching method integrating both inductive approach and deductive approach with multimedia assistance into an English grammar class on the acquisition of subjunctive mood. And contrast experiments were made by employing either inductive approach or deductive approach. After the research, detailed filed data, such as self-reported reflection on the study, students’ test scores, and survey results, were collected with attentiveness so as to make comparison and contrast. General conclusions were made after the study, and there were also several other interesting discoveries during the study.

**Literature Review**

Generally speaking, a deductive approach in language teaching is to layout and explain grammar rules to learners and then train them to apply it, whereas an inductive approach fosters learners to practicing the syntactic structure in the context and then asks them to infer certain grammar rules from practices (Rose & Kwai-fong, 2001). Fischer (1979) distinguished deductive approach from inductive approach in the way that deductive approach should be applied when the targeted learning language is dissimilar to learners’ native language, while the inductive approach may be employed when the targeted language is similar to learners’ native language. The debate how grammatical rules should be taught has been a heat discussion in SLA research and applied linguistics over the years.

Some argue that explicit grammatical rules should be taught. Through deductive approach, learners can acquire language points with more efficiency and accuracy, thus facilitating the application (Nagata, 1997; Robinson, 1996). A deductive instruction may be required when targeted learning language is of greater complexity, at least to the adults learners (Fischer, 1979; Omaggio, 1986). Nevertheless, deductive instruction is more of a teacher-oriented approach, which inevitably will reduce learners’ self-motivation in language acquisition (Ausubel, 1968, 1974). Others hold that inductive approach is more favorable in the way that it can encourage learners to formulate their own rules by inducing them from a set of examples (DeKeyser, 1995). As Krashen (1987) argued, the true and effective causes of language acquisition were through “comprehensible input”. And there is no need for learners to have “previous conscious knowledge of a rule” (Krashen, 1987, p. 84). However, as educational psychologists pointed out, inductive approach can only reach its full capacity only in case of easy rules and high-aptitude learners (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Ausubel, 1974).

Multimedia-assisted approach has long been proved to have a favorable impact on most language class (Fotos, 1996). The combination of using media, like video, graphics, animations, etc., can not only draw students’ attention to the language point, but also help students to have a deeper impression on the lesson. And to certain extent, computer-based instructions could be as effective as teacher’s instruction (Nutta, 1998).

**Methodology**

**Participants**

The 70 participants were English major sophomores enrolled in an “English Grammar” course in a college in Ningbo. They were divided into two classes randomly according to enrollment when they enter the college: Class 1 and Class 2. Their language proficiency is relatively of medium level or less. However, language proficiency of students on Class 1 is higher than that of Class 2. About half of the students in Class 1 passed CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) exam, a national English level test in mainland China, while approximately
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1/3 of the students passed CET-4 in Class 2. A pre-test of subjunctive mood is conducted before the class. And the result of Class 1 is 14% higher than Class 2 (see Table 1).

Table 1
The Results of Two Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Class 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 1 (%)</td>
<td>Part 2 (%)</td>
<td>Part 3 (%)</td>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>Part 1 (%)</td>
<td>Part 2 (%)</td>
<td>Part 3 (%)</td>
<td>Total (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation test</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased by</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Design

This study examines the acquisition of subjunctive mood, one of the most difficult grammar points for ESL (English as a second language) students to acquire (Green & Hecht, 1992). The teacher was to give lectures on subjunctive mood in three parts, according to the “English Grammar” textbook A New English Grammar Coursebook (ZHANG, 2009): subjunctive mood with be as main verb, subjunctive mood with were as main verb, and subjunctive mood with hypothesis meanings. The first part is taught with inductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 1), the second part deductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 2), and the third part both inductive approach and deductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 3). Three parts were taught in same amount of time arrangement, 30 minutes each. And in all three parts of teaching, computer-based assistance, such as PPT, learning animation, was played.

There were two tests in the experiment. Both tests were of 15 multiple choice questions, covering three parts evenly in accordance with the textbook contents. The pre-test was taken before the experiment in order to get a general idea of students’ previous acquisition of subjunctive mood. The second test was placed after class so as to evaluate the students’ acquisition on this grammar points. Along with the evaluation test, three questions were asked in the end for the students’ perception and attitudes toward the class: (1) We talked about three parts on subjunctive mood, which part do you think you have mastered best?; (2) As some of you may discovered we use three different ways to learn three parts of subjunctive mood today. Which way do you prefer? Why?; and (3) Do you feel any difficulties in today’s lesson? What are they?.

The same experiments were conducted in both classes in order to examine the acquisition of students at different levels of proficiency so as to increase the generalizability of the results.

Data Collection

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) argued that effective qualitative research can be made through careful detailed field data collection. Students’ pre-test score and evaluation test score of 70 students were compared part by part after the experiment. Students’ three survey answers were analyzed and categorized with attentiveness. What is more, self-reported reflection on the experiment was made with an attitude of equality and mutual respect with the participated students, as Hammersley (1990) pointed out, in carrying out classroom ethnography, teachers should undertake field data collection with objective attitude and consider variable inevitable elements such as “power relations” between teacher as a researcher and the students.

The pre-test was taken before the experiment. The evaluation test was placed after class. Each test was of
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three parts with 15 multiple choice questions. And each part consisted of five questions. Part 1 was designed to examine students’ acquisition of “subjunctive mood with be as main verb”. The teaching method employed in this part was inductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 1). Part 2 was intended to examine students’ acquisition of “subjunctive mood with were as main verb”. The teaching method employed in this part was deductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 2). Part 3 aimed to examine students’ acquisition of “subjunctive mood with hypothesis meanings”. The teaching method employed in this part was both inductive approach and deductive approach with multimedia assistance (method 3). The percentage in the box means the students’ accurate percentage of each part (see Table 1).

After the evaluation tests, three survey questions have been raised to the students in order to examine their perception and attitudes toward the class: Q1: We talked about three parts on subjunctive mood, which part do you think you have mastered best?; Q2: As some of you may discovered we use three different ways to learn three parts of subjunctive mood today. Which way do you prefer? Why?; and Q3: Do you feel any difficulties in today’s lesson? What are they?. And the survey results for the first two questions are presented as follows (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The result of survey question.](image)

Analysis and Findings Discussion

Although the small sample size of the participants and limited teaching content of this study may not draw definitive conclusions about the research question, this study does present some evidence of though-provoking results in grammar pedagogy in terms of combining inductive and deductive approaches with multimedia assistance.

If multiple-choice-question tests reflected students’ acquisition of the grammar points, it is evident from both experiments that teaching fabricating both inductive approach and deductive approach with multimedia assistance is more effective compared with other two methods (see Table 1). In the survey question 1, more than half of the participants expressed they have mastered Part 3 best, which is also confirmed by the evaluation test scores (see Figure 1). They explained that through inductive approach, they had a deeper impression on the grammar rules, and with the deductive approach, they practiced the application of the acquired rules. As Shaffer (1989) argued, integrating inductive approach would help students to understand the grammar concept involved, thus facilitating the applying of it.
Besides, through the observation of the class, students embodied more class involvement when teacher employed method 3. And most students felt positive about method 3. When applying subjunctive mood with hypothesis meanings (teaching focus in Part 3), students could present more accurate examples to the point, compared with other two parts. And less mistakes were made by students in sentence construction exercises. When mistakes were made, several students could help chase out possible error by logical grammar links. Suffice to say, students can apply grammar rules after reading textbook on the premise that they comprehend and analogize the grammar concept (Scott & Randall, 1992).

In survey question 2, there were also a great number of answers mentioning the usage of multimedia assistance. Students tended to address interests with such multimedia assistance. To them, it is more “vivid”, “funny”, “interesting”, “impressive”, etc.. As expected, students’ preference on multimedia teaching assistance are obvious. Though computer-based instructions may not be as elaborate or flexible as teachers personally, they still can play a crucial role in arousing students’ learning interests and motivating students’ learning (Nutta, 1998).

Apart from positive perspectives of combining teaching method 3, there are also several interesting findings resulted from the study. As is clear from the survey result, the number of students who prefer method 2 is sightly more than that of teaching method 3. The traditional teaching method of teaching grammar is deductive approach (LIAO, 2004), students, since primary school, have already been used to such teaching method. Some students attached words like “comfortable”, “natural” to describe the reason why they were in favor of method 2. Grammar to them seems like “language laws” made by linguists for people to comply rather than flexible rules drawn out from daily conversations. Such stereotype of English grammar limited students’ acquisition of grammar points (Rose, 1994; Schmidt, 1990).

What is more, students encountered evident obstacles when inductive approach was employed. During the class experiment, it took relatively long time for students to infer grammar rules on subjunctive mood with be as main verb, especially in those long and complicated structures. And many students expressed difficulties in survey of question 3 about similar issues. They answered “don’t know how to get started”, “confused”, and “puzzled” to indicate the inductive approach, which is quite an illustrative case to the phenomenon of ESL Chinese students who lack creative and improvise skills (LIAO, 2004).

