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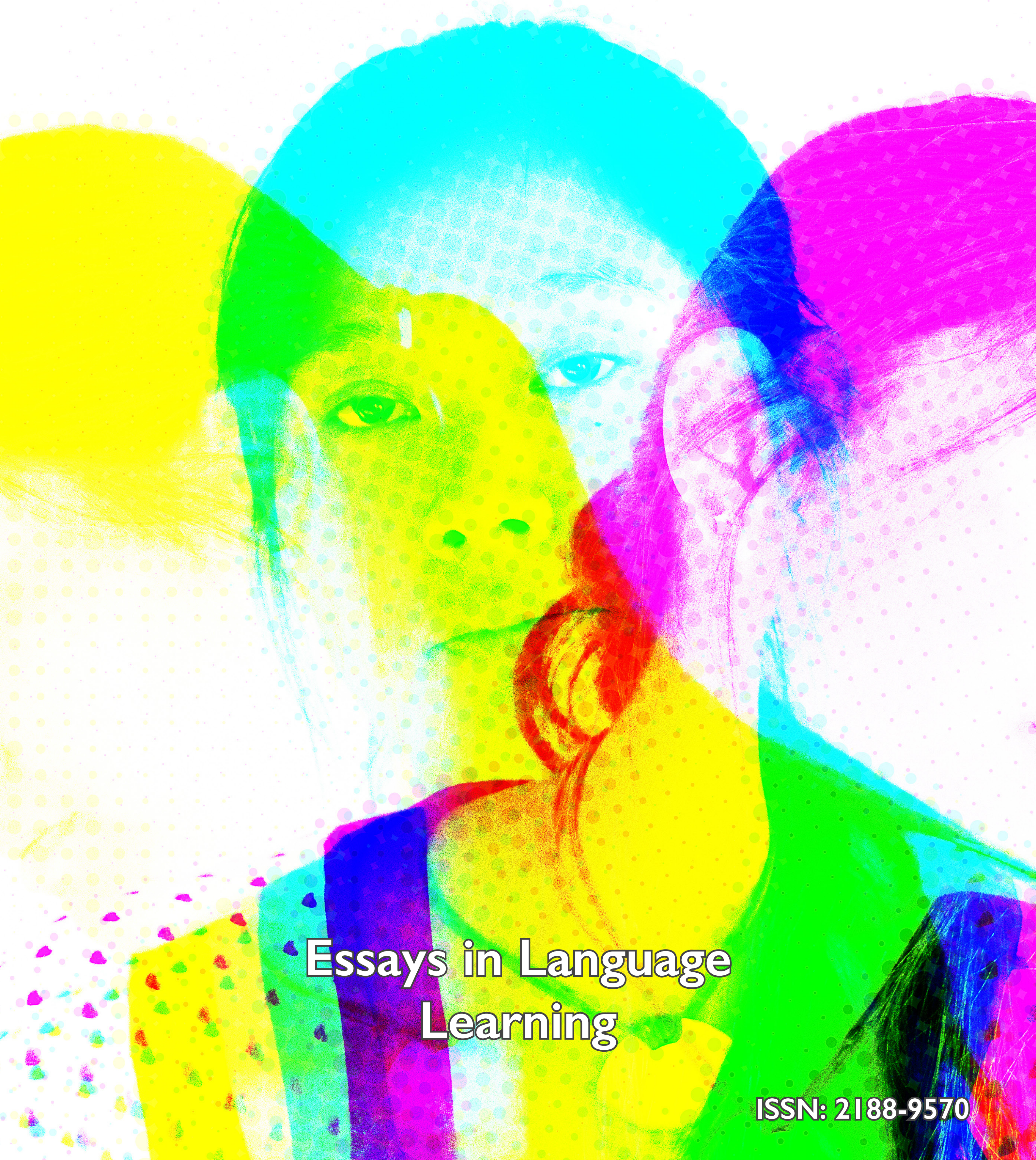

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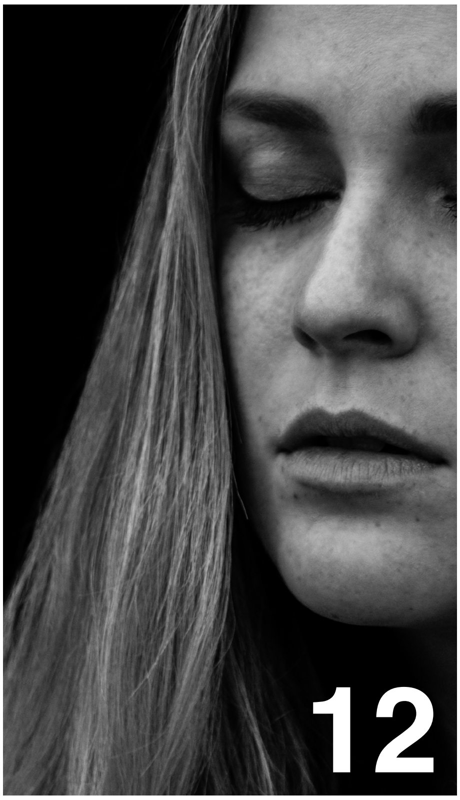

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Editorial Committee Introduction

It is my great pleasure to announce the publication of the seventh issue of the IAFOR Academic Review. One of the central missions of The International Academic Forum or IAFOR is to provide avenues for academics and researchers to be international, intercultural and interdisciplinary. In this the seventh issue of the IAFOR Academic Review we the editorial committee bring together a selection of the most interesting contributions from our two most recent Asian and European Conferences on Language Learning. Though this edition focused on the importance of Language Learning published by the International Academic Forum. However, though the primary focus is on the learning of language, the very broad nature of the discipline means it has wonderful opportunities to reflect and embrace the other disciplines of study. From applied linguistics, through to educational technology, and on to sociology and psychological are covered in the five papers presented in this edition. The papers selected by the editorial committee for this special edition certainly reflect the international, intercultural and interdisciplinary approach that lies at the heart of both IAFOR and Language Learning.

Sincerely,

Michael Liam Kedzlie
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The Propriety of the Native Speaker: World Englishes and the NEST/NNEST Dichotomy

By Kevin Kato

Photograph by Australia Department of Foreign Affairs / Flickr

Abstract

Discriminating teachers' pedagogical and professional skills, solely on the basis of accent, physical appearance, and native speaker status is unfounded and unethical. The growing number of English language learners worldwide correlates to an increasing number of nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and native English speaking teachers (NESTs). Unfortunately, NNESTs have not always shared equal status with NESTs in the field; in fact, until quite recently, NNESTs, the global majority of English teachers, were not seen by many as legitimate educators. Moreover, unity between NNESTs and NESTs seems lacking at best, and at worst a contest to claim superiority over the other. Specifically, a native speaker benchmark has divided a group of teachers sharing a common goal of teaching English, into two species with a distinct set of assets.
This article aims to reexamine and implement the perceived advantages and disadvantages of NNESTs and NESTs into a coalescent framework in which both parties can access and utilize assets thought before unique to each group. Specifically, this paper argues the intersection of multicompetence, codeswitching, and six qualities thought only accessible to nonnative English speaking teachers offers one step towards unifying two disparate groups by refocusing the emphasis on the needs of our students. For instance, NESTs in EFL environments who have proficiency in their learners' L1 can empathize with the frustrations of learning a foreign language, and of course benefit from sharing a language in common. This essay seeks to move beyond the native speaker dichotomy and provide students with qualified teachers.

Introduction

With the current rate English is continuing to spread across the globe, Inner Circle countries can no longer dictate and control the future of English; it is now in the hands of the world—a world comprised of a diverse population of English speakers from different cultures and varieties of English. An often cited statistic by Canagarajah (1999) projects that 80% of English teachers world-wide are nonnative speaking teachers of English (NNESTs). Interestingly, however, many people both within and outside of the ELT community continue to view these educators from a native speaker perspective. That is, a primarily Inner Circle native speaker model is used as a benchmark and target of ultimate attainment by which teachers' pedagogical and professional skills are measured against. Paradoxically, these teachers will never attain native status in the eyes of many people, but are referred to instead as 'native-like.' Those falling short of the 'native-like' title are demoted to the rank of failed native speakers. This paper advocates for a perspective based on L2 users, the majority of speakers and teachers, rather than on native speakers the minority group. It also argues that a native speaker framework has divided a group of teachers with the same end goal. Moreover, I will present a foundation which implements the perceived advantages of both nonnative and native speaking English teachers via the intersection of multicompetence, codeswitching and Medgyes' (1992) 6 assets.

This paper is written in the context of language teaching in Japan, where English is taught as a foreign language. Although the findings and pedagogical applications are most fully beneficial with a monolingual group of learners in an EFL environment, they also hold relevance in ESL situations.

Outline of the paper

The current paper is divided into two major sections. The first section traces the origins of the native speaker benchmark and explains how its reverberation through the field divided NNESTs and NESTs. The subsequent section describes a new framework, aiming to bridge a conceptual gap between theory and practice by arguing how the intersection of multicompetence, codeswitching, and Péter Medgyes' (1992) six assets of NNESTs can refocus teaching on the L2 user. I will elaborate how the use of multicompetence as basis invalidates the myth of the native speaker and will further detail the implications of this foundation regarding the use of L1 in the classroom as well as a lens to reevaluate and reply Medgyes' (1992) 6 assets.

From Deficit to Difference—Changing Perspectives and Paradigms in the Literature

In the last three decades, the notion of native and nonnative speakers in language teaching went from an overlooked area of research to one with a dedicated subfield of study in applied linguistics. While many academics and practitioners perceive NNESTs as bona fide educators in the field, the situations in some EFL environments, such as Japan, seems to reflect unity between nonnative and native English teachers as lacking at best, and at worst a contest for superiority between two groups who possess a common purpose. Moreover, this dichotomy is often portrayed through stereotypes in the literature with NNESTs viewed as grammar gurus who can better offer insight and teaching strategies from their experience as learners and NESTs as the proprietors of pronunciation (see e.g., Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Braine, 2010; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). However, prior to the 1980s, the perceptions of many NNESTs could not have been any different; these educators were widely viewed as second class teachers with language deficiencies. In this section, I argue that this reflects one example of how deeply the native speaker benchmark has penetrated the field of ELT.