Conclusions

In grammar teaching, employing both inductive approach and deductive approach may be more effective than adopting either of the approach alone. On the one hand, with the inductive approach, students can have a deeper impression on the grammatical points. And the learners may also develop certain grammatical logic when applying the rules, which will make a big difference to the acquisition of grammar points. On the other hand, after inductive instructions, deductive approach needs to be employed, for the reason that it can emphasize and clarify the targeted grammatical points and help students to utilize them with flexibility. However, when inductive approach is employed to Chinese ESL learners, certain attention should be drawn with emphasis. Most Chinese ESL learners may exhibit habitual preference towards deductive approach, so that certain measures should be taken to change the hardened consciousness. Moreover, Chinese ESL learners may lack certain inductive skills, thus posing threats to the employment of inductive approach.
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References
The Effect of Background Knowledge on EFL Learners’
Reading Comprehension

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Schema is known to play an important role in reading comprehension. The schema embodying the learners’ background knowledge of cultural familiar materials facilitates the understanding of the text (Pritchard, 1990). Also, Steffensen, Joag-Dev, and Anderson (1979) and Nelson (1987) proposed that the schemata embodying background knowledge influenced how well the text would be comprehended. However, Hudson (1982) and Carrell (1984) found there was no significant background effect in advanced level learners. From those studies, it seems that background effect is different at different language proficiency levels. Thus, the present study examines the interaction between background knowledge and language proficiency in reading comprehension. The participants were freshmen of National Chiayi University. They were divided into three language proficiency levels based on the General English Proficiency Test. Four reading comprehension tests were constructed to assess their reading comprehension: cultural familiar/unfamiliar text and topic familiar/unfamiliar text. The results of this study showed that participants had better performance on the culture/topic familiar text than the culture/topic unfamiliar text. Thus, the findings suggest that the teacher can use teaching activities, such as pre-reading activities or vocabulary teaching to increase the background knowledge when teaching readings to EFL (English as a foreign language) learners.

Keywords: background knowledge, reading comprehension, language proficiency levels

Introduction of the Study

Reading is a very complex process which educators, psychologists, and linguists are interested in for decades. Because of the complex reading process, a number of theorists are devoted to defining or developing reading models of reading process. The proposal of reading models, from the ones that are linear in nature, such as bottom-up processing (Goodman, 1967; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Hayes, 1991) and top-down processing (Goodman, 1967; Coady, 1979; Eskey, 1986) to interactive processing (Rumelhart, 1980; Gove, 1983), demonstrates the efforts that the theorists have delved into what happens when readers are reading (Chang, 2004). Reading is considered as a meaning-constructing process (Hayes, 1991). From this complex process, readers can interact with various sources, such as the content and the background of a text or the pragmatic context and then construct the meanings from the information in the reading.

Currently, in Taiwan, reading holds an important place in students’ English education, because most of them do not really communicate with native speakers of English. Examining the textbooks in Taiwan, we may find
most English texts that Taiwanese students read are narratives or expository passages. In addition, for most students, the purpose for reading those passages is to help them to learn new words and syntactic rules so that they can get better grades for some exams. Thus, many students cannot interact with the context and they cannot learn the whole picture of the reading passage (Huang, 2003). From the above problems, choosing better reading materials becomes an important mission in reading instruction.

Every reading material requires its own background knowledge. Different background knowledge would influence students’ reading comprehension. Generally speaking, background knowledge is formalized in a theoretical model known as schema theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, 1984). Following schema theory, numbers of studies demonstrated the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension (Carrell, 1984; Pritchard, 1990; Nelson, 1987; Bensoussan, 1998). Gatbonton and Tucker (1971) suggested that providing relevant cultural information was important. With suitable and relevant background knowledge, students would learn better. In addition, Droop and Verhoeven (1998) proposed a facilitating effect of cultural familiarity for both reading comprehension and reading efficiency. Hence, we cannot deny the importance of background knowledge in reading instruction.

Although most researchers agree on the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension, there are still lots of problems. First, for the role of background knowledge at different proficiency levels, a controversial situation existed in studies. Chan (2003) suggested that the relative importance of background knowledge and language proficiency in L2 (second language) reading comprehension should be considered. Rahman and Bisanz (1986) believed that poor readers’ schema did not develop as well as was not efficiently used as good readers’. They believed that the role of background knowledge was more crucial in good readers than in poor readers. However, in Hudson’s (1982) and Carrell’s (1984) studies, they both suggested that there was no significant background effect on learners’ reading comprehension in advanced readers. Also, Chan (2003) proposed that background knowledge was more beneficial to low proficiency learners. As a result, the role of background at readers with different proficiency levels seems to become an unsolved problem. Second, Chan (2003) and Alptekin (2006) recommended that the subjects should have wider range of language proficiency levels. That is because in their studies, they all used learners of advanced English proficiency level as the participants. Thus, based on above different suggestions and problems, this study chose participants with wider range of language proficiency levels to find out background effect on those participants with different language proficiency levels.

According to research goal of this study, there are four major research questions involved in this study: (1) Is there any significant difference between learners’ comprehension of culture familiar and culture unfamiliar texts at different language proficiency levels?; (2) In culture familiar and unfamiliar texts, is there any difference on reading comprehension among questions with different levels of representation?; (3) Is there any significant difference between learners’ comprehension of topic familiar and topic unfamiliar texts at different language proficiency levels?; and (4) In topic familiar and unfamiliar texts, is there any difference on reading comprehension among questions with different levels of representation?.

Method

This study chose a quantitative method to investigate the interaction between culture and topic familiarity and language proficiency level in EFL (English as a foreign language) learners’ reading comprehension. Based
on the research goal, this study examined if culture and topic familiarity influenced learners’ reading comprehension at different language proficiency levels.

Four reading tests were designed to examine the effect of background knowledge on reading comprehension. The researcher chose four reading texts of different backgrounds as materials (culture familiar, culture unfamiliar, topic familiar, and topic unfamiliar). In the following, the research design is presented in Figure 1.

Participants

There were six classes of freshmen in National Chiayi University involved in this study. Three classes came from College of Humanity and Art, and the other three classes came from College of Science. The division of three language proficiency levels—upper-intermediate (A), intermediate (B), and low-intermediate (C)—was based on their results in the institutional GEPT (General English Proficiency Test), which was used as a placement test at National Chiayi University. The GEPT mainly includes two sections. The first section is a listening comprehension test, including 45 multiple-choice items, and the second one is a reading comprehension test, including 40 multiple-choice items. The total score is 240 points, 120 for listening comprehension test and 120 for reading comprehension test. In addition, the content of this test is also similar to GEPT in Taiwan. The level of this test corresponds to intermediate level in GEPT in Taiwan. The detailed information of this test is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test item</th>
<th>Listening comprehension test</th>
<th>Reading comprehension test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (Minutes)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Picture-cued questions (15 questions)</td>
<td>Vocabulary and structure (15 questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short answers (15 questions)</td>
<td>Cloze tests (10 questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short conversation (15 questions)</td>
<td>Reading comprehension (15 questions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students whose scores were above 180 were located to Level A (upper-intermediate level). Students whose scores were from 150 to 179 were located to Level B (intermediate level). Finally, students whose scores were under 150 were located to Level C (low-intermediate level). There was no significant difference of students’ scores of this placement test between students of College of Humanity and Art and College of Science at the same
language proficiency level. Thus, totally, there were 278 freshmen participants.

Based on the author’s assumptions about background knowledge, the author supposed that all participants were familiar with Chinese culture. Also, participants of College of Humanity and Art were familiar with readings of social science, and participants of College of Science were familiar with readings of natural science. Hence, participants whose familiarity ratings did not correspond to the author’s assumption were eliminated. Thus, after the elimination, 201 freshmen became the participants and the other 77 freshmen were eliminated.

Moreover, the author also adapted the VLT (Vocabulary Levels Test) (Schmitt, 2000) to examine participants’ vocabulary levels. The division of three vocabulary proficiency levels—under 2,000-word level (Level 1), 2,000-word level (Level 2), and 3,000-word level (Level 3)—was based on their results in VLT. Table 2 shows the division of each vocabulary level.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>College of Humanity and Art</th>
<th>College of Science</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 2,000-word level (Level 1)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000-word level (Level 2)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,000-word level (Level 3)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In College of Humanity and Art, 61 participants’ vocabulary level was under 2,000 words. Then, there are 33 participants whose vocabulary levels were 2,000 words. Finally, eight participants’ vocabulary level was 3,000 words. In addition, in College of Science, 58 participants’ vocabulary level were under 2,000 words. Then there were 35 participants whose vocabulary level was 2,000 words. Also, six participants’ vocabulary level was 3,000 words. Then, after the division, the researcher examined the effect of background knowledge and vocabulary level on reading comprehension.

**Procedures**

The procedures of this study were presented in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](image)

All the participants were tested in their regular freshmen English class. All the participants had to read four different texts (culture familiar, culture unfamiliar, topic familiar, and topic unfamiliar) and answer 20 questions based on the four readings. In addition, after the reading comprehension tests, participants had to do the familiarity rating of the four reading texts. For example, in culture familiarity, they had to rate the familiarity of
the texts. The researcher used familiarity scales for participants to rate their familiarity about culture and topic. The familiarity is rated from “1” to “4”. “1” represents very unfamiliar and “4” represents very familiar.

Finally, they had to do the VLT. Participants had to answer questions in the five vocabulary levels (2,000-word level, 3,000-word level, 5,000-word level, academic vocabulary, and 10,000-word level). They had to match the vocabulary and the definitions of the word meaning based on their understanding. The total procedure lasted 90 minutes. All the texts were in English and also the assessment.

Finally, during the reading tests, the researcher avoided the discussion between participants.

**Results and Discussion**

**Culture Familiarity and Language Proficiency Levels**

A paired-sample *t*-test was used to investigate the effect of culture familiarity on participants with different language proficiency levels. The results indicated the effect of culture familiarity on reading comprehension with participants of different language proficiency levels. Culture familiarity did not affect the reading comprehension (*t* = -1.08, *p* > 0.05) at Level A. Then at Level B, participants performed better on the culture familiar reading (*t* = 3.75, *p* = 0.00). Also participants performed significantly better on the culture familiar reading (*t* = 3.09, *p* = 0.00) at Level C. From the results, they indicated that culture familiarity was important for participants with intermediate (Level B) and low-intermediate (Level C) language proficiency levels.