The Native Speaker Construct

The notion of the 'idealized native speaker' model emerged from the Chomskian paradigm in linguistics (see e.g. Chomsky, 1965, 1968, 1986) which helped define (Inner Circle) native speakers as the perfect models of their language—i.e., the judges of grammaticality, against which others would be measured. The underpinning of this model was in Chomsky's (1966) difference between competence and performance which emphasized the former over the latter (see also Firth & Wagner, 1997; Sampson, 1980). While this may have applicability in examining a static language in a homogenous group of monolingual speakers, it does not provide an adequate basis or account for language variation among the multilingual users and various contexts in which English is used today.

Another conceptual emphasis of the Chomskian perspective was a focus on independent grammars. For instance, Selinker's (1969, 1972) notions of fossilization and interlanguage helped support the idea of separate grammars by using a native speaker perspective and benchmark as a measure of ultimate attainment for L2 learners. Specifically, the initial interlanguage model proposed that students traverse a path from L1 native speakers to L2 native speakers, with interlanguage representing the language during their L2 transition. Those failing to attain native proficiency in the L2 became fossilized or deficient native speakers. While Chomsky's and Selinker's theories regarding SLA certainly represented novel and breakthrough discoveries during the 1960s and 1970s, these were largely predicated on the notions and hypotheses of first language acquisition. This foundation inherently employed a native speaker model as a linguistic and cultural target for acquisition which would reverberate through different paradigm shifts.

An Injection of Sociolinguistics

Following the rather theoretical lab-based approach to the native and nonnative speaker constructs exemplified by the Chomskian paradigm, the next shift, the NNEST movement, would broaden the scope of investigation to include a wide range of sociolinguistic variables. Specifically, scholars and linguists in the field began to view other varieties of English through a more pluricentric lens taking into account issues such as language ownership, class, race, and (access to) education (e.g., see Halliday, 1974; Higgins, 2003; Norton, 1997; Peirce, 1995; Widdowson, 1994). Under this more holistic approach, non-Inner Circle varieties of English would become recognized not as erroneous forms of an Inner Circle target, but as separate and unique varieties worthy of study (see B. Kachru, 1997; Sridhar & Sridhar, 1986). This movement also signified the legitimization of NNESTs as educators (see e.g. Higgins, 2003; Medgyes, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Widdowson, 1994).

Another Divide

Although momentous progress was made during the almost 20 year span from the 1980s until the late 1990s, it was also a double edged sword. Some research implicitly reiterated remnants of a Chomskian (in)competence model and thus marked the origin of another division between NNESTs and NESTs. Medgyes' 1992 article represents one such example of this research. Seidlhofer's (2001) assertion, "this means that the how is changing, but linked to a what that is not" (p. 140), provides a nice analogy for the analysis of this. While the legitimacy and status of both NNESTs and NESTs changed, differing degrees of an "us" versus "them" relationship between the groups remains nearly the same.

That is, despite insisting that the questions concerning the relative value of NNESTs and NESTs represent a false dichotomy which "may be conductive to forming wrong judgments about the differences" (1992, p. 347) between NNESTs and NESTs, Medgyes' argument presupposes this binary contrast, and in fact rests on the advantages and disadvantages between each group. Moreover, these merits and demerits are predicated on the remnants of the native speaker benchmark via their derivations in terms of what they are or are not. This shares similarities how the term nonnative, was conceived and defined in terms of something that they were not, a native speaker. Although Medgyes' 1992 article bought into a comparative fallacy, his six assets raise important notions that practitioners, researchers and teacher training programs (e.g. MA TESOL programs) should address. Shortly after Medgyes, in 1999, Vivian Cook, an English linguist, proposed a groundbreaking idea that viewed SLA from the perspective of the L2 learner.

A New Framework

This marks the second major portion of the paper. The notions of multicompetence and the L2 will be introduced as well as their implementation as a theoretical foundation for L1 use in the classroom. The subsequent section will discuss how codeswitching can be utilized as a tool by both teachers and students, which will be followed by a re-examination of Medgyes' (1992) assets.

Multicompetence and the L2 User

Cook (1999) offers his notion of multicompetence as one way of going beyond the native speaker dichotomy. His idea of multicompetence, originally coined in his 1991 publication, The poverty-of-the stimulus argument and multi-competence as "the compound state of a mind with two grammars" (p.112), encompasses the knowledge of L1, L2, and interlanguage into one mind. That is, it accounts for the total amount of language knowledge a multilingual person possesses, rather than isolating a speaker's L1 and L2 (see Figure 1).

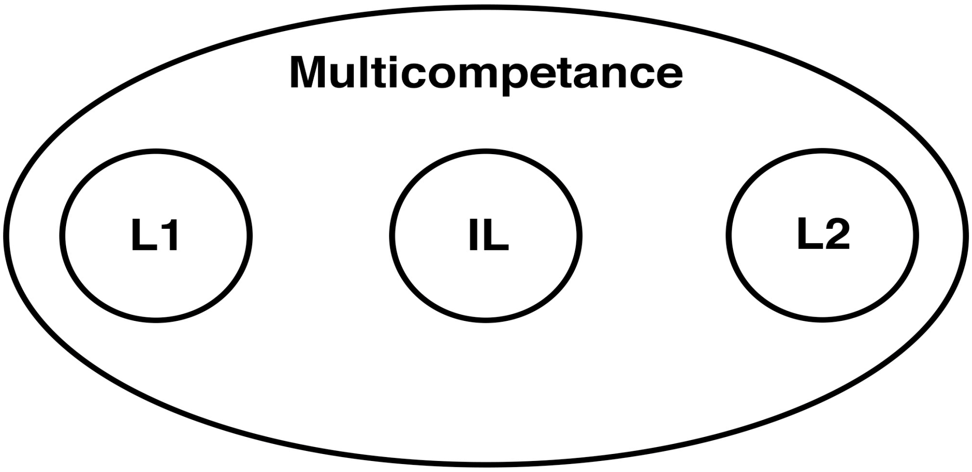

Figure 1

Moreover, all languages contained in a user's language eco-system are seen as interdependent on one another and encompasses the syntax, culture and pragmatics of each language.

The L2 user comes as a natural extension of the multicompetence lens. A non-monolingual speaker is seen as unique user and person in their own right, free from descriptors such as a failed native speaker. Cook (2005) defines an L2 user as, "a person who uses another language for any purpose at whatever level, and is thus not covered by most definitions of either bilinguals or L2 learners" (p.47). The multicompetence and L2 user approach take into consideration that many of people in the world use at least two languages with many more that use a multitude of languages for different purposes. When viewed in this context the native speaker framework shifts from a structure of normality to one of uncommonness. That is successful communication can and does span more than one language at a time (codeswitching) and occurs between those possessing a gamut of proficiencies. As a theoretical foundation for my framework, it provides a constructive basis to address L1 use in the classroom and re-evaluate Medgyes' 6 assets. It will soon be monolingual native speakers who find themselves lost in a multilingual world.

Codeswitching and L1 Use in the Classroom

Codeswitching denotes one tool accessible to bilinguals. However, what exactly defines a bilingual? Or perhaps more specifically, what levels of proficiency do bilinguals possess? Bilinguals represent not a homogenous group of people, but rather individuals who possess different ranges of proficiency in more than one language (cf. V. Cook, 2002; Han, 2004). Although some bilinguals have equal (balanced) proficiencies in more than one language, they represent a minority group among bilinguals as a whole. For example, Cook (1999, 2005) argues that plotting native speaker proficiency as an ultimate attainment goal represents an unreasonable, if not impossible objective, with the exception of people who are monolingual speakers of two languages (balanced bilinguals). Not surprisingly, the differing proficiency ranges equate to a diverse use of codeswitching between bilinguals. This encompasses not only the linguistic features of codeswitching (e.g., inter- and intra-sentential switching), but also extralinguistic variables such as identity and power. Even under a multicompetence lens, the fear of negative transfer may represent a topic of contention for teachers. However, I argue that the benefits of positive transfer significantly outweigh the possible detriments of negative transfer in EFL environments. The following sections will discuss some possible uses of L1 in the classroom (via codeswitching) and its benefits to students and teachers.

Codeswitching by Students (Limited Proficiency Bilinguals)

The use of codeswitching by students can be utilized as a tool to repair breakdowns, express personal feelings, fill lexical gaps and can also foster stronger classroom solidarity which may lead to improved motivation (Fotos, 2001; Nishimura, 1995). For instance, I will introduce two examples gathered from out of class recordings submitted by some of my students.

Example 1

I'm going present…chau wa…I'm going to present. {I'm going present…I mean…I'm going to present…}
This student's use of codeswitching signaled her repair of a grammatically incorrect item.

Example 2

Is it totteiru? {Is it recording?}

The code switch to Japanese was used to prevent the breakdown of her inquiry. While the students in each example learners utilize Japanese for different functions, they both used English as a base grammar. Research by other scholars (Vivian Cook, 2001; Eldridge, 1996; Fotos, 2001; Kite, 2001; Macaro, 2001, 2005) show that contrary to popular belief, linguistically and pedagogically, codeswitching can improve coherence among students as well as offer the teacher possibly more effective classroom management methods. Macaro (2005) insightfully writes:

the trick for the teacher is to encourage the learners to make evaluative strategies such as: 'when am I likely to be better off sticking with language I know already (e.g. formulaic expressions; whole sentences I have used in the past) rather than generate new sentences via translation. Balanced against this I must try to address the task as fully and as creatively as I can.' (p.77)

When used in a constructive and sparing manner, the use of students' L1 and codeswitching in the classroom can facilitate more L2 production as it keeps the flow of a conversation intact. Fotos' (2001) study observed that an improved classroom atmosphere and enhanced motivation represented a couple positive effects for students.