In addition, for the discussion of culture familiarity and vocabulary levels, a paired-sample *t*-test was used to investigate the effect of culture familiarity on participants with different vocabulary levels. At Level 1, participants performed significantly better on the culture familiar reading (*t* = 3.92, *p* < 0.05). However, at Level 2, no significant difference was found (*t* = 0.40, *p* > 0.05). Also no significant difference was found at Level 3 (*t* = 0.28, *p* > 0.05). Those results indicated culture familiarity did not matter for participants at Level 2 and Level 3, but it was important for participants at Level 1. Comparing the results of participants with language proficiency level and vocabulary level, vocabulary level provided more specific information of culture familiarity in reading comprehension. Culture familiarity was important for participants whose vocabulary knowledge was under 2,000 words.

From the above results, the author found that culture familiarity was more important for participants at lower language proficiency levels than participants at higher language proficiency levels. In this study, participants at higher language proficiency levels had enough linguistic knowledge so that their linguistic knowledge can overcome the lack of background knowledge. Thus, culture familiarity was not detectable in participants at higher language proficiency levels.

On the other hand, because of the lack of linguistic knowledge, participants at lower language proficiency levels still needed background knowledge to help them comprehend the reading texts. As a result, the effect of culture familiarity is detectable in participants at lower language proficiency levels.

**Topic Familiarity and Language Proficiency Levels**

A two-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used to examine the effect of topic familiarity and language proficiency levels on reading comprehension. The results of a two-way ANOVA showed that language proficiency levels and topic familiarity influenced reading comprehension. Participants got higher grades in their
topic familiar readings than topic unfamiliar readings. Also, language proficiency levels influenced participants’ reading comprehension. Participants of Level A (upper-intermediate level) got better grades than participants of Level B (intermediate) and Level C (low-intermediate levels) \( (F = 18.83, p = 0.00) \) in *Birds*. In addition, participants of Level A (upper-intermediate level) also got better grades than participants of Level B (intermediate) and Level C (low-intermediate levels) \( (F = 29.59, p = 0.00) \) in *Taboos*. Also, the researcher detected the cross effect between language proficiency levels and topic familiarity. The researcher found that in *Birds*, there was cross effect between language proficiency levels and topic familiarity \( (F = 14.43, p = 0.00) \). On the contrary, in *Taboos*, there was no cross effect between language proficiency levels and topic familiarity \( (F = 1.45, p = 0.32) \). The results indicated that language proficiency levels and topic familiarity affected reading comprehension, but when they interacted, they did not influence reading comprehension.

Moreover, the relation between topic familiarity and vocabulary levels were also discussed. A two-way ANOVA was used to detect the effect of topic familiarity and vocabulary levels on reading comprehension. The results of a two-way ANOVA showed that topic familiarity influenced the reading comprehension \( (in Birds, F = 7.30, p < 0.05; in Taboos, F = 7.82, p < 0.05) \). However, although vocabulary levels and topic familiarity had individual effects on reading comprehension, they did not have cross effect on reading comprehension \( (in Birds, F = 1.29, p > 0.05; in Taboos, F = 0.60, p > 0.05) \).

In addition, a Post Hoc Scheffe test results showing the pair group differences and the significance levels were given in Table 3. From the results, the author found that no significant difference was found at Level 2 and Level 3 in *Birds* and *Taboos* \( (p > 0.05) \). In fact, participants from College of Humanity and Art and College of Science at Levels 2 and 3 did not differ significantly on either topic familiar or topic unfamiliar readings. However, as for the participants from College of Humanity and Art and College of Science at Level 1, they got better scores in their topic familiar readings, which meant that for the two readings, participants from College of Humanity and Art got better scores in the reading text of *Taboos*. On the contrary, participants from College of Science got better scores in the reading text of *Birds*. The above results indicated that topic familiarity was important for participants at low vocabulary levels.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant groups and vocabulary levels</th>
<th>Birds</th>
<th>Taboos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HA-level 1 and S-level 1</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA-level 2 and S-level 2</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA-level 3 and S-level 3</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. HA: College of Humanity and Art; S: College of Science; Level 1: under 2,000- word level; Level 2: 2,000-word level; Level 3: 3,000-word level; and * \( p < 0.05 \).

This finding partly supported Gagne, Bell, Weidenmann, and Yarbeough’s (1980) and Swaffar’s (1988) studies. They all proposed that compared with unfamiliar texts, familiar texts were learned faster and remembered better. But, in their studies, they did not take language proficiency levels into consideration. In this study, the results were a little different from the previous studies. The author found that topic familiarity was more important in participants at lower language proficiency levels.
Conclusions

From this study, we should understand that teachers of EFL reading need to be aware of the importance of background knowledge in EFL reading. Schema theory suggests that the purpose of building and learning to activate appropriate background knowledge of texts is to produce better reading comprehension. In addition, in an English reading classroom, the teachers should become the facilitators of acquisition of suitable background knowledge. Thus, in order to emphasize the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension, the followings are some educational implications in an EFL reading classroom for teachers to improve students’ reading comprehension.

Pre-Reading Activities

When teachers teach some unfamiliar readings, teachers have to provide some background information about the reading texts for low level. In addition, teachers can design some teaching activities to help students more familiar with the texts. From the teaching activities, students will know more about the text, and they will learn it more efficiently.

Vocabulary Teaching

From the study, vocabulary plays an important role in reading comprehension. Thus, as a reading teacher, before teaching reading, the teacher can provide some teaching of the key words in the reading text. If the teacher can simply help learners understand the key words before the reading task, it will be easy for learners to understand the text.

Comprehension Instruction

In an EFL classroom, the teachers seldom teach learners how to read or comprehend a text. As a result, comprehension instruction becomes an important part to help learners to read. In a reading task, predicting questions and some problem-solving questions are useful for teaching comprehension skills. Thus, the teacher can help learners to ask the predicting questions to check if they really understand the text. From those questions, learners can apply their knowledge to solve those questions and finally they can comprehend the content.

As EFL teachers, the task is to help learners build appropriate background knowledge and teach them that reading is a process of making good use of prior knowledge to build new knowledge. Only if teachers try to take background knowledge into consideration during the teaching processes, will learners’ reading comprehension be improved.

References

EFFECT OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE


The Role of Lexis in Developing EFL Learners’ Speaking Skill

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EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speaking is a very demanding skill that requires learners’ socio-pragmatic as well as strategic competence in any interactional situation, and lexis proves to play a crucial role in this process. However, few studies have investigated how both EFL teachers and learners view and analyze situations in which learners are not producing enough spoken language in class, and the reasons behind them. The present study will pinpoint the significant role of lexis in Moroccan learners’ speaking production. To this end, 40 EFL teachers and 200 Moroccan high school students are surveyed and interviewed to reveal their perceptions of the speaking skill and the corresponding high significance of lexis in this instance. Results show that both teachers and learners identify vocabulary deficiency as the main factor behind students’ inability to speak English. In the present paper, among the many suggestions that could be proposed to deal with this situation, it is argued that one efficient way would be to assist the students during the process of L2 (second language) vocabulary learning through vocabulary learning strategy instruction. Pedagogical and research implication will be given in response to the difficulties encountered in this area as have been identified by the EFL teachers and learners surveyed.

Keywords: EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes, speaking skill, L2 (second language) vocabulary acquisition, learning strategies, strategy training instruction, FL (foreign language) fluency

Introduction

Numerous studies assert that effective communication is a function of adequate and appropriate vocabulary acquisition rather than the learning of grammar rules (Coady, 1993; Rott, Williams, & Cameron, 1999). However, one of the problems that most of the students complain about is that they easily forget the newly-learned words. To solve this problem, researchers (Coady & Huckins, 1997; Hedge, 2008) suggest the implementation of strategy training into the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom as a way to boost vocabulary learning and oral communicative competence.

The focus of the present study is on the importance of lexis to EFL oral production. It seeks to investigate the reasons behind high school EFL students’ inability to speak English fluently. Field work research suggests that the lack of vocabulary competence tremendously affects students’ speaking skill which is essential for language proficiency. Also, there is a strong agreement among researchers, teachers, and students that L2 (second language) vocabulary, important as it is, can be best learned by training students on the most effective strategies that can be used for learning vocabulary successfully.

This study is an attempt to find answers to the following questions: (1) What are teachers’ perceptions toward their students’ speaking skill?; (2) What are the main reasons behind Moroccan EFL high school
students’ poor oral communicative competence?; and (3) How can Moroccan students improve their speaking through vocabulary learning strategies?

This research paper describes an exploratory study carried out in the Sale Zemmour Zaer area in the year of 2011 with different secondary Moroccan learners and teachers. Its main purpose is to examine the reasons behind students’ poor speaking skill and come out with a solution to the problem. In the first section, some findings related to already existing theories and other research studies on speaking skill and vocabulary learning strategies will be presented. Then, a model for vocabulary learning strategy instruction will be suggested. In the next part, the research method, the participants, and context will be described. Finally, suggestions for further research and pedagogical implications will be given.

Literature Review

Speaking Skill

During speaking production, both many intervening processes and the nature of speaking itself (indeterminate and in permanent flux) make of the learning/teaching of speaking a very complex undertaking. From a psycholinguistic viewpoint, Levelt (1994, p. 91) demonstrated how speaking entailed the interaction of several processing components and the difficulty was how to put them in motion to produce fluent speaking. From a pedagogical perspective, Bygate (1987, p. 8) stressed that handling reciprocity condition (the relation between the speaker and listener in the process) was another difficulty affecting the speech quality in addition to time constraints and grammatical accuracy which also interfered during the production of good speaking.

Among EFL learners therefore speaking is believed to be a demanding process (Levelt, 1989; Murphy, 1991; Bailey, 1999; Ferris & Tagg, 1996, 1998; Mauranen, 2006) where learners should ideally be engaged in producing both long and structured chunks of an FL (foreign language) without undue pauses or long hesitation. To this end, all four components of communicative competence as have been identified by major thinkers like Halliday and Hasan (1976), Hymes (1972), Savignon (1972, 1983, 1991, 2008), and Swain and Canale (1980) are at play. Simultaneously, learners have to exhibit: (1) a socio-pragmatic awareness (the ability to use English in social contexts in culturally appropriate ways); (2) a strategic competence (the ability to cope with breakdowns in speaking); as well as (3) a grammatical competence (grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary); and finally (4) a discourse one (the ability to interconnect utterances to form a meaningful text). This makes speaking a highly complex skill both cognitively, lexically, and socially.

Moroccan EFL learners do exhibit non-fluency in speaking situations based on an interview done with their teachers. Forty secondary teachers have been interviewed and a significant proportion has reported that their students did indeed experience non-fluency during speech production. Some of the causes cited have been mentioned in Table 1 in the “Method” section below. Based on this investigation done to find out the causes behind this situation, however, both learners and teachers have identified vocabulary deficiency as one major obstacle impeding to learners fluency. Therefore, the necessity to make appeal to vocabulary learning strategies may be of great importance here. The following section will shed light on this issue.

VLSs (Vocabulary Learning Strategies)

VLS is an approach which facilitates vocabulary learning and has attracted considerable attention. VLSs constitute a subclass of language learning strategies, which in turn are a subclass of learning strategies (Nation, 2001). A learning strategy is a series of actions a learner takes to facilitate the completion of a learning task.
Language learning strategies promote self-direction for learners. Self-directed learners are independent learners who can assume responsibility for their own learning, and hence, gain confidence, involvement, and proficiency (Oxford, 1990). In a sense, language learning strategies make students “better learners”. Taking this into consideration, second and foreign language researchers have made various attempts to know the types of VLSs. Accordingly, a number of taxonomies and classification systems have been developed including: O’malley (1985), Oxford (1990), Stern (1992), Stoffer (1995), Shmitt (1997), and more recently Nation (2001). Although most of the taxonomies cited above “reflect more or less the same categories” (Al Kattan, 2003, pp. 58-85), it is Oxford’s classification scheme (SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning)), that is mostly adopted by researchers. It has been checked for reliability and validated in multiple ways (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Besides, the SILL is valid in the sense that the six categories of the SILL measure the same construct and strategies.

VLS Instruction Framework

To ensure an effective use of vocabulary in different contexts, L2 teachers struggle to find out the most effective strategies that can be used to enable their students to learn a good stock of words. Up to date, in the area of L2 acquisition, a number of methods, approaches, and strategies focusing on vocabulary instruction and/or acquisition have been presented. This section presents one of the most prominent frameworks of L2 vocabulary instruction that might be implemented at Moroccan high schools within EFL courses.

Research on oral production skills strongly argues for explicit strategy instruction rather than providing a separate learning strategies course (Bygate, 1991; Chamot, Barnhardt, El Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Cohen, 1998; Nunan, 1997; Oxford & Leaver, 1996). In explicit learning strategy instruction, teachers should decide which strategies (e.g., semantic mapping, vocabulary notebook, keyword method, etc.) to give attention to and how much time they need to spend on training. In order to know about the strategies the learners need and the ones they are currently using, students should be asked to draw up a list of strategies they employ to learn English words in small groups. They report their lists to the class. The students and teacher can then collaboratively construct a list of strategies the learners employ. After this brainstorming session, the teacher can decide what strategies learners lack and need most. The teacher should model the strategy for the learners. Then the steps in the strategy should be practiced separately. Learners are asked to apply the strategy in pairs while helping each other. They report back on the application of the steps. The teacher monitors and provides feedback on learners’ control of the strategies. Learners report on the difficulty and success in using the strategy outside classroom and they ask for teachers’ help and advice on their use of strategy (Nation, 2001).

In general, recent models of VLS instruction basically rely on promoting learners’ knowledge about their own thinking and strategic processes and encouraging them to adopt strategies that will improve their language learning and proficiency.

Method

Design

In this paper, a mixed design approach is implemented. It implies both quantitative and qualitative data. The choice of a mixed design is dictated by the nature of investigation itself which is based on data collected from teachers and students particularly questionnaires and interviews to identify the main difficulties or impediments to speaking among the target population. Structured teachers and learners’ questionnaires are based on a Likert-scale and have been used to direct an investigation towards research aims. Therefore multiple
hypotheses are advanced to spot the causes behind learners’ non-fluency. Besides, open interviews have been employed to leave teachers more freedom and collect corresponding data. Many visits to the target schools have been conducted and a series of subsequent questionnaires and interviews compiled in due time.

**Participants**

The participants are from different high schools in the Sale Zemmour Zaer area and are constituted of: (1) a total number of 200 students who have contributed through the questionnaires; (2) forty secondary teachers from different academies who have provided a detailed view about their experience; and (3) twenty secondary teachers from the area of Salé Zemmour Zaer who have been interviewed orally to allow more insightful data about the process of learning/teaching speaking in secondary classes.

**Instruments and Statistical Measures**

The instruments are composed of the followings: (1) students’ questionnaires; (2) teachers’ questionnaire; and (3) teachers’ interviews.

As to the statistical measures, the findings recorded are based on the SPSS (Statistical Packet on Social Sciences) application to the instruments employed. Since chi-square is a statistical test commonly used to compare observed and expected data, chi-square tests have been used here to test the multiple hypotheses posited through the questionnaire to the null hypothesis one (the state of having no significant difference). The chi-squares will also introduce the likelihood ratio, the degree of freedom, and the \( p \) (probability) as well as the \( q \) (chi-squared) values. Besides, crosstabs have been compiled and are composed of the registered frequencies, percentages, \( p \) and \( q \) sorted out. These will be presented in the following section.

**Results**

Table 1 is an explanatory estimation to teachers’ perceptions regarding fluency and its causes. Teachers have reported speakers to be not fluent, since nearly half of them have identified their students as not fluent at all (55%). Plus, a rather good proportion has also reported only very few (30%) are which gives us a rather very significant total proportion of students (85%) with a general tendency of students not being able to produce fluent talk.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic considered</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Type of inquiry (opinion)</th>
<th>Corresponding tendency (%) &amp; cited causes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Perceptions         | Teachers          | Do your students speak fluently? | 1. No, not at all: 55%  
                          |                   |                           | 2. No, very few do: 30%  
                          |                   |                           | 3. Yes, they do: 15%  
                          |                   |                           | \( \sum = 100\% \) |
|                     |                   |                           | Few causes as perceived by teachers:  
                          |                   |                           | Lack of vocabulary  
                          |                   |                           | Speaking is not afforded importance in Moroccan classes  
                          |                   |                           | Speech anxiety  
                          |                   |                           | Error anxiety |

**Learners’ Perceptions**

Tables 2-3 have been sorted out as shown below. The two following chi-squared results have been chosen for the high significance they hold in this instance. They test the “how to convey meaning problem” and the “lexis deficiency” one.
Table 2

*How to Convey Meaning Problem*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>780.000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>599.638</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* * seven cells (28.0%) have expected count less than five. The minimum expected count is 1.66.

Table 3

*Lexis Deficiency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>792.000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>589.742</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>198</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* * 10 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than five. The minimum expected count is 1.29.

Crosstab 4

*Speaking Difficulties as Identified by Learners*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students not speak because</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th><em>q</em></th>
<th><em>p</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afraid of making mistakes</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students will laugh at your pronunciation</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot find the English words</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not know how to convey the meanings you have in mind</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have already had problems in speaking other foreign languages</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* * p < 0.05 (all cases); *q* = 788, 591, 792, 780, 768, respectively.

A noticeable high significant *p* value is recognized in Crosstab 4. But two of the above sorted out values should be given great consideration here (namely not knowing how meaning should be put into words (*p* = 0.000; *q* = 780), not being able to find the exact words (*p* = 0.000; *q* = 792)), taking into account that both have also very significant corresponding *q* values and both are evolving around the same issue. Besides, the highest corresponding *q* value has been identified to be directly linked to vocabulary (*q* = 792). The coming results will shed light on teachers’ perceptions to see whether this identified item will be a recurrent one as well.

**Teachers’ Perceptions**

Table 5

*Speech Anxiety*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>114.000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>87.062</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* 19 cells (95.0%) have expected count less than five. The minimum expected count is 0.05.
Table 6

*Lack of Vocabulary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>117.000*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>79.024</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* *13 cells (81.3%) have expected count less than five. The minimum expected count is 0.03.

Crosstab 7

*Speaking Difficulties as Identified by Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the elements that hinder students’ speaking</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>*q</th>
<th>*p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech anxiety</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of vocabulary</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* *p < 0.05 (all cases); *q = 114, 117, respectively.

Indeed, Table 6 testifies the importance of vocabulary as it becomes a recurrent identified impediment to learners’ fluency in Moroccan classes and this with a highly significance value both from the learners’ as well as the teachers’ perspective. As Crosstab 7 shows, a highly significant *p* value is recognized here, and a higher corresponding *q* value has been reported with vocabulary. In this respect, if compared with speech anxiety for example (see Table 5 above), lack of vocabulary is still registered at a higher chi-squared value (compare for instance, 114 and 117) even when speech anxiety also proves to be significant (*p = 0.000*) as Table 5 demonstrates.