Codeswitching by Teachers

Just as codeswitching can facilitate the use of the target language in the classroom for students, teachers can also benefit from employing it as a tool. Forman (2010) offers ten principles for the use of L1 in the EFL classroom (see Table 1 below).

1. Cognitive L2 development
To explain L2 vocabulary, grammar, usage, culture
2. Affective Solidarity
To facilitate easy, 'natural' interaction amongst students and with teacher
3. Interpersonal development
To develop collaborative, team-work abilities
4. Pedagogic
Time-effectiveness To make good use of limited classroom time
5. Comprehensibility
To convey meaning successfully
6. Inclusivity
To ensure that all students can participate
7. Contingency
To respond to immediate teaching/learning needs
8. Classroom management
To maintain discipline
9. Socio-political Globalised communication
To enable students to move flexibly and effectively across two languages
10. Political positioning
To resist the political dimension of global English

For those in teaching environments where contact between students and teachers occur one a week for 90 minutes, codeswitching can offer teachers a powerful tool to build repertoire with students. Additionally, classroom management via students' L1 can become much easier as a teacher can more accurate assess and respond to students who are on or off task. Codeswitching can also be used to ease understanding of the target language (e.g. English) by replacing seemingly difficult to words with glosses in the students' L1. Moreover, Macaro (2001, 2005) suggests that the codeswitching in this context can help rather than hinder students' ability to recall and remember new vocabulary. Perhaps the most beneficial and realistic outcome from judicious codeswitching is the authenticity provides as well as the focus on the L2 user.

Medgyes' Six Assets

Péter Medgyes, a Hungarian EFL teacher, published a seminal article and then a book (1994) which scrutinized the position and roles of NNESTs and NESTs in TESOL. Although his two works were the first to assert that both 'native' and 'nonnative' speakers of English could be successful teachers, these suppositions were accompanied by the observation that each group possessed a distinct set of characteristics. Despite the flaws in his original argument, Medgyes' six traits represent a good objective for NESTs to aspire for. The six inimitable qualities thought unique to NNESTs are as follows:

1. Only non-NESTs can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English.
2. Non-NESTs can teach learning strategies more effectively.
3. Non-NESTs can provide learners with more information about the English language.
4. Non-NESTs are more able to anticipate language difficulties.
5. Non-NESTs can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners.
6. Only non-NESTs can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue. (pp. 346-7)

NESTs learning their students' L1 are adding another tool to their repertoire of teaching methods. With the exception of the first trait, the others will become more and more beneficial as the teacher develops greater fluency. In most of the classes that I teach I code switch between English and Japanese with students. However, with two of my classes, I took an L2 based approach. Based on informal comments from student surveys, I found that students in the L2 only class wished I spoke Japanese, while the others classes remarked it was a benefit. While further more structured and formal research is required, if the informal comments gathered verbally and via surveys are indicative of the results, it would seem in the best interests of NESTs in EFL situations to learn and develop proficiency in their students' L1s. As a limited proficiency bilingual who does not represent a model of the successful learner of English, the pedagogical benefits of sharing an L1 and the ability to express my struggles and successes in learning Japanese to students have proved invaluable for me.

Conclusion

While it seems unlikely the label native speaker will disappear from peoples' minds and the lexicon of English, the term itself has grown in breadth and depth from the definition concerning the order a person acquires a language. For instance, the term has gone beyond the purely linguistic qualities, and now accounts for other variables such as social factors, e.g., personal affiliation and association (see e.g., Davies, 1991, 2003; Rampton, 1990). I hope that we can move beyond native speaker status and accept people based on their merit rather than the language they are born into.

I have also attempted to provide a brief history of the native speaker benchmark in the fields of applied linguistics and ELT. This section will discuss how notion of multicompetence, codeswitching and Medgyes' six assets can be reframed to move past a native speaker standard and also bring teachers together. As discussed earlier, Cook's (1999) concept of multicompetence combines into one model all languages accessible to a user. Moreover, it emphasizes defining ultimate measures of acquisition in terms of the L2 user rather than on the native speaker. In other words, it serves as the theoretical underpinning of this trifecta. Now that we can view access to multiple languages (regardless of a user's proficiency) as a tool, as opposed to a deficit, the proverbial door has been opened for codeswitching and the re-application of Medgyes' assets.

Fotos (2001) argues that limited proficiency bilinguals can employ codeswitching as a learning strategy. Employing the same framework, a NEST with some knowledge of the students' L1 would also fall into this classification and as such have access to the same benefits. When viewed under a multicompetence lens, this notion has potentially powerful benefits for both teachers and students. That is, it grants NESTs access to a toolbox of assets once thought unique to NNESTs. Although codeswitching by limited proficiency bilingual teachers may not be as beneficial as those performed by a more proficient user, it may have positive wash back effects. For instance, if you just arrived in a foreign country with no knowledge of the local language and someone greeted you in your L1, would it not make you feel a little better? Likewise, limited use of a student's L1 will hopefully evoke a feeling of safety and express your empathy with the outcome leading to more production in the target language.

By adapting a multicompetence view of language in the classroom I hope we can move past the notion of the idealized native speaker, help our fellow colleagues and improve our own teaching techniques. I hope the future of English teaching entails a world in which teachers are judged not by native or nonnative status, but by their pedagogical and professional skills.

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What goes on in Foreign Language Learners' minds? Planning Research to Explore EFL motivation, EFL anxiety and EFL Learning Strategies

By Phil Craigie & Alison Owens

Photograph by Natalie Schmid / Flickr

Abstract

Learning a foreign language is a complex task and one that is becoming more and more popular as the world becomes smaller. Within Taiwan, English is taught in elementary, middle and senior high schools as part of the compulsory education as well as in specialised courses in universities and cram schools. However, despite the intensity and breadth of English instruction, the language proficiency of Taiwanese English learners is highly variable and not improving. According to the Education First – English Proficiency Index, Taiwan has slipped from 25th ranking down to 30th. However, it is not just proficiency test results that can and should inform English teaching. What really goes on in the language learner's mind and how do these processes influence proficiency outcomes? Researchers have established that a wide range of factors influence learning proficiency including demographic factors such as age and gender, as well as pedagogical factors related to approaches to learning and teaching and prior education. This study explores three pedagogical factors in the adult language learning university context in Taiwan; language learning strategies, foreign language classroom anxiety, and foreign language motivation. This research posits that these factors may account for a greater portion of language learning proficiency variance. This paper explains the language teaching and learning context and its challenges, existing measures of motivation, learning strategies and anxiety used in language research and a proposed approach to research of these factors.

Introduction

English is taught as a foreign language within Taiwan generally starting in elementary school through to university. Furthermore, Taiwan has many educational institutions outside of the formal schooling system such as privately run cram schools that also teach English. However, despite all of the English teaching, Taiwan is ranked thirtieth for English proficiency worldwide (EnglishFirst, 2012). Furthermore, Taiwan has slipped from twenty-fifth position in the previous year of 2011. One of the reasons for the decline is that Taiwanese students' overall psychology towards learning English may have a negative influence on their English proficiency.

Experiences from my classroom

To begin with, I would like to provide context for the research problem by sharing some of my teaching experiences from my classroom that I hope may illustrate some of the diversity and the challenges that are evident in learning a foreign language.

The first experience revolves around a student who wishes to speak English perfectly, just like a native speaker. While communicating with this student, there are two actions that he does that impede his learning. The first action is that he will often say a few words into his sentence, stop, and then ask me how to complete the sentence properly as a native speaker would. Unfortunately, after a few words, he has not communicated enough of his meaning to determine what he wants to say, let alone help him phrase a proper English sentence. Usually after this first action, the next action is that he will usually utter in Chinese that English is too difficult and then want to give up trying. What could be going through his mind? One thought, and the student has mentioned this on numerous occasions to me, is that he wishes to speak English perfectly and immediately. The desire for perfection is also evident in his desire to achieve one hundred per cent for every single assessment and not achieving this means failure. The second thought that does not appear to be apparent to him is the unnecessary stress and anxiety that he manifests within himself. The student's desire to appear perfect may generate constant worry and also a sense that he is being constantly evaluated.

The second experience I would like to share is about a common theme that I have observed in my students' behaviour. One semester I decided to run a class activity where I asked the students to talk about about their goals and which professions they wanted to pursue after graduation. Interestingly, many of my students told me that they had no idea what they wanted to do. Rather puzzled, I asked them why they chose English as their major. They generally have two answers: a) their parents told them to, and b) their university entrance exam score was not high enough to be offered a position in a higher ranked university. Both of these explanations imply that students only chose English with resignation. As a result, it is often difficult to stimulate motivation within my students, as they seem more interested in the games they can play on Facebook and their cell phones.

The third experience I would like to share is about one student who has an overwhelming enthusiasm for learning English. The first example of this is during class time, when this student is called up to talk, she has a big smile on her face. She takes the microphone and starts talking, and talking, and talking, and talking. In fact, it is difficult to stop her talking because she appears to enjoy it so much. Another example is when I have seen her around the university campus, she immediately approaches me dragging her friends along and then instructs them to speak to me using English. Her friends usually look a little uncomfortable. Then immediately after I have spoken a sentence, she will translate it to Chinese so her friends can understand. The third example worth mentioning is a piece of writing she gave to me for reading. While reading it, I had to have an English dictionary with me because she likes to swap common English words for unusual words that she has remembered from word maps. I deliberately used the word remembered and not looked up because it would appear that she has a photographic memory and likes to use it.

The fourth experience I would like to share is about one student who when I first taught him about a year ago, he did not want to communicate in English. Often the conversations followed the pattern of me speaking in English, he looking very confused. I repeated the English sentence again very slowly and clearly, and then I would have to communicate using my broken Chinese. Recently, he attended an English Corner session that I hosted and he asked, using English, if I remembered him. Initially, I didn't remember, but after a few weeks I remember him from the previous year. Now, he regularly comes to the English Corner that I host, rarely relies on using Chinese, and even has developed the ability to spell English words based on their sounds. This skill he has developed when other students have not.