Discussion

As singled out above, vocabulary deficiency and difficulty in articulating or conveying what learners have in mind are major problems learners have identified. The highly significant *p* (*p < 0.05*) and *q* values (*q = 792, 780*) demonstrate the significance that vocabulary holds from the viewpoint of learners. Similarly, teachers have also identified lack of vocabulary as a major obstacle and this at a highly significant *p* value (*p < 0.05*) too (see Table 6 and Crosstab 7 above). The significant difference in comparison to the null hypothesis value (the state of having no significant difference: in this instance if *p > 0.05* which is not the case) comes to prove that something else (not mere chance) interferes when learners experience withdrawal or non-fluency in speaking situations. These results come only to confirm and stress the urgent need for the application of a VLS instruction framework and the importance it holds in improving the quality of Moroccan learners’ oral production.

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications for EFL Teachers

The present study has a number of implications for improving Moroccan EFL learners’ speaking skills. First, explicit VLS instruction should be integrated into the existing EFL curriculum. After discovering the meaning of a word, learners should be oriented to recall it via different strategies. Secondly, rather than providing the learners with one or two strategies, the instruction should focus on the whole range of strategies, and students should be encouraged to opt for the most effective one(s) for themselves. EFL teachers should make their students aware of the need to be more independent learners, and therefore better speakers, by
recognizing the strategies they possess and those they lack. Furthermore, teachers should urge learners to practice a wide range of vocabulary learning strategies so as to be able to acquire the vocabulary they need to deal with any conversational situation in and out of class context.

To sum up, speaking English fluently is a challenge to EFL students but they can overcome by having access to a wide array of vocabulary learning strategies. Learners should be trained in strategies they lack. To this end, teachers should consider the implementation of a VLS instruction framework and think of the most appropriate way to introduce the strategies.

References


A Study on Student Interpreters’ Note-Taking, Interpreting Process and Output

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Interpretation, either consecutive or simultaneous, demands more advanced linguistic skills as well as higher cognitive strategies than translation. This paper investigates the characteristics of the notes taken by student interpreters in relation to the output and the process of interpretation with the purpose of identifying the role of note-taking in the process of interpretation, its relations with the production quality, and the factors that constrain the development of the students’ potential as future interpreters. Statistical and qualitative analysis of the notes and think-aloud protocol reveals that students majoring in English should further improve their overall English proficiency. Note-taking, either in source language or target language, or both, should be practiced until students are able to use it expertly. In spite of the importance of note-taking in interpretation, students should be trained to rely more on memory rather than solely on the notes.

Keywords: interpreter, notes, process, output

Introduction

Students majoring in English or translation in China have Oral Interpretation either as an elective or required course which prepares at least some of them to be future interpreters. Unfortunately, few graduates with tertiary degrees in English or translation are qualified and competent interpreters. This results first of all from the students’ poor command of English and Chinese, including limited vocabulary, a narrow scope of cultural knowledge, or insufficient training in interpretation. Secondly, unlike translation that has been studied and consequently yielded rich findings in the past millenniums, interpretation lacks theoretical and practical guidance. Finally, students do not have chances to apply their interpreting skills to practice on campus. Based on the above rationale, interpretation as a course entails a pedagogy that is guided by research findings on professional interpreters as well as would-be interpreters. The author of this paper explores the relationship between oral interpretation process, note-taking, and interpretation output by conducting a small-scale experiment on the third-year students majoring in English.

Theoretical Background

Compared with the millennial practice of interpreting as a means to facilitate communication between speakers of different languages, the systematic study of this phenomenon can be traced back only some few
decades (Pöchhacker, 2005). Yet the half-century reflection has yielded a growing body of insights into the nature and process of interpreting. Among the prolific researchers, Seleskovitch and Lederer (1984) were two of the most prominent who jointly put forward the triangular model of the interpreting process. The basic model, later altered and improved by their followers, is still widely cited and its influence is still felt in the circle of interpreting and translation scholars.

Seleskovitch and Lederer compress the interpreting process into three steps as is shown in Figure 1. The process begins with the auditory perception of a linguistic utterance which carries meaning. Then the interpreter immediately and deliberately discards the wording but keeps the mental representation of the message (sense). Finally, the interpreter produces a new utterance in the target language that meets a dual requirement: It must express the original message and be geared to the recipient.

Seleskovitch and Lederer’s model is too general in that they use “interpreting” to encompass other sub-processes, such as decoding of the source text, memory, transferring, and encoding. A new model is proposed to illustrate all the sub-processes an interpreter undergoes.

The improved model as is shown in Figure 2 decomposes interpreting into a few sub-processes. From SLT (Source Language Text) Input to Sense is the decoding process and from Sense to TLT (Target Language Text) Output is the encoding process. Understanding, Memorizing, and Transferring are mental processes that take
place in “the black box”, while Note-taking and Articulating are visible sub-processes. The quality of TLT Output serves as the criterion for evaluating an interpreter’s performance but it is the process that guarantees quality interpretation.

Notes as context cues are crucial to achieving transferring the message from SLT to TLT, because note-taking facilitates memory and serves as external storage of information received. Given the importance of notes in interpretation, note-taking training has been considered as an integral part in interpretation (especially consecutive interpretation) instruction (W. Y. WANG, ZHOU, & L. WANG, 2010; Niska, 2005; WANG, 2003; Gile, 1995). Since interpretation involves SL (source language) and TL (target language), which should be used as a medium in taking notes? To this question, researchers have different opinions. Johns (1998) and ZHONG (1998) insisted in using TL in note-taking. Dam, Engberg, and Schjoldager (2005), Szabo (2006), Alexieva (1994), and Ilg and Lambert (1996) believed SL was a better medium to take notes. Gile (2005), HUANG (2005), and WANG (2003) thought both SL and TL could be used in note-taking if the interpreter finds it convenient.

There are far fewer studies on interpretation by comparison with those conducted on written translation. This paper intends to probe into the interpreting process of the student interpreters and find out to what extent note-taking correlates with their performance. Think-aloud protocol is used to analyze students’ thinking process and statistical analysis is conducted to compare the students’ notes.

**Method**

**Sampling**

Fifty-eight students from third-year English majors took part in the experiment in the 6th semester. They have taken Oral Interpretation as an elective course for one semester.

**Research Questions**

(1) What role does note-taking play in students’ interpreting process?; (2) How does the production relate to the language in which the students take notes?; and (3) Is the length of notes proportional to production quality: Students competent in interpretation take more notes than their less capable peers do?.

**Method**

The experiment was conducted in the Language Lab. Fifty-eight students took part in the experiment in three different days within a week. The material to be translated consisted of four paragraphs: two of which were in English (245 words) about environment, and two in Chinese (270 Chinese characters) about education. To make sure the majority of the students understand the text, all the new words were replaced by simpler and shorter words. The instructor read the paragraphs at 150 words per minute and the students were required to do consecutive interpretation. The students recorded their interpretation on the computer. The instructor collected the students’ notes and downloaded the audio data. Right after the experiment, the instructor asked 10 students (top five and the lowest five in the experiment) to recall what they thought and did during the whole process in retrospect.

Three types of data were collected and analyzed: (1) the audio data to decide on the students’ performance in interpretation; (2) all the notes the 58 students took in the experiment; (3) the audio data of the 10 students via think-aloud protocol.
Result and Discussion

The Process of Interpretation

The students’ reported process of interpretation conforms to the model the author adopted from Seleskovitch and Lederer (1984) (see Figure 2). When a student receives a speech signal, he/she starts to understand what it means. At the same time, he/she jots down the important points in case they are forgotten. Memory is facilitated by the notes taken in a form that only the student himself/herself can recognize. That is the process of decoding. After a brief pause, the interpreter starts to transfer the meaning or sense into the TL. The encoding process ends when the interpreter delivers the sense to the audience. The students, especially the less competent ones, reported different time allocation on different stages in the whole process. In doing E-C (English into Chinese) interpretation, the students spend more time decoding the sense of the incoming message while in doing C-E (Chinese into English) the same groups of students experience more difficulty, hence spend more time in encoding the sense into the TL. This indicates that despite the strategies required in doing interpretation, Chinese students majoring in English, especially at tertiary level, are still poor users of English, which is manifested in understanding audio input, selecting right words, and deciding on syntactic patterns and rhetorical means. Another marked difference as is reported in the students’ protocol is that students who perform poorly in the task report they are not able to balance note-taking and memorizing. By trying to jot down everything in the first few sentences they hear, they miss the up-coming information. While they encode the text, they do the same. Too much reliance on notes results in low efficiency in interpreting and confusion. Besides the same group of students also report they have experienced more tension in the whole process that they believe is detrimental to their performance.