These scenarios help outline the variable language learning issues evident in Taiwanese classes that problematize my teaching and provide incentive for the research proposed in this paper.

English within Taiwan

To communicate using English is an important skill that Taiwan appears to value. This is evident by English being taught in elementary, junior, and senior high schools, not to mention the numerous cram schools that teach or specialize in English, and finally the university courses available. Although there are many opportunities for the Taiwanese to learn English, as previously mentioned, Taiwan has recently and significantly slipped in the world rankings of English proficiency EnglishFirst (2012). If Taiwan places a high importance on learning English, and there are so many opportunities for Taiwanese to learn English and improve their proficiency, why has Taiwan dropped in the world rankings? Some possible reasons could be that other countries that have jumped ahead of Taiwan by adopting fresh approaches and/or materials that have promoted more effective learning outcomes in English. Or alternatively, Taiwan has regressed in its pedagogical capacity resulting in more limited outcomes in English proficiency. Rather than analyse the reasons why Taiwan has slipped in the English proficiency ranks, it may be more productive to look at factors that affect English learning within a Taiwanese context.

There are many opportunities for the Taiwanese to learn English, and this generally occurs within a classroom. Students that attend English classes may do so for a variety of reasons including parental influence, inadequate university entrance exam scores for target courses, uncertainty about future career prospects or a belief that English will make them a more attractive job applicant in the future. Chamot (2004) suggested some more generalised reasons such as academic purposes, travel or survival.

Factors that may have an effect on English language proficiency may be personal traits such as personality, learning styles, learning strategies, anxiety and attitudes, just to name a few. This leads us to the question: what goes in the mind of the EFL learner? Questions similar to this have motivated researchers to search for answers generally focusing on one aspect or factor of the teaching and learning context. Over the last 30 years, there appears to be an increasing trend to focus on different learning factors such as motivation, learning strategies and anxiety and these are the three factors that I will focus on.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety is "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 125). Horwitz et al. (1986) found that foreign language learning anxiety has unique characteristics that are not found in other types of anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) have also stated that foreign language learning anxiety is "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p. 284). Some of the symptoms of foreign language anxiety may be avoiding situations that cause anxiety such as skipping class, or not completing homework (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Research prior to the late 1970's that examined anxiety and its relationship to learning a foreign language revealed that it was neither simple or well-understood and this is in part due to the lack of consistency between anxiety measuring instruments (Scovel, 1978). During the mid to late 1970's, research revealed that anxiety has different aspects and that has led to various theories. Kleinmann (1977) and Chastain (1975) suggested that anxiety might have a facilitating effect or a debilitating effect on language learning outcomes. Chastain (1975) pointed out "some concern about a test is a plus while too much anxiety can produce negative results" (P.160). Kleinmann's (1977) research demonstrates this theory in finding that learners with high levels of anxiety (debilitating) tended to avoid synaptic structures that contrasted most with their own native language. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) also suggested that facilitating anxiety appears to have a positive influence on language learning whereas debilitating anxiety has a negative effect.

Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene (1970), investigated the differences between state and trait anxiety. State anxiety is defined as being a "transitory emotional state or condition of the human organism that is characterised by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension and apprehension and heightened autonomic nervous system activity" (p.3). Trait anxiety is defined as being a "relatively stable individual differences in anxiety proneness" (p.3). Trait anxiety represents how individuals respond differently to stressful situations and has been found to be consistent over time.

With no clear definition or a reliable instrument to measure foreign language learning anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) undertook research that led to their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Understanding more about foreign language anxiety, particularly if it can facilitate language learning, as well as its relationship with other affective factors could lead to helping learners understand themselves and increase their language proficiency. Higher achievement is something that most, if not all, Taiwanese students desire and addressing language learning anxiety may assist them meet their goals.

The FLCAS has three subscales that consist of comprehension anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Comprehension anxiety is the fear of communicating with other students or a teacher using the foreign language. Fear of negative evaluation is the fear that other people (not necessarily confined to the classroom) will think negatively of the speaker. Test anxiety is the fear of participating in any type of quiz or exam (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Reflecting back on the first scenario about my classroom experiences, the student who wishes to speak English perfectly may be subjecting himself to more anxiety than necessary. Some anxiety would probably help him to improve, but his constant fear of negative evaluation may push his anxiety to a debilitating level.

Foreign Language Motivation

Motivation is the desire to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000) with an expectation of some value for the effort spent (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995). Motivation also must have a goal, a desire to reach the goal, a positive attitude towards learning how to achieve the goal, and behaviour that moves the person toward the goal (Gardner, 1985). From the opening stories about some of my students, there are different aspects of motivation, or lack of motivation, that can be observed. The second scenario of students studying English because their parents told them to, or they couldn't get into a higher ranked university, or they chose to major in English because their grade didn't allow them to another area, might suggest that they don't really have any motivation at all. This type of motivation has been described by Ryan and Deci (2000) as amotivational, meaning the learner is neither motivated nor not motivated.

One of the researchers who appears most dominant in the motivation area is Robert Gardner with work on the topic that dates back to Lambert in the early 1970s. Over the years, Gardner (1985, 2005) has developed his socio-educational model that examines motivation from an instrumental and integrative perspective. Instrumental motivation is described as desiring the rewards that an action can bring with two examples being increased job opportunities and meeting requirements to graduate. Integrative motivation is the desire to integrate oneself into the target culture by adapting parts of it into one's identity and an example of this may be my Taiwanese students using their English name where they can. Gardner's socio-educational model also covers other components that include orientation towards the target language, attitudes towards the learning situation, and anxiety.

There have also been other researchers with their own theories regarding motivation with two influential examples following. The first theory is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, as cited by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991); Ryan and Deci (2000)). The SDT is based on two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Tasks that are considered fun, enjoyable, or interesting are considered intrinsic motivation. Tasks that are done for utilitarian purposes, even if they are not interesting, are considered extrinsic. These theoretical understandings were modified in 2000, when Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed amotivational theory as discussed above. The second branch of motivation theory is Expectancy-Value theory proposed by Eccles and Wigfield (1995); Wigfield and Eccles (2000) who suggested that there are four components of motivation consisting of attainment value, intrinsic value, extrinsic utility value, and cost. Attainment value is the individual's perception of how important a given task is. Intrinsic value is the pleasure that the individual enjoys while completing the task. Extrinsic value is the perceived usefulness of completion of a task in relation to the individual's future goals. Cost is the perceived negative consequences of completing the task that includes not only financial cost, but also physical and emotional cost.

Self-determination theory and the expectancy-value theory have been examined within a general education environment. Whereas, the socio-educational model has been examined within a second language acquisition environment. Despite the fact that English is still considered a foreign language in Taiwan, and not a second language, the socio-educational model seems more appropriate for the following reasons. Firstly, its development was specifically based in second/foreign language acquisition contexts and not in a general setting as was adopted in development of the self-determination and expectancy-value theories. Even though English is not a second language in Taiwan, Taiwanese students have many opportunities to interact with the English language and culture. Secondly, motivation is a complex phenomenon and the socio-educational model appears to offer a more holistic approach. Thirdly, the AMTB has been used in many studies around the world and found to be useful, reliable and relevant to identifying the components of learner motivation as well as the impact of motivation on learning outcomes (Gardner, 2001).

Foreign Language Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are the "special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 1) and are procedures that facilitate learning especially at the novice stage (Chamot, 2005). Learning strategies assist the learners to move towards their goals through taking conscious actions (Oxford, 1990) such as Taiwanese students memorising exactly what their teachers have said. However, for learning strategies to be effective, they must be appropriate for the contextual situation (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) otherwise they may, in fact, be a hindrance.

Language learning strategies should be problem-oriented, encourage the learners to become more self-directed, be flexible and involve more of the learner than just his/her cognition. In addition, learning strategies should help the learner organise and integrate the new knowledge, they may also have an effect on the learner's motivational or affective state (Weinstein & Mayer, 1983). These strategies may seem strange to Taiwanese undergraduate students who have become accustomed to the authoritarian teaching methods of their youth. Therefore, an additional characteristic should be that the strategies are also teachable (Oxford, 1990). The learning skill that the student from my fourth scenario has learned, to spell words from their sounds, is interesting for several reasons. The first reason is very few other students have this ability. Therefore, where, how, and who did he learn this skill from? The second reason is that, if this student learned the skill, can it be taught to other students?

One of the more popular instruments used to measure how many and how often learning strategies are used is Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL has six categories of strategies that consist of mnemonics, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social. Mnemonics strategies concern adopting different ways to remember, for example using pictures and semantic maps. Cognitive strategies involve how the learner interacts with and processes new information, for example, practicing, repeating new words and searching for patterns. Compensation strategies involve deploying different methods to communicate when there are unknown gaps in the target language, for example, using gestures. Meta-cognitive strategies involve planning to improve and practice the target language, for example, seeking out native speakers and engaging in language exchange. Affective strategies involve managing one's own emotions, for example, relaxing and positive self-talk. Social strategies are interacting with others, for example, asking questions and practicing with other students.

Proposed method for research

This study is designed to examine the relationships between the three selected factors (foreign language learning strategies, foreign language anxiety, or foreign language motivation) and determine which factor or combination of factors is the best predictor of foreign language learning achievement for Taiwanese undergraduate students.

Several methods can be used to research educational phenomena. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2010) describe qualitative research methods as examining the contextual setting with no attempt to predict the future in order to produce a rich account of the events. On the other hand, quantitative research methods make an attempt to predict the future by determining the dependant factors associated with the phenomenon under examination by testing the relationships. After the analysis has taken place, the conclusion will be formed by deductive reasoning and dictated by the statistical analysis of the results.

This study aims to examine the relationships between several factors: foreign language anxiety, foreign language learning strategies and motivation to learn a foreign language and attempts to predict which factors individually or collectively have the greatest influence on foreign language achievement. The three main instruments to be used in this study have been extensively developed, tested and implemented in a variety of language learning situations and found to be fit for purpose and highly reliable. See Oxford (1986); Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) for the SILL, Aida (1994); Cao (2011) for the FLCAS, and Ho (1998). Therefore, it is deemed appropriate that a quantitative research methodology deploying established survey instruments should be used for this study.

For this study, the three instruments are all questionnaires that require the participants to self-report using a Likert scale. It is anticipated that the results will allow a close examination of the relationships between several factors: foreign language anxiety, foreign language learning strategies and motivation to learn a foreign language. Data from the survey instruments and a proficiency test will be analysed using PASW (formally known as SPSS). An enhanced understanding of correlations between these factors and language proficiency will provide evidence for predictions about which factor individually or collectively has the greatest influence on foreign language achievement. Such understandings can greatly assist language teachers who encounter learning issues similar to those common in Taiwanese classrooms.

Descriptive statistics

In order to adequately analyse the data several procedures will be implemented to establish validity and reliability.

The next set of data analysis procedures that will be run will be descriptive analysis to show the profile of the sample used. The information to be shown will be the median, frequency distribution and standard deviation of the participants' age, gender, study major and number of years studying English. In addition to the demographics descriptive analysis, procedures will be run to show participants' median level of anxiety, use of language learning strategies, motivation to learn a foreign language and foreign language achievement at that particular point in time when the data collection will be taken. The independent factors each have their own sub-scales and they will also be included in the descriptive analysis.

After the descriptive analysis procedures have been ran, the next set will be Pearson's correlation coefficient. As mentioned earlier, the independent factors have their own respective sub-scales and each of these will be compared for any statistically significant relationship between the sub-scales of there the other independent factors. For example, the FLCAS has three sub-scales (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety), the four sub-scales of the AMTB (integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation, and instrumental orientation), and the six sub-scales of SILL (memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social) will all be completed against each other. The final Pearson's correlation coefficient will be compared against each of the sub-scales and foreign language achievement.

The next sets of procedures to be run are inferential statistical procedures that they will test for impact and predictive nature of the independent variables on the dependant, that being foreign language achievement.

Inferential statistics

The set of inferential statistical procedures to be run are multiple regression analysis. There are two parts that will be completed. The first type multiple regression analysis using the "enter" method with collinearity diagnostics included. Any factor that shows a value of more 10 in the variance inflation factor (VIF) will be removed. This will show the impact that each of the independent variables will have on the dependent variable. That being the impact of foreign language anxiety, and/or foreign language learning strategies, and/or motivation to learn a foreign language will have on the foreign language achievement. The second multiple regression analysis to be run will be using the "the stepwise" method. This will show the predictive nature of each independent variable has on the dependent.

Why this study is important

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, English is taught throughout the Taiwanese education system, yet Taiwan has slipped in the world rankings. The dynamics of teaching English in a classroom is a combination of many factors. Previous research that has focused on specialised areas that has helped gained an insight into a part of the language learners' psychology. Three areas that have been discussed are anxiety in the foreign language classroom, motivation to learn a foreign language, and language learning strategies. Individually, these factors have guided researchers over the years. Now that these factors and instruments have been proven measures, maybe it is time to combine the power of these factors together and seek to reveal more of the holistic picture of foreign language acquisition.

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Focused Instruction of Formulaic Language: Use and awareness in a Japanese University Class

By David Wood & Kazuhiko Namba

Photograph by Danny Choo / Flickr

Abstract

While there exists a growing body of research on the nature and functions of formulaic language (FL), there remains a paucity of analysis of the ways language teachers may implement this knowledge in their classrooms, and the relative effectiveness of teaching techniques. FL, defined as multiword units of language which have particular functions and meanings in discourse, and which may be processed as if single words, may be acquired through exposure to language input. However, a benefit may accrue from techniques involving repetition and memorization, focused on a performance task. The present study is a report of a university EFL course in Japan in which students were taught about FL and provided with FL to repeat and memorize for a class presentation task. Results indicate that they used the sequences in their presentations and that their awareness of the nature and functions of FL was augmented by the course experience.

Plenty of research has been conducted on the nature of formulaic language (FL), defined by Wray (2002: 4) as "…word strings which appear to be processed without recourse to their lowest level of composition…," that is, multiword units of language which are prefabricated and/or holistically produced and understood. The role of FL in communication and language acquisition has been studied, but relatively little work has focused on how second language (L2) learners may develop awareness of FL and acquire facility with it in specific educational contexts.

The present study is an investigation of how students in a FL-focused university communication class at a Japanese university grew their awareness and skill of using FL through a variety of pedagogical means including form-focused activity, guided oral presentations, and attending to lectures on various aspects of FL. They were required to produce pre and post course freewriting about FL, and to perform an oral presentation about an aspect of FL. This presentation was guided and students were provided with formulaic sequences (FS) to memorize, to aid their crafting of effective academic oral discourse. The study was grounded in the research literature on task-based teaching and the role of memory in language gain, specifically as regards FL and formal, rehearsed speaking.

Formulaic Language and Repetition, Memory, and Production

It appears that benefits accrue from providing students with time and support in preparation for a speech production task. Pre-task planning and online or within-task planning have positive results for spoken language development. Ellis (2005) discusses a range of planning types, and notes that pre-task planning may be in the form of rehearsal of production or strategic planning – ways in which learners can take time to prepare how to express the ideas they want or need to formulate. The benefits of within-task planning, or taking time to reflect and plan while performing, for fluent production have been studied by Ellis and Yuan (2005), who found that the complexity and accuracy of learner speech improved when allowed online processing time. In the present study, learners were given the opportunity to discuss and revise their presentation topics and to practice their presentations using FL provided by the researchers.

Recently, some developments in the study of formulaic sequences and the ways they may be beneficial to fluent production focus on memorization as a means of boosting competence. The potential value of memory is targeted in research such as that of Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988), who outline principles for encouraging memory to further automatization. Phonemic aspects of formulaic sequences, including alliteration and assonance (Lindstromberg and Boers, 2008a, 2008b) have been shown to aid in the learning or memorization of FS. In the present study, learners were encouraged to memorize formulaic sequences relevant to their presentation topics, in an effort to automatize them.

Several recent studies have been conducted in which participants memorized FL with positive results for effective communication. In one study (Wray, 2008), a beginner learner of Welsh memorized phrases and sentences necessary in order to provide a cooking demonstration broadcast on television, all within a one-week period. The learner delivered a competent and fluent demonstration and nine months later recalled a significant amount of the targeted language. In another case (Wray, 2008), advanced learners memorized nativelike formulaic ways of expressing ideas which they deemed valuable in everyday encounters with native speakers. After a week of practice and rehearsal, the learners recorded themselves in real life encounters using the memorized material. Participants produced the memorized utterances in their real life encounters, although not always accurately, and they reported that the memorized language aided them in confidence, satisfaction, and feeling like nativelike interlocutors. This supports the assertion of Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, and Demecheleer (2006) that use of formulaic sequences can help L2 learners by providing nativelike idiomaticity, a nativelike temporal pattern of speech, and multiword strings of accurate speech. The learners in the present study underwent a process similar to those in Wray's studies, in that they memorized FL in order to achieve nativelike idiomaticity and multiword strings of accurate speech in a real-life task, in this case an in-class presentation

Memorization has been viewed in Western contexts as a questionable and archaic learning technique with limited potential for language acquisition, but evidence from Asian learners has indicated a role for memorization and repetition of texts in language acquisition. Some research with Chinese learners suggests that memorization may have some utility in facilitating understanding of written texts (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000). Other research has shown a measurable perceived positive effect of memorization. Ding (2007) found positive effects of memorization of large amounts of text by university students in China. After extensive experience memorizing lengthy texts in English, students reported that the practice had made them better communicators in English by enhancing their fluency, focusing attention on collocations and formulas, and enabling the transfer of these to real life communication. Similarly, Walker and Utsumi (2006) found that memorizing dialogues in Japanese as a second language was valued by learners as a learning technique and as a boost to fluency and transferable to real life communication. In another recent study, Dai and Ding (2010) found that Chinese L2 learners of English who engaged in text memorization activities used more FSs in their L2 writing than those who did not, and that their writing proficiency and ability outstripped that of learners who did not memorize texts. These pieces of research provide hints of a potentially powerful effect of memorization in furthering language proficiency and production.

Psycholinguistic research into phonological memory appears relevant to FL processing and retention. The basic model of working memory, as elaborated by Baddeley (2000) and others, is that language production involves the short-term retention of aspects of language in a cognitive loop. The loop has several components: a visual-spatial sketchpad which holds visual and spatial information related to the target language items; a phonological loop which deals with verbal information and is linked to phonological memory; an episodic buffer which integrates information from the sketchpad and phonological loop with long-term memory. Phonological memory is said to facilitate language acquisition through a process of holding phonological information temporarily over and over until a permanent or long-term memory representation can be created. This aspect of the working memory model has been studied quite extensively in laboratory settings, and considerable evidence exists to confirm the existence of a phonological loop (see Baddeley, Gathercole, & Papagno, 1998). While studies of adult L2 acquisition and phonological memory are numerous and have actually indicated that phonological memory plays a significant role in vocabulary acquisition, a limited body of work has investigated possible links between phonological memory and oral L2 fluency.

O'Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, and

Collentine (2007) examined phonological memory in the context of the real world of language learning, comparing the development of Spanish L2 fluency of native speakers of English in a regular university language program and a study-abroad semester. Psycholinguistic tests of phonological memory were conducted before and after a semester of study and examined for correlation with gains in speech fluency over the same period of time. Results indicated that, independent of the learning context, phonological memory actually appears to be related to gains in L2 fluency. One could speculate that the effect of phonological memory on the ability to retain and produce formulaic sequences may be a key component of the fluency gains of the learners in this study.