Findings From the Notes

Table 1 is a summary of the notes (total 232) taken by all participants, the top 10 students as well as the last 10 in the score report of the four interpretation tasks. Students, whether the competent or the less competent, take notes mainly in SL. Students who excelled themselves in consecutive interpretation and their less able peers demonstrated little difference in this regard. In doing C-E interpretation, the top 10 students use significantly more TL (around one third of the total) than their less able peers. To take notes in TL, the students should possess more advanced cognitive competence by which they process information and instantly find the equivalence in TL to match the input in SL. The average number of words and signs in the notes was about one-third of the whole text to be interrelated. This result is consistent with WANG et al.’s (2010) findings in their study of college students’ note-taking and the quality of production in interpretation.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Notes in Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-C/C-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes by all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes by the top 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes by the last 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: E-C = English into Chinese; C-E = Chinese into English; SL = source language; TL = target language.
Table 2 is the result of quantitative study of the lengths of notes (total 40) taken by the top 10 students and the last 10 in E-C in the score report. It shows that the former wrote much less than the latter ($t = 4.6, p < 0.001$). In C-E, the difference is also obvious, but not so significant ($t = 2.6, p < 0.05$). No difference was found in the use of signs. A detailed reading of the notes revealed that the notes by the top 10 students contained key concepts, important points, arguments, and causal and numerical relationships. The notes taken by the last 10 showed a quite different picture. Theirs were significantly longer but unfocused and disorderly. Since they tried to jot down everything they had received, they may miss the most important information. As a result, the notes failed to serve either as the content cue or as the context cue.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes by the top 10</th>
<th>Notes by the 10 poorest</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>Sig. (two-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-C</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>120.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-E</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>131.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

Conclusions

Oral interpretation as an advanced communicative skill does not only involve application of linguistic knowledge and cognitive competence but also involve psychological factors, such as tension, apprehension. This paper probes into the role of note-taking in the process of interpretation and its relations with the production quality with the goal of identifying the factors that constrain the development of the students’ potential as future interpreters. The findings of this study cast some light on interpretation instruction and training. Firstly, the fact that students experience more difficulty in decoding incoming message in English and transferring the received message in C-E indicates that students majoring in English should improve their overall proficiency in English. Students benefit little from skill training without a good command of English. Secondly, notes that contain key concepts, important points, arguments, and causal and numerical relationships serve as meaning and context cues and note-taking as a skill should be practiced until students are able to use it expertly. Thirdly, class instruction and training in note-taking should focus more on content. Finally, note-taking in interpretation is different from what students take in attending a lecture; students should be trained to rely more on memory to retrieve information rather than solely on notes.

References


The Postcolonial Meaning of Home in Nash Candelaria’s Novel

Memories of the Alhambra*

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Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iaşi, Romania

Published in 1977, in the peak of Chicanismo—the social, cultural, and political movements that brought raza consciousness and profoundly influenced the creation of a modern Chicano/Chicana identity—Nash Candelaria’s novel, Memories of the Alhambra, reflects a complex vision of the concept of home. For the two generations of Chicanos (U.S. citizens) depicted in the novel, the United States represents the site of postcolonial tensions and (b)order-ed negotiations of a postmodern Chicano/Chicana identity through ethnic reinvention. This paper aims at analyzing the postcolonial significance of the home, as a geographical, ontological, and national space, and Candelaria’s association of the concept with a postmodern and mestizo identity.

Keywords: postcolonial, home, protean identity, borderland, Chicano/Chicana

Introduction

In his article “The World and the Home” (1992) and later in The Location of Culture (1994a), Homi K. Bhabha argued that “In the House of Fiction, there is a stirring of the unspoken, of the unhomely… today” (1992, p. 152). Defining the unhomely as “a paradigmatic postcolonial experience” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 142), Bhabha speaks about the relocation of the postcolonial home through a range of historical conditions and social practices which account for the cultural differences in contemporary societies. Moreover, to be unhomed is to be culturally dislocated and disoriented in an “unhallowed place” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 121). The unhomed cannot establish for themselves a fixed status/position in the house of fiction or in the house of memory, as they are often juggling such categories as ethnicity, gender, race, nationality, class, etc.

Nash Candelaria, a Mexican-American novelist, comes from an ancient Chicano family that traces its lineage back to the first settlers of New Mexico and to the founders of Albuquerque (1706). Although he does not accept being classified as simply a Chicano writer, his works relate thoroughly with the cultural meaning of the US—Mexico border and its inhabitants, the Chicano/Chicana identity struggle, and the racial dichotomy between the Mexican-American and Anglo-American groups. In fact, Chicano/Chicana literature in general is a peculiar case of text which can be interpreted as a bridge between history/sociology and fiction.

The Postcolonial Relocation of Home From a Chicano Perspective

Memories of the Alhambra (1977) illustrates the tension between the traditional meaning of home and its postcolonial relocation. It traces the story of the Rafas, a family with Mexican roots, who moved from

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Diana Ştiuliuc, Ph.D. candidate at Doctoral School of Philological Studies, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University.
Albuquerque to Los Angeles in search of the American dream, portraying two generations of Chicanos (Jose and Theresa—the parents—and Joe, their son). Jose’s obsession of coming to terms with his roots takes him on a journey to Mexico and Spain, which proves to be a disillusion, as nothing of the glorious past he was imagining can be found anymore by the “unhomed” character. In his protean Chicano formation, Jose Rafa cannot find a clear answer to the question “Who am I?”.

Hybrid Identities in the Borderlands

The borderlands where the Chicanos/Chicanas forge their identities are spaces of hybrid cultural production and intercultural routes, mingling various influences in a peculiar form. In Colonial Desire (1995), Robert Young asserted that hybridity worked in two ways: as “creolization” and as “raceless chaos”:

Hybridization as creolization involves fusion, the creation of a new form, which can then be set against the old form, of which it is partly made up. Hybridization as “raceless chaos” by contrast produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha’s restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms. (p. 25)

Nash Candelaria’s characters reflect both types of hybridization (creolization—as products of a mestizo culture—and “raceless chaos”—for Jose Rafa who cannot find a stable racial and ethnic marker to define himself). They are portrayed as individuals belonging to a number of overlapping cultures and their identities, whether self-defined or not, are based on multiple and continuously negotiated affiliations linked to class, religion, gender, ethnicity, age, nation, etc. Moreover, the character and plot construction in the novel Memories of the Alhambra illustrate Young’s (1995) belief that cultural identity cannot be represented in terms of fixity, centredness, or homogeneity, but in terms of hybridity, creolization, and métissage, as a result of particular historical configurations. Jose Rafa’s state of mental nepantlism (Anzaldúa, 1987) reflects the Chicano postcolonial condition and the postmodernist strife of coming to terms with his hybrid identity. Searching for the Spanish marker of cultural hybridization, Nash Candelaria’s character is straddling spaces where he is not fully at home.

Jose Rafa’s quest for identity begins immediately after the death of his father. The event underlines the death of a generation and the dissolution of the Mexican family ties. Heading toward Albuquerque for the “patriarch’s” funeral (Candelaria, 1977, p. 7), Jose and Theresa nurture confused feelings toward the Rafa house and the Mexican customs it has grounded for generations: “Yet the place would not let them alone. It kept pulling them back to rehearse for their own time, which would be soon enough” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 9).

Los Rafas and Los Trujillos, the families of origin, had lived in New Mexico for 250 years, before the founding of Albuquerque, in 1706. Neither Jose nor Theresa felt there at home. It was the city they left in order to head for East Los Angeles where many refugees from the Mexican revolution had settled.

Jose’s odyssey towards a recovering of the so-called “noble” ethnicity is also generated by a strong misidentification with his Mexican kinship, a well-known topos in Chicano fiction. The patriarch’s funeral represents an opportunity for the character to analyze his ethnic background and to reconsider his position within the family:

As he looked at them, he spoke quietly so only Theresa and Joe could hear. These are not my sisters, my brother. Look at their brown, greedy faces. Listen to their accented speech. We’re not even members of the same family. We’re not even members of the same race. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 12)

Jose’s disentanglement from the Mexican roots and his strong personal conviction that his ancestors were
Spanish and not Indian/Mexican take him on a route towards Spain, the motherland of Chicanos, land of noblemen and conquistadors, where he hopes to find his origins:

And he had never traced back to the root of things, to the beginning—back to the conquistadors—back to the hidalgos, _hijo de algo_, son of someone. These pretenders he had thrown out of the house were not his family. Not his siblings. He was more than that. He was someone. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 12)

Rafa’s denial of ethnicity can be read as a cast away of the legacy of La Malinche, the indigenous woman who is said to have betrayed her people. Mexican cultural memory portrays Malinche as a woman of ill repute, who facilitated Cortez’s colonization of Mexico and then mothered a race of mestizos that eventually displaced the indigenous population of Mexico. The figure of La Malinche is very often perceived as a stigma on Chicano identity. On the other hand, her story is related to the Chicana feminist movement that revived her legend and pointed out her sale as a slave to the Spaniards by the natives of Tabasco in 1519.

Jose Rafa recognizes that if his ethnic heritage is tied to the infamy of Cortez, then it is also entangled with the treachery of Malinche, and that he is both Indian and Mexican, not pure Spanish, as he has always claimed.

Thus, the traditional meaning of home as hearth, shelter, and stability is distorted and the Mexican home, as the original center, multiplies symbolically, and in a postmodernist fashion, into different and unstable centers where identity is hybridized and reconfigured: Aztlán, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, Granada, and Madrid:

Jose looked past his mother, through the window, past the apple orchard toward the river. But his thoughts carried him farther. Across the ocean to the source, the beginnings. To a place he had never seen that was some secret, essential part of himself. And it was then that Jose knew what he must do. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 13)

Bhabha (1994a) furthermore asserted that “Each ‘unhomely’ house marks a deeper historical displacement” (p. 18). Candelaria uses the _descensus ad inferos_ pattern to illustrate the plot of Jose’s spiritual journey towards reconciling the Latin American and the European fragments of his postcolonial identity. Moreover, through his border crossings to Mexico and Spain, he also aims at coming to terms with the collective memory of the Chicano people, the palimpsest of the pre-Columbian past, the Spanish colonization, the betrayal of La Malinche, the U.S.-Mexico war, and the internal colonization of the Northern Mexican lands. He belongs to the unhomed, to the displaced, and to the dislocated. As Bhabha (1994a) furthermore argued: “To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into public and the private spheres” (p. 121).

Thus, Jose Rafa is looking for a different meaning of home, as the (b)-order-land cannot define him from a spiritual viewpoint. When flying to Spain, the (m)-other-land of mestizos and Chicanos/Chicanas, the character’s sense of otherness is sharpened. His journey is “a painful re-membering”, a re-ordering of “the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha, 1994b, p. 121).