In practice, then, it appears that repetition is important if formulaic sequences are to be automatized, or readily available for use in spontaneous discourse. Repetition can be built into tasks in a number of ways, including the repetition of a particular task in its entirety, such as a presentation or a role play, or form-focused, with a focus on improving particular points of language such as FS. In the present study, students were encouraged to repeat FL in order to memorize it for use in a presentation.

In light of the existing knowledge of the possible role of memorization and repetition in developing facility with FL, and the notion that experience using FL in real-life performance might heighten student awareness of the nature and utility of FL, we conducted our research to address these two questions:

1. When students have been provided with FL to repeat and memorize specific to a performance task, will they use it appropriately in the task?

2. Will a range of experience with FL, including using it in performance tasks, heighten student awareness of the nature and utility of FL?

Methods

The course

In an attempt to examine how particular pedagogical practices can facilitate awareness and use of formulaic language, we engaged students in a communication studies course at a Japanese university in a range of activity. The 14-session course of 22 students followed a mixed syllabus of lectures, form-focused tasks, and group and individual oral presentations, all conducted entirely in English:

- The form-focused tasks were adapted from McCarthy and O'Dell (2005)
- Lecture topics included identification, formulaic language and second language acquisition, code-switching, spoken fluency, and lexical bundles.
- Students prepared and performed group presentations on aspects of Japanese FL which were of interest, and received content and language-focused feedback.

Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from students over the course of the semester:

- students were coached and provided with formulaic sequences to practice and memorize for a final oral presentation about formulaic language
- students produced a piece of freewriting on the first and last days of the course, responding to the prompt "what is formulaic language and why is it important?"

Eight students volunteered to participate in a round of activity designed to examine the idea that memorizing formulaic sequences for a specific purpose can be beneficial. The individual final presentations for the course were scaffolded and guided, and the participants were provided with formulaic sequences which could aid in effective and appropriate expression of their chosen content.

Each participant met with a researcher several times to select a presentation topic, refine the topic, and create an outline. After the initial round of meetings, each participant presented a spoken draft of his or her presentation to the researcher, who gave feedback on content, organization, and language.

The researcher provided each participant with a number of specific formulaic sequences which could refine and augment the presentation. The sequences were chosen based on their appropriateness for the expressions of particular functions in the discourse of the presentations, following the metacategories of lexical bundles (a functionally specialized subset of FL) elaborated by Biber, Conrad & Cortes (2004). While the categories are presented by Biber et. al. as a way of classifying lexical bundles as to discourse function, they are readily applicable to FL in general. Referential sequences deal with factual content, and characteristics such as quantity, time, and space, for example a number of, a range of, and late by X minutes. 11such sequences were provided in total. Discourse sequences deal with organizing information, for example all in all, in the course of, and some of which are. 16 such sequences were provided in total. Stance sequences deal with modality, attitude, and a link to the listener, for example curious as to why, as illustrated here, and the truth is that. 18 such sequences were provided in total.

The sequences were all selected with reference to the Corpus of Contemporary American English - at a frequency of at least 10/million words and with a Mutual Information score (MI) of at least 3.0 in the corpus (for an overview of MI see Schmitt, 2010). Appendix 1 presents a full list of the sequences provided.
Participants were then encouraged to practice the presentation and include the formulaic sequences which had been provided, repeating them until

they felt confident in using them. From one to three weeks elapsed between the provision of the formulaic sequences and the actual presentations. Participants were strongly advised not to memorize and entire text for their presentation, and to only use notes which contained point-form prompts.

The presentations were video recorded and the recorded speech was checked for the presence of the formulaic sequences which had been provided. Of the eight students who had chosen to participate in the study, three made deep changes to their presentations shortly before the presentation day, to the extent that it rendered the formulaic sequences irrelevant. These presentations were therefore not analyzed.

Results

Presentations

Of a total of 45 formulaic sequences provided to the remaining five participants, all were used in the presentations. Individual results are presented in Table 1. Student names are presented as abbreviations. In some instances the number of FS used exceeds the number provided because some sequences were used more than once in a presentation See appendix).

Table 1

Use of formulaic sequences in presentation

Participant	No. Sequences provided	No. Sequences used
A W	12	14 (2 duplicated)
K M	7	7
S Y	8	7
Y O	8	7
Y U	10	10
Total	45	45

The participants who followed through on all stages of the research process used the formulaic sequences comprehensively in their presentations. It appears that practicing and memorizing formulaic sequences for a specific performance goal is a practical and effective way of improving communicative effectiveness for the target task itself.

Pre-post course freewriting

On the first day and the last day of class the students were asked to freewrite for ten minutes to the prompt "what is formulaic language and why is it important?" Freewriting is a process of fast, timed writing in which a writer puts thoughts on paper without the opportunity to preplan content or language. In this case, the freewriting was meant to capture the students' deep sense of formulaic language, not to test their recall of lecture or textbook content. In other words, the technique was designed to capture more what they had acquired about formulaic language than what they had learned or been taught. The freewriting samples were matched pre- and post course and were analyzed for evidence of a developing sense of the functional and communicative value of formulaic language. It was expected that the experience of the course, particularly the lectures and the coached final presentations, might have raised awareness of the communicative value of formulaic language.

A common theme in the first pre-course freewriting was the idiomatic nature of formulaic language, often referred to as "expressions," along with a perceived basis in cultural traditions, and even slang. Statements to these effects from the initial freewrites include:

- It was passed from ancestor to us
- It's a traditional expression which old people have used for a long time
- Idioms are difficult for Japanese student
- Idioms combine two words
- It has a slangy expression

Other perceptions of the function and nature of formulaic language included structural aspects, for example "we can modify easily, for example, we can just modify simple verbs when we don't know the past form," or a sense of the noncompositional nature of some sequences, as in "they are composed of some words … idiom has a completely different meaning."

A strikingly clear and salient broad theme from the post-course freewriting samples is the power of formulaic language to facilitate effective and fluent speech. Common statements to this effect include:

- If we don't have FL, we can't speak or write speedily … makes language better and comfortable
- There are a lot of cases that we can't explain in terms of grammatical rules, but these words are commonly used in daily communication by native speakers
- It help to speak fluently and naturally
- It help us to speak smoothly or understand easily
- We can communicate with each other efficiently, quickly, and easily
- A way of expressing how we feel or understanding socially
- We need not think about the grammatical system
- We can speak fluently by using it

During the course students had a great deal of exposure to background information on the types and functions of formulaic language, and they had ample opportunity to study and manipulate formulaic sequences in practice and in the preparations for the final presentations. It is likely that this body of experience contributed to their final observations that formulaic language is a set of tools for efficient and effective communication, rather than a set of idioms, expressions, slang, or traditional ways of expression.

Discussion and Conclusions

The students who participated in the course and the cycle of FL-focused activity appear to have gained in two ways: their overall awareness of the value, functions, and uses of FL in communication expanded and deepened; their repertoire of FL for use in the expression of particular ideas was augmented. The former gain is evidenced by their freewriting, in which they express a broader range of attitudes and beliefs about FL after completing the course – particularly as regards the benefits of FL in facilitating overall speech proficiency and fluency. The latter gain, the increase in repertoire of FL, is present in their speech presentations, into which they integrated a new set of specific FSs after practice, repetition, and memorization.

Research of this type is fraught with difficulties and complications, yet it is essential that we continue to investigate how learners may benefit from specific pedagogical practices with regard to FL. In future, projects involving closely matched of genre and dynamics between rehearsed and practiced performances and subsequent recalls might yield firmer results. However, the present study provides tantalizing preliminary evidence that utilizing the power of repetition and memory in speech tasks can augment facility with and awareness of FL; it remains for future research to determine how and to what extent this is so in a range of circumstances.

Appendix

Formulaic Sequences Provided for Presentations

1. a number of
2. a range of
3. according to
4. all in all
5. are generally defined as
6. as illustrated here
7. as many (examples) as possible
8. can be a source of difficulty
9. can be tricky
10. comes across
11. compiled a list
12. curious as to why
13. dealing with
14. direct our attention to
15. down through generations
16. draw out
17. for the most part
18. from (their) point of view
19. from our perspective
20. have the additional benefit of
21. highly unusual
22. how the X differ
23. in fact
24. in an instance in which
25. in the course of
26. initial reaction
27. it became apparent that
28. late by X minutes
29. launch into
30. looked down on
31. may appear similar
32. point out
33. present a comparison between
34. presents problems
35. some of which are
36. some such thing
37. such as
38. the truth is that
39. through the eyes of
40. to sum up
41. use in error
42. with particular attention to

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Empowering English Language Learners: The Importance of Developing Critical Literacy Skills

By Jennifer Cope

Photograph by Daniel Foster / Flickr

Abstract

For some time, listeners and readers have been regarded as active participants in the complex and interactional nature of negotiating meaning (Savignon, 2001). However, many of those who are learning English do not have equal access to the skills of understanding the social practices in which reading and writing are embedded (Clark, 1995). For English language learners to critically engage with textual and cultural practices, they must have access to, and be able to critique, both cultural and linguistic resources (Hammond & Mackin-Horarick, 1999). One way to achieve this effectively in English language teaching is to consider the teaching of context alongside the meaning of the words themselves.

This paper presents some of the research relating to critical literacy skills and responds to the challenge of teaching critical literacy skills to English language learners. In so doing, it provides a contribution towards the development of these skills in the classroom as a way of enabling learners to participate fully in the discourse. This paper provides an overview of the discourse analytic study in progress, from which it is derived, that is critically analysing newspaper texts from the USA, the UK and Australia, and discusses how contextual factors can affect readers' understanding of discourse. The paper concludes with a discussion of the factors under consideration in teaching critical literacy skills in the English language learning classroom, and the proposed pedagogical tool.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of critical literacy skills and that, by aiding English language learners to develop these skills, may provide a viable way of empowering them. Motivations for this paper are based on the following premises. Firstly, the significant role that critical literacy skills play in unpacking meanings within texts, to better understand the ideologies and or sets of belief which are inherent in them, cannot be underestimated. Secondly, from an English language teaching perspective, it is considered that the better the understanding of learners of the depth and range of meanings within a text or genre, the more that it enables them to access and participate in those genres. Thirdly, it should not be assumed that the language of English which is shared as the main language by the countries of the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, automatically means that the cultural context of these countries are the same. Fourthly, in an ongoing discourse analytic study, being carried out by the author of this paper, the extent to which contextual features and intertextual references affect the meaning of the discourse are being questioned. The final motivating factor for this paper lies in assessing the pedagogical implications of the discourse study and, as a consequence, developing a proposed pedagogical tool for the language learning classroom.

This paper will review each of these motivational aspects outlined above and attempt to contribute to the discussion of how language learners can be empowered to engage with and participate in the multitude of interactions to which they are exposed, whether as a migrant living within a particular country, or as an interactant who communicates from afar.

Critical Literacy and English Language Learners

While listening and reading are considered as 'receptive' as opposed to the 'productive' skills of speaking and writing, they nevertheless require a certain amount of activity on the part of listeners and readers to understand what is being said or written. For some time, therefore, listeners and readers have been regarded as active participants in the complex and interactional nature of negotiating meaning (Savignon, 2001). However, language learners, including many of those who are learning English, do not have equal access to the skills of understanding the social practices in which reading and writing are embedded (Clark, 1995). For English language learners to be able to critically engage with textual and cultural practices, they must have access to, and be able to critique, both cultural and linguistic resources (Hammond & Mackin-Horarick, 1999).

It is useful to take account of the work of the following scholars in considering how and why it is important to develop the critical literacy skills of English language learners. Kress (1982) and Martin (1989) suggest that language learners may be excluded from engaging in 'genres of power' unless they are specifically taught how to critique them. Genres of power tend to be specialised ways of writing, such as, scientific reports and legal documents, which are generally monopolised by group members and restricted to members of particular technical and professional activities (Lemke, 1995). While acknowledging that access to these genres suggests a certain degree of acquiescence with dominant cultural systems (Lemke, 1995), it is however asserted that critiquing these genres as they are taught can empower ESL students to both understand and participate in them. The strategies used in 'professional' genres (Bazerman, 1988, 1994; Halliday & Martin, 1993), according to Lemke (1995), should be taught in their context for deeper understanding. Developing the ability of language learners to critique these texts may, furthermore, lead them to challenge the values which underlie the texts (van Dijk, 1998). Thus, an analysis of texts undertaken from a critical linguistic position, will help to highlight the..." ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258). Alongside critiquing texts or discourse, identifying the contribution of multimodal features can be important, as it may affect peoples' reactions to events (Paltridge, 2006), and thus reveal the different ways in which texts are constructed. Enabling English language learners to access and participate in genres, through the development of their critical literacy skills, could therefore ensure more equitable interactions (Cope, 2009).

Cross-Cultural Aspects of English

The notion of cross-culture has mainly been examined in spoken or written texts from cultures and countries whose first languages are different (see, for example, Bhatia, 2006; Simon-Vandenbergen, White, & Aijmer, 2007; Wang, 2006). However, the number of varieties of English is increasing in addition to the number of people throughout the world who are speaking Englishes. According to Kachru's (1988) concentric circles, countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia form part of the inner circle of English-speaking countries – those countries where English is the primary language for the majority of that country's population (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Yet the largest proportion of English language speakers, over 1,000 million people, now belongs to the expanding circle which includes China and Russia and consists of countries where people mainly use English as a foreign language. There seems to be an implicit assumption, however, that because certain countries, for example, the UK, the USA and Australia, share English as their first language, it follows that their cultural contexts are similar. While there are likely to be some cultural similarities in the inner circle countries due to their common origins, differences may have occurred too with the evolution of these countries away from their common ancestry. In consequence, the English language may have continued to develop too, particularly in the USA and Australia, as a result of contact with other languages or varieties and changes in the social and cultural contexts (Kay, 2004).

An illustration of the important influence of context on language can be seen in the use of the word 'sorry' in Kevin Rudd's, a former Prime Minister of Australia, formal Apology speech to the Aboriginal and Indigenous people of Australia at the opening of Parliament in early 2008 (Rudd, 2008). In the Australian context, the word 'sorry' is emotionally and politically charged because it had been withheld from being said to Aboriginal people ever since the Europeans arrived in Australia in the late 1700s. In the North American or British context, however, saying a single word of apology may not be construed as particularly sincere and a more embellished apology may be demanded for a similar experience. In Australia, English language learners are likely to benefit from an understanding of the Australian historical and cultural background to be able to obtain a deeper understanding of Kevin Rudd's formal Apology speech. Contextual factors, therefore, can affect how language is used across cultures, and, for this reason, it is necessary to highlight and distinguish features of the context in order to analyse hidden and coded meanings in texts (Wodak, 2007). Wierzbicka (1997) additionally claims to have provided evidence of specific Australian patterns of social relations and cultural values in her examination of the word 'mate', stating that the Australian variety of English includes a socio-category of the word 'mate' not found in other varieties of English, such as British and American English.

English language learners, therefore, who find themselves living in a country, or communicating from elsewhere, with people whose first or main language is English, may find that they do not fully grasp the meaning of what is being said or that the variety of English is different to that with which they are familiar. While the sequence of events in a spoken or written transaction are often similar, even in two cultures in which the first language is different, the way of using language may vary from one cultural group to another (Paltridge, 2006), and is strongly influenced by their cultural norms (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). Consequently, speakers and writers reflect their cultures and roles in interactions, making certain assumptions about a situation and the participants (Moerman, 1988). Thus, in English language learning, there needs to be an awareness that understanding a text is more than just knowing the meaning of the words and that, in particular, the context has an effect on the discourse. For learners of English to be truly empowered, they need to be aware of the impact that both the broader socio-cultural context of the country and the local situational context in which the text is published may have on the meaning of texts.

Overview of a Critical Discourse Analytic Study

This paper has been derived from an ongoing study, which is examining a selection of newspaper texts from the USA, the UK and Australia, written by influential authors, on the Global Financial Crisis. From a critical discourse perspective, one of the aims of the study is to compare and evaluate writing strategies to highlight the extent to which, and in what ways, the cultural contexts impact the discourse of the texts. It is considered that an investigation of the impact of background knowledge of cultural and situational contexts on discourse, may lead to an understanding of how this affects readers' understanding of the meaning of a text. Additionally, the critical analysis of writers' strategies could reveal the underlying ideologies or sets of beliefs, which they adhere to.

An analysis of cross-cultural aspects will allow comparisons to be drawn between the three English-speaking countries of the USA, the UK and Australia during the Global Financial Crisis. Even though English is the dominant language in all three countries, it is expected that the context may affect the discourse in various ways from country to country. Examining the impact that these three cultural contexts have on the discourse could be of additional importance because, as well as demonstrating how socio-economic factors and ideologies inherent in national contexts affect the production of discourse during a crisis across three English-speaking cultures, it may also lead to an understanding of how writers position themselves and their readers.

Pedagogical Implications and a Tool For Developing Critical Literacy Skills

The development of critical literacy skills for English language learners is thus important because through the application of these skills, learners will develop an understanding of the underlying meanings of spoken and written English. It is intended that developing the ability to critique and access 'genres of power', such as newspaper texts from the study written by influential writers, will ultimately allow students to engage with and participate in them. It is proposed that a simplified version of the methodology derived from the study could be applied in the classroom as a pedagogical tool.

In consideration of how to develop a pedagogical tool for teaching critical literacy skills, the following factors have been taken into account. A top-down approach is favoured, as put forward by Ellis (2003), so that the heading and structural aspects of the whole text are considered before individual words. This concurs somewhat with Crawford's (2002) proposition that the focus of classroom materials should be on "whole texts" (p.84), and where possible an audiovisual component is useful for richness in linguistic and cultural information. Texts should be authentic-like (Crawford, 2002), and be adapted for learners according to their proficiency levels and the teaching context. There should be an understanding that, in reading a text, the reader is actively interacting with it in order to negotiate meaning from the text. Guiding the language learner through the reading task using their critical literacy skills can allow the reader to discover possible cultural and linguistic resources for themselves which can lead to powerful insights.

This paper has stressed the importance of context in understanding a text. This tool, therefore, emphasises two types of contextual factors, those relating to the broader socio-cultural context in which the text is set, and those which relate to the more immediate contextual factors in which the text is produced. Some of these aspects may already be known to students, while other information may need to be elicited from students, or supplied by the teacher.

A table or grid could be drawn up for each student and questions adapted according to the level of proficiency of the students. The following contextual factors could be considered before reading the text, for example:

• When and where was the text written?

• Who wrote it? What is known about the identity of the writer - what is their age group, gender, nationality, role?

• What is the title of the text and sub-title? Do these give an idea of what the purpose of the text is or what the text is about?

After finding the answers to the questions above and discussing them, the following could be considered while reading the text:

• What values may be associated with the text? Which words or structures suggest these values?

• What phrases or names or individual words are unfamiliar? Do you think these names or words are written without explaining them because the writer thinks the reader might already know them? Why might the writer do that?

• Which words or phrases are important to understanding the text?

Awareness of both contextual and textual factors in reading materials will provide a starting point for the development of English language learners' critical literacy skills. It will help them to more fully understand the cultural context of the English writers of either the country in which they are living or with which they are communicating from afar. It is intended that eventually these skills will empower them by enabling them to participate fully in the discourse.

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The Teaching of Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes - How and Why

By Mario Pace

Photograph by Steve Wilson / Flickr

Every time I am asked to prepare an Italian course for specific purposes, be it a "Commercial Italian" course, an "Italian for Call Centres" course, "Italian for Hotel Front Desk People" etc, the first thing I do is ask myself the following questions:

i. What is a language for specific purposes?
ii. Who are my clients/ students/ my audience?
iii. What are their objectives? What objectives would they like to reach?
iv. What is their level of Italian?
v. What should my role be in such a course?
vi. What /which methods shall I adopt?
vii. What shall I include in my course?