The American Dream and the Ethnic Home

After the Mexican revolution of 1910, when immigrants from Mexico crossed the border to the United States to find economic and democratic salvation, Albuquerque had become a city largely populated by _la raza sufriente_. For Jose Rafa, “These were not their people, these latter day migrants from below the Rio Grande River, these Chicanos who huddled protectively under the shelter of common language and common appearance in this part of the city” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 13).

As an in-between citizen, neither Mexican nor a fully assimilated American, Jose Rafa does not accept being labeled Chicano, but North American of Spanish descent. Rafa cannot distinguish who he is from the “raceless
chaos” (in the sense of Robert Young) and is in a constant state of contradiction. Another reason lying behind his move to Los Angeles and behind his quest for the American dream is the danger to be identified by Anglos with this group of poor, Mexican immigrants, after 1910, and to be treated as a minority, that is, racially discriminated.

The acculturated Chicano family. When they return to Albuquerque after 20 years, with the occasion of the “patriarch’s” death, he and his wife, and probably more their son Joe, are to a great extent acculturated. The family’s drive home, after the funeral, some of them accusing Jose of fleeing to California to get rich, while the father got sick and suffered, some of them willing to steal precious objects from the house or fighting over the family’s land “like dogs quarreling over a bone” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 9), offers a grotesque and disgusting scene for Jose, who secretly whispers to Jose Rafa that these people are neither part of his family, nor part of his race. Moreover, they are derogatorily named “vultures” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 9). For Jose, these are not typically American attitudes and reactions, nor is the way they get dressed. They have remained people of el campo, Chicano workers, while Jose, in California, has achieved a higher social status: “Jose felt the touch self-consciously, seeing the rich texture of his suit in contrast to his cousin’s calloused paw and threadbare sleeve” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 10).

By descent, he was one of them, by consent he refused to be. Scrutinizing the members of his large Mexican family, the partly Americanized character strongly rejects each of them:

Carlos, whose avarice could be seen in the pinched squint of his eyes as he glanced through the window at the tiny apple orchard—Eufemia and Gregoria, planting their feet as if for a tug-of-war where each would grasp one of the old lady’s arms and tear for the larger hunk. Once again Juana’s eyes were wide with desire as they flitted from object to object. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 12)

In this way, Jose needs an objective proof of his denial of Mexicanness; the idea that his ancestors are Spanish, of European descent, therefore noble conquerors of America, and not the conquered ones, la raza, Mexican or Indian, slowly pervades his imagination.

The reversed American dream. Having fulfilled his American dream of upward mobility in California, Jose wishes to come to terms with his ethnicity/descent by pursuing the European dream in a journey to Spain. The character’s European dream is a reversed American dream. Since the foundation of the New World, the United States has been a place extensively imagined and de-constructed by the European mind. Peter Freese argued in his book “America”: Dream or Nightmare? Reflections on a Composite Image (1994), that “From its very discovery, America became the country upon which the European imagination projected its cherished dream of a paradise on earth” (p. 35).

In the same way, Europe becomes for Nash Candelaria’s character, Jose Rafa, a place of the mind where he hopes to recuperate his image of himself, but also a place of heterostereotypes—images he has of the others, since Spain was perceived in his Chicano imagination as a country of travelers, explorers, and conquistadors.

Travelers from Europe to the Americas went over an itinerary which stretched from the Old World Reality (civilization) to the New World Reality (nature, freedom, and triumph of progress), in which the American dream both as an aspiration and as a cultural narrative could be fulfilled. Jose Rafa shifts the point of departure of the cultural narrative and performs the spiritual quest in reverse, from the New World Reality, through re-migration, to the Old World Reality. It is an up-turned pattern of the American dream, through which he wishes to discover the European fragments of his hybrid identity.

Jose’s dream of a white cultural heritage that would automatically disconnect him from the Mexican racial and familial features turns into nightmare. The nightmare occurs partly due to Jose’s rejection of his hybrid
American identity, partly due to a disagreement between idealized memories and reality. Jose’s genealogy accounts for his split identity and for the re-mythologizing of the Spanish past, the conquest of Mexico, and the migration to the United States.

“Unhomely” routes/roots. Arriving in Mexico City to meet a certain Senor Gomez, as Sintierra told him, Jose finds out that he has been tricked into a whole mess and that neither Sintierra nor Gomez are real genealogists. The scene where Rafa meets Gomez is depicted humorously by the narrator:

That man—He had a business card. Here Gomez took the extended card, looked at it, turned it over as if looking under a rock and handed it back. “He traced my family back to Spain. With a few missing pieces here in Mexico. I believed him.”

Gomez reached into his wallet. “Senor, I have a card too. And I’m only a limousine driver”. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 34)

The Mexican “ethnoscape” (Appadurai, 1994, p. 329) triggers for Jose’s significant flashbacks from his childhood in a city where the Anglo-Americans exploited Mexicans for cheap labor, where public schools were segregated and Mexican children were forced to leave education at an early stage in their life. Jose Rafa feels safe in the private home of the family and an exploited, inferior human being in the world of the Anglo-American world. The clash between the two cultures (Mexican and American) revives the colonial rapport between the colonizer and the colonized:

Those had been difficult years for Jose, torn between two worlds. The old world was familiar and comfortable. Poor. Dirty. Where he was something special—a favorite. The new was unknown. Ruled by the enemy who saw him as some kind of inferior being. Yet—out there were all those desirable treasures: shiny new automobiles, houses of wood with flowers instead of dirt and cornfields, radios, new clothes, paved roads leading to somewhere, Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks, steak instead of frijoles,—a magnetic world that, against his will, sucked him up from the beanfields of Los Rafas like iron filings from dirt. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 35)

“Out there” in the excerpt above refers to the United States, “a magnetic world” which attracted the Mexican subject with all its glittering riches. The lure of the American dream, with its superior civilization, captivates Jose and he flees north, to Albuquerque, in order to pursue his desire. His assimilation in the United States gives forth a mental state of nepantilism, in which he receives contradictory cultural messages from both the colonizer’s and the colonized cultures: “Yet he was torn. In the world he wanted he was a stranger. In the world he rejected he was at home. He felt this pulling, this tension, as a constant weight he became so used to that his awareness of it faded away” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 35).

Another flashback is related to the race riots which took place in Mexico City at the beginning of the 20th century. La raza began to rebel against the Anglo-Americans in Mexico and Jose is compelled to hide his brother, Herminio, who was fair-skinned and blond-haired, from a mob of Mexican youngsters who were chasing him. When Herminio shouts “Soy raza, compadres! Soy raza” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 39), the mob gets even angrier and starts hitting him with rocks. The conclusion drawn by the two Chicano brothers reflects one more time the subversion of the sense of “home”: “Que loco, Jose thought. It’s like I can’t be either one. Can’t be at home either place. In the middle. Nowhere” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 39).

In Mexico City, driven by Gomez to the main sites of tourist attraction, Jose discredits the worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the institutionalized Catholic faith which obliged the Aztecs to forget their aboriginal goddess, Tonantzin. He criticizes “the richness of a monument endowed by the poverty-burdened millions who somehow always found another centavo for the church”, and the “army of priests and helpers to carry on the business of God” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 44). But a Spanish colonial pride arises in his thoughts and dictates that
his previous considerations are wrong and that he should interpret the cultural conquest of the Aztecs through the lens of the Spanish identity he yearns for.

In the hotel room, Jose has a vision of his death, lying motionless on the altar of the Virgin of Guadalupe from the hill of Tepeyec, where she appeared to Juan Diego and proclaimed the new faith to the Mexican-Indian population. Waking up, he immediately decides that Mexico is a space of decadence and destruction and he urgently flies to Spain, another de-composed center of his postcolonial “home” in order to find himself as a whole:

That very morning he cancelled his trip to the pyramids and made hurried arrangements to fly to Spain. Mexico was not for him. This was the wrong place. The hell with the missing links in Mexico. To Spain! To the beginnings of the exploration of the Indies. And of himself. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 51)

Bhabha (1994a) metaphorically pointed out that “Anxiety links us to the memory of the past, while we struggle to choose a path through the ambiguous history of the present” (p. xix). Jose Rafa’s arrival in Madrid amplifies the ambiguity of his own present history.

Lately it had been airplanes, hotels, taxis, restaurants. Stewardesses, porters, desk clerks, drivers, waiters. “Si, senor. Everything you say, senor.” He had been the boss. Wasn’t that what he wanted? But there had been no relationship. Only an exchange. Service for money. Like parts of his life, he thought. Not really living. Just a perpetual traveler with a bag in his hand, skimming through what he called life, leaving tips for services rendered. (Candelaria, 1977, pp. 143-144)

When a porter recognizes that Jose is not Spanish, but Mexican, the character’s quixotic dream of a white cultural heritage disappears: “Jose froze. It was as if a knife had pierced his side. Even the pride in the knowledge of the Spanish language could not shield him from that thrust” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 145).

Unable to find Senor Gomez and his famous Catalogue of Passengers to the Indies, Jose goes to the National Library in Madrid and searches his name in Spanish-American Surnames, by a certain Spanish writer, but finds no Rafa in it.

Jose’s peregrinations continue to Granada, a city where he expects to find great monuments and statues of conquistadors. Ironically, in the light of a mock picaresque novel, in Granada, he sees a statue of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance astride Rosinante, as a symbolic reminder of the discrepancy between reality and deception. When Senor Benetar, a Spaniard of Moorish descent, who accompanies him in a car on the way to Granada, asks Jose whether the place reminds him of the old days, he replies: “It reminds me of what I dream my boyhood was. […] I don’t know if it’s a real memory or not. Maybe it’s just the memory of a dream” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 158).

Thus, his obstinate search for a Spanish past rests somewhat between illusion, dreams, and a provable memory. Later on, when he meditates on European-American history, he will admit that like the United States, Spain is also a hybrid construction of ethnicities:

The Jews expelled from Spain. The New World discovered. When Catholic—Islamic—Jewish Spain had become one nation—politically and spiritually. While in the New World they had initiated another trilogy of culture—Spanish, Indian, and later Anglo. As if the one God, the true God, sought balance. What is taken away here is put back there. Senor Benetar was an exile of the old, and he, Jose, an exile of the new. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 159)

However, when he reaches Sevilla, a vision of Benatar appears in sleep and suggests him that in Spain, the Jews, Moors, and Christians got together, but they were not considered equals. Through this dream, the narrator tries to make him aware of his mestizo identity and to understand that as a Chicano in the New World he is an
embodiment of contradictions: Indian, Anglo, and Spanish, a successful *coincidentia oppositorum* which the Old World did not manage to reconcile. Consciously, Jose denies the hybridity and asserts that he is only Spanish and not of mixed blood.

Meeting the famous genealogist recommended by Alfonso de Sintierra, Jose stunningly gets the news that his conquistador ancestors are not to be found in Sevilla, but in Extremadura, close to the Portuguese border, since it is from there that the illustrious Spaniards came: Pizzaro, Cortez, Balboa, deSota, etc.. The unhomely center multiplies again in search of a new meaning.

The character’s daydreams weave images of himself as a Spanish “don”, in the desert, like in a Western American, fighting with the “savage” Indians. Intertextual references to Cervantes’s Don Quixote are this time made explicit. The author quotes a large passage here:

> He was galloping along the high desert on Rosinante. The wind whistling past his suit of armor, the visor open so he could see the way. The trail up to Rio del Norte had been attacked again. Wagons destroyed. Cattle driven off. And the safety of the settlement still two days march away.

> Well. He, Don Jose de Rafa, would take care of those Indian dogs. “Just a little farther, Rosinante,” he urged. Up that rise so we can see which way they went. (…)

> Don Jose dismounted and crept ahead through the low shrubbery. After a short distance the ground sloped down gently to a small creek backed by a high embankment. He could see the raiding party now—their several horses tethered to the small trees on the right. He sat for some time watching them. (…) They were talking and laughing among themselves, certain that no white man was anywhere near.

> Back to Rosinante with a final check of horse and weapons. The lance he carried in his right hand. The sword hung in its scabbard on Rosinante’s side. The dagger in Don Jose’s belt. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 167)

Killing the Indians from his quixotic dream, Jose looks carefully at their corpses lying on the ground and realizes that they were his father and his brothers—Daniel and Tomas. Thus the narrator implies that any attempt of rejecting the Indian as “savage” or “abject” is a subliminal act of killing his Indian side, his-self.

In Extremadura, Jose Rafa finds himself in a central plaza, at the time of siesta, so deserted as if it were an Indian village in New Mexico. In the square he sees the monumental statue of Hernan Cortez and his search comes to a resolution. His discovery is what Nash Candelaria inserted between the lines from the first pages:

> There he stood in bronze—Hernan Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, holding a Castillian standard in one hand and some kind of a baton in the other. Below were inscribed the names of past glories: “Mejico, Tabasco, Otumba, Tlaxcala.”

> Jose followed the conquistador’s gaze out over the abandoned plaza. (…)

> There were no monuments of Cortez in Mexico. Only a memory of infamy. A kind of awesome, grudging accord one gives a rapist whose victim gave you birth. The father one cannot acknowledge. (…)

> If Cortez was your father, Jose thought, then your mother was—He did not want to think the next words. They popped out anyway. Malinche. Never mind that the Spaniards called her Dona Marina. It was Malinche. An Indian. And you, child of the Old World and the New, are Mexican. (Candelaria, 1977, pp. 172-173)

Jose Rafa has finally understood that he was a mestizo, a child of the New World, both conqueror and conquered. Cortez’s statue parallels a psychoanalytical reflection of history in which he has viewed himself as an illegitimate son.

**“Mexed” America**

Candelaria’s displaced character dies on a bus to Sevilla, uttering the word “home” several times. Hence, the character’s split identity accounts for the failure of the European dream and for a distorted understanding of the postcolonial meaning of *home*. Moreover, it explains the failure of the American dream, due to its
stumbling in racial prejudice.

Jose Rafa goes to Spain to retrieve his father’s corpse and he finds in the pocket of his coat a notebook with handwritten notes stating: “No soy Mejicano. Passengers to the Indies 16th-18th. Biblioteca Nacional. (…) Is it a matter of color?” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 177). Back in the United States, he hides the notebook from Theresa, because she must not find out that her husband died for a false dream. Trying to find a reasonable explanation for his father’s death, Joe concludes that it was a sort of Hispanic pride that drove him to all these nonsensical fixations. In the spirit of the ancient tragic heroes, Jose Rafa is defeated by the tragic fault, hamartya, which can be interpreted in this context as the desire to assume the colonizer’s identity, while denying his true self:

The key, Joe thought, was in that Hispanic pride. Pride born of—of what? Part poverty. Part social status. Part sensitivity to the gap between what a man was and what he wanted to be—or of what others thought him to be. It was there in the scribbled notes of his father’s notebook. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 180)

Jose’s thoughts towards the end of the novel raise a question of paramount importance: “Did it matter what someone called you?” (Candelaria, 1977, p. 181). An answer to Jose Rafa’s presumed Hispanic pride and to the denial of his true ethnicity comes from the meaning of the word “Mexican” in the American Southwest:

It was a derogatory word rather than a statement of fact—applied to the poor, the hungry, the unemployed, the accented, the powerless. And when his father heard the word applied to himself, that was how he took it, with the added dimension of his colonial pride. If you recognize me, I want you to recognize me properly. Spanish! (Candelaria, 1977, p. 183)

Thus, Jose Rafa may have achieved the American dream of upward mobility in Los Angeles, but the American dream of equality was still denied to him. He dies alienated from himself, his family, and both the American and the Hispanic communities. In this respect, Paula Shirley remarks: “Memories of the Alhambra addresses the alienation and isolation of millions of Americans who have felt the conflict of pride and shame in their heritage” (Shirley, 1979, p. 102).

In this way, the American dream is revived from a Chicano perspective, reaffirming that, in a postmodern world of eclectic identities, a person’s value lies within himself, and not in the color of the skin or in the ethnic heritage he carries within. All these are reflected indirectly in Jose’s mind:

It had to do with the forgotten promises of America. With the unspoken assumptions people had that were wrong. That had to be changed before the promises could be fulfilled.

It had to do with winning. For history only remembers winners, while losers fade into forgetfulness as if they had never existed. The truth of the matter is: for every winner there is a loser. And America’s history, his North America, was strewn with the body of losers who did not stay dead. (Candelaria, 1977, p. 181)

While Anglo-Americans imposed themselves as a great colonial power, ethnic America was rendered invisible in the colonial discourse. Misrepresented, stereotyped, and often marginalized, postcolonial identities such as Jose Rafa’s were destabilized in “a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization (Bhabha, 1994a, p. 94).

Conclusions

Nash Candelaria uses an ironic tone to demonstrate the failure of the Chicano subject to define himself from an ethnic point of view. Memories of the Alhambra is a classical guitar piece composed by Francisco
Tárrega in 1896. As the novel’s title, “Alhambra” stresses the character’s obstinate search for a Spanish identity and his denial of Mexicanness. In Jose Rafa’s postcolonial quest for an ethnic home, “memories” become as fluid as music and suggest a fragmentary (it is not memory, but memories) and a relative representation of culture, since Jose Rafa has no direct memory of Spain, and like the fleeting sounds of guitar music, each ethnic identification is woven in his imagination. Like Richard Rodriguez in the early phases of Chicanismo, Nash Candelaria was accused of being a “coconut” (brown on the outside and white on the inside) and this is how he responded in an open letter to Carta Abierta:

Becoming a coconut can be one stage in the evolution to “American”, whatever that means. I think the big concern is: will these coconuts remember that hard brown shell on the outside that is part of them? Or will they try to paint that shell white and pass for some other kind of fruit? Memories was written to look at that question and what I think of as the “great American story”—the migrant experience. (as cited in Shirley, 1979, p. 103)

Jose Rafa’s split identity and his desperate search for a white cultural heritage can be explained in the light of the fact that, unlike African-Americans, Native Americans, or Asian-Americans, Chicanos do not have a proper nation or country to return to. Their ambiguous postcolonial identity resides somewhere in-between Mexico and the United States. Aztlán itself is an artificial construction which represents an imaginary homeland, being perceived more as a state of mind recuperated through the force of archaic memory, as a mythical space and not a real one. Azade Seyhan explains this “neither here/nor there” spatial ambiguity of the Chicano people in her book Writing Outside of Nation (2001). According to Seyhan (2001),

In many Chicano/Chicana works, the translation of the idea of nation into a linguistic and metaphysical idiom becomes an object of intense reflection, since as a quintessentially hybrid identity, the Chicano/Chicana cannot return to a national origin. (p. 20)

The vision of the postcolonial home which Nash Candelaria highlights in Memories of the Alhambra is a token of the hybrid culture of the American Southwest, of the mestizo identity which the Chicano people forged in the borderlands, and of their difficulty or impossibility of coming to terms, as American citizens, with the ethnic blend of identity markers: American, Mexican, Indian, Spanish, and mes(s)tizo. These facts have characterized the former northern Mexican territories and have become anthropological topoi in Chicano culture and literature.

References