In other words: The teaching of a foreign language for specific purposes: How and why?

Balboni (2000) describes a language for specific purposes as a linguistic variety used in scientific and professional sectors. Its objective is to help anyone belonging to that particular scientific or professional sector communicate in the least ambiguous manner possible. Dita Gálová (2007; viii) states that. "globalization of the world economy requires professionals and specialists in various areas to communicate effectively in foreign languages. The success is conditional on their ability to manage language and cultural barriers, i.e. on the language skills and competences with respect to their professional areas." Jesus Garcia Laborda (2011) is, maybe, even more specific, when he describes LSP as "the teaching of a language as a second or foreign language for certain groups of students to whom the syllabus, tasks, and methodology is especially tailored to their interests and needs".

Indeed, in today's world, knowing how to use a language in specific circumstances and purposes gives people a very strong bargaining power, especially in the labour world. Whereas up to a few years ago, very few people considered speaking a foreign language an important prerequisite, today it has become of fundamental importance in all professional circles. In fact, in today's European society, languages and interculture play a fundamental role in getting to know different people and in obtaining professional and economic development.

In the global marketplace that we now live in, language skills are becoming always increasingly important in organisations and businesses who want to remain competitive on an international level. Companies today require a versatile staff in order to communicate effectively and it is in their interest to employ speakers of foreign languages who are able to talk to clients, business partners, fellow employees in different countries in their own languages as this will not just help communication but, above all, it helps to make sales and to negotiate and secure contracts. As declared by the European Commission in one of its documents on multi-linguilism, entitled, "Languages mean Business!", one of the main reasons why thousands of European companies lose out on concluding deals and contracts is their lack of linguistic and intercultural competencies . This is also confirmed by the Bologna process: "If higher education programmes are to be relevant to the European labour market, graduates have to be able to communicate in a number of languages and to expand their repertoire in changing needs".

And this is exactly why today there exists an array of courses in foreign languages for specific purposes, be it for tourism, for call centres, for business, for commerce and so on, focusing on acquiring the necessary terminological, interdisciplinary and intercultural skills needed for specific jobs. This is confirmed by the CBI Education and Skills Survey (2009: 48), which states that "in an increasingly competitive job market, it is clear that foreign language proficiency adds significant value to a candidate's portfolio of skills, and can give them a real competitive edge when applying for jobs." Furthermore, the Business Forum for Multilingualism established by the European Commission (2008: 8) declares clearly that "A significant percentage of European SMEs lose business every year as a direct result of linguistic and intercultural weaknesses. Although it appears certain that English will keep its leading role as the world business language, it is other languages that will make the difference between mainstream and excellence and provide a competitive edge".

Furthermore, several research studies not only show that a variety of languages are required on international markets but also that the most quoted barrier to intra-European mobility remains lack of foreign language skills . It is no surprise that language skills are considered by employers as one of the ten most important skills for future graduates. This was confirmed by a recent Eurobarometer study where 40 % of recruiters in the industry sector highlighted the importance of language skills for future higher education graduates. Another study, about the internationalisation of European SME's published by the European Commission in 2010, shows how when companies start exporting, language and cultural barriers start being perceived as important obstacles.

This explains why today there exists a need to diversify the language training market with courses in foreign languages for specific purposes. Although the teaching of foreign languages in general and the teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes have a lot in common, there exist two main divergences, namely, (i) the learners and the reason why they are learning the subject and (ii) the aim of instruction. Usually, as we shall see, the teacher of foreign languages for specific purposes has 3 main tasks: (i) to carry out a needs analysis; (ii) to design the course; and (iii) to prepare original/authentic teaching materials.

Such courses in foreign languages for specific purposes imply addressing the immediate and very specific needs of the learners involved, having as their driving force, both in the preparation stage as well as in the development stage, the needs analysis of the learners. For this reason the starting point should always be an analysis of the learners' needs, objectives and expectations for the course, which can vary in their scope and focus . This includes forming a list of preferences of what the learners want and need to learn, as far as language and content are concerned, and of how they would like to learn them. This is by no means an easy task given that in the same group individuals may vary considerably in age, education level, motivation, aptitude for languages, work experience, self-discipline, etc. It therefore includes getting to know their knowledge in the language, their past work experiences (especially in countries where the target language is spoken) as well as their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This can be done either by means of an interview or a questionnaire or else by means of a writing task or an initial test. I consider this stage as fundamental since the needs of a learner studying, for example, a foreign language for scientific or technological purposes are totally different from those of another learner studying for medical purposes or legal purposes, or financial purposes. The same goes for individuals studying a foreign language for specific trades or occupations and others still concerned with finding a job. Even the skills required vary considerably. This usually helps me determine what to teach, how to teach it and what materials must I use to help the learners reach their goals. As a matter of fact, the people studying for commercial purposes usually need specific reading and writing skills – reading and understanding the contents of an email and replying to it; writing various letters of a different nature, be it a letter of complaint, of protest, of acceptance; taking minutes of an important meeting, etc. On the other hand, those studying the foreign language to work in a call centre are usually more interested in listening and speaking skills – answering the phone; leaving a message; giving information over the phone, etc. What is important is that the language being taught should be presented in authentic contexts. This helps learners understand better and become acquainted with the particular ways in which the language is used in functions that they will need to perform in their jobs.

One must also take into consideration whether or not the learners already work in that particular field or if they are still concerned with finding a job. Those already in the job are the primary knowers of the content of the material and experts in the field. We need to keep in mind that we are not teaching them the job, but rather to help them communicate better about their work in the target language. The role of the teacher will therefore be to help, to facilitate communication in class, to provide the tools for the learners to develop and acquire the skills they need, to become autonomous learners. If, for example, there is a course of Italian for commercial purposes or for legal purposes, my role as a teacher is not to teach them the rules of business management or to teach them the laws of the country. There is no doubt that the learners are experts in the field. My role is to provide the learners with the necessary linguistic tools to be able to apply the concepts, interpret them, and above all communicate in the target language, not just with the particular jargon characteristic of that specific occupational context but also with the language of everyday informal talk, that allows them to communicate effectively regardless of the occupational context.

All this implies that such courses cannot be taught according to any pre-ordained methodology. Rather than talking about a subject to be taught we need to think of which approach to adopt and this implies flexibility on the teachers' part, negotiating with the learners how best to reach their objectives. In other words, the teacher needs to understand the requirements of the profession and be willing to adapt to these requirements. It is important to understand the context in which the language will be used as well as any specialist concepts and terminology, and this, in turn, implies the need for specific training, tailor-made courses and teaching the practical use of the target language. It is a known fact that language in different situations varies and therefore the teacher has to tailor make not just the curriculum and the methods, but above all the materials to be used for each and every individual course in accordance to its specific context and centred on its appropriate language. The fact that, very often, the teacher is asked to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, makes it practically impossible to either find suitably published material or to use a particular textbook without the need for supplementary material. This means that the teacher has to provide the material for the course himself/herself. Hutchinson and Waters (2009) suggest three main factors that need to be addressed when designing materials for such courses, namely, (i) the criteria for implementing or modifying materials, (ii) the subjective criteria on what teachers and students want from that material, (iii) the objective criteria which is what the material really offers. Furthermore the teacher has to tailor make all the materials to be used for each and every individual course in accordance to its specific context and centred on its appropriate language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres (Strevens, 1988, Robinson, 1991, Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) . And as Nunan (1987) puts it, this requires time, skills and support. In fact this involves not just keeping abreast with the vast selection of published material and adapting it to the learners' needs, but very often it also implies developing a self produced resource bank of authentic materials.

From the point of view of the course contents, each course plan should be threefold: there should be the individual theoretical component of learning, which includes, amongst other things, revising some basic grammar notions and rules, becoming familiar with business terminology, introducing the kind of language they will face and need to use in their profession, and writing letters; the individual practical component of learning, where, in collaboration with third parties (employers, banks, business communities, legal offices, hotels, [depending on the nature of the course], etc), each course participant is assigned a number of open-ended, supervised 'hands on' tasks (answering emails, writing letters, attending meetings, etc) which can be performed at his/her own level; the third component should consist in group work and team work – classroom discussions, role plays, etc. It is important to note that, given the heterogeneity of most of the groups of learners, most of the tasks assigned, both on an individual level as well as in team or group work, should be open-ended and the learners are free to adapt them according to their needs and abilities. At the end of each course, a detailed evaluation sheet should be distributed to the course participants in order to have their feedback on all the aspects of the course. I consider this exercise of fundamental importance as it helps the teacher reflect on what decisions need to be taken before starting a new course.

In an article entitled "Business Needs Language" Language Magazine explores 'What Business Wants: Language Needs in the 21st Century' and concludes that, within the American business sector, there exists a real need for a more systematic discussion of the role and value of foreign language skills, especially In the face of strong perceptions that English is — and will continue to be — the lingua franca of international business. Elisabeth Lord Stuart, Operations Director of the U.S.-Algeria Business Council, argues that an enormous barrier to increasing US participation in overseas markets is the lack of appropriate foreign language skills and abilities among U.S. businessmen. Indeed, a lingua franca can never be enough in today's world to satisfy every communication need. Learning foreign languages for specific purposes, not only provide the keys to the cultures they represent but, above all, open doors to new markets and new business opportunities.

One last consideration. It is a known fact that the demand for foreign languages for specific purposes and communication skills is steadily rising on the European labour market and that very often employers demand diplomas/certificates as a proof of language competence. This means that the testing and accreditation methods connected to language competences for professional purposes are becoming ever so important and relevant and that the language skills acquired through such courses, usually outside the formal education system, should be formally acknowledged. In this sense, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which provides the structure not just of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines but also for most of the assessment methods for language competences, provides transparent and authentic proof of appropriate skills acquired for various occupations.

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