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Welcome to the first issue of the *English Australia Journal* for 2012, a year in which there have been some important changes. Firstly, we must say goodbye, thanks, and best wishes to Stephanie Schembri, who edited Classroom Talk since its inception in 2009 and made a great contribution to this issue. Sophia Khan has now taken over as the editor of this section of the journal, and has made some exciting changes, which are outlined in the Classroom Talk editorial. Readers will also note the new name of the journal and the colourful look of the cover which accompanies this exciting change.

Whilst not a change in itself, an ongoing trend in the journal is towards a focus on depth rather than breadth, with the publication in this issue, as in the last, of three substantial reports on research studies, rather than the four shorter articles of previous years. We hope to see all sections of the journal continue to evolve as a space for practitioners and academics to meet and share ideas about ELT. With this overall objective firmly in mind, we also hope to maintain and attract the support of those in the profession who are able to make their invaluable contribution to the journal as peer reviewers. As in previous recent issues, the names of all peer reviewers are listed on the front pages of each issue along with the names of book reviewers.

The first article, by Hongwei Ren and Guangwei Hu, investigates the pedagogical implications of peer review in university writing classes, involving what appear to be affective disadvantages for students from a Chinese or similar cultural background. This article analyses the underlying factors involved in peer review and suggests ways to address these factors in the classroom.

The second article, by Peter Copeman, drawing on an ongoing classroom research project developed over several years, examines the way in which actor voice training techniques can be adapted for TESOL to improve speaker intelligibility. Peter won the 2010 English Australia/Pearson Award for Contribution to Professional Practice in ELICOS for the presentation upon which this article is based. Some fundamental connections between performance education and TESOL are explored and a
practical classroom application of these connections is then provided, showing how learners can be helped to improve their intelligibility at a segmental level.

The final article, by Le Van Canh, reports on research into teacher and student beliefs about grammar instruction in EFL, focusing on an initial survey which was part of an in-depth longitudinal case study in Vietnam. The article addresses the problems of a perceived theory-practice divide and concludes with some suggestions for ongoing teacher education.

Many thanks must go to all involved in the production of this issue, including the staff at the English Australia office and our graphic designer Derek Trow. As usual, we continue to encourage all our readers to submit articles and are confident that this year’s Sydney conference will be the ideal forum to spread the news about the evolving English Australia Journal. If you see us at the conference, please make contact and let us know if you have any ideas about possible contributions.

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Editors
Peer review and Chinese EFL/ESL student writers

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Peer review, as a potentially beneficial pedagogical practice, has been gaining popularity in university writing classes for EFL/ESL students. A recent survey on the writing feedback preferences of undergraduate EFL learners at a major university in China, however, reveals a potential problem with the adoption of this pedagogical practice in EFL/ESL writing classrooms, namely the possible existence of an affective disadvantage of peer feedback for Chinese students and other learners from similar cultural backgrounds. Prompted by survey data and drawing on existing research, this article looks into this issue by analysing its underlying factors and suggesting productive ways to address these factors in the classroom.

Introduction

Peer review has been claimed by many researchers to have the potential to be an effective pedagogical activity in writing instruction. It can provide learners with the opportunity to improve their writing with the help of feedback from peers (Berg, 1999; Hu & Lam, 2010; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998), develop their writing competence (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Hu, 2005; Mangelsdorf, 1992; O’Brien, 2004; Rollinson, 2005; Stanley, 1992), and facilitate their longitudinal development in various ways (Cotterall & Cohen, 2003; Hyland, 2000; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). The use of peer review, however, is not always without problems (Ferris, 2003; Hu, 2005; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Paulus, 1999; Sengupta, 1998). Researchers and practitioners are still exploring ways to maximise the benefits and avoid the problems it might bring to learners (see Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010; Hyland, 2006; Min, 2005; Stanley, 1992).

With a growing body of empirical research reporting numerous pedagogical
benefits of peer review (e.g., Berg, 1999; Hu & Lam, 2010; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), more and more university writing instructors have started to adopt this pedagogical activity in their instruction for EFL/ESL students. In addition to benefiting students in the aforementioned ways, peer review is also expected to be a useful strategy for coping with students’ common complaint about ‘lack of feedback’ from their instructors, which results, in part, from the latter’s heavy workload and big class sizes. While writing instructors often have high expectations for peer feedback and although some success stories with peer review are quite encouraging, a recent survey on the writing feedback preferences of undergraduate EFL learners at a major university in China reveals a potential problem with the adoption of this pedagogical practice in writing classrooms, namely the possible existence of an affective disadvantage of peer feedback for Chinese students and other learners from similar cultural backgrounds. In this article, we will first summarise the results of the survey briefly and then address the problem identified in the survey by examining its underlying factors and exploring productive ways to deal with these factors in university EFL/ESL writing classes.

Affective disadvantages of peer feedback

In order to find out students’ attitudes towards various sources of feedback for their English writing, we recently administered a written survey to 116 junior English majors at a major university in China. At the time of the survey, these students were taking an advanced writing course and were encouraged to revise their writing with the help of peer feedback in addition to teacher feedback. However, they had not received any training on peer review except for a brief explanation about what they were expected to do. In the survey, the students were asked to indicate whether they preferred to have teacher feedback only, peer feedback only, both teacher and peer feedback, or no feedback at all on their writing. They were also asked to give reasons for their choice.

The analysis of the data revealed that whereas more than a third of the participants in the survey preferred to have teacher feedback only, no one preferred to have peer feedback alone. Furthermore, although 60.3% of the students preferred to have both teacher and peer feedback, qualitative analysis indicated that a great majority of them described teachers as experienced experts and teacher feedback as being authoritative and effective, whereas they found peer feedback useful only in addressing surface language corrections or offering an alternative perspective. Notably, 16 students reported that only teacher feedback would be taken on board when teacher and peer feedback conflicted with each other. Such perceptions of the different values of these two feedback sources show
students’ strong preference for teacher feedback. That no one preferred to have peer feedback only also suggests students’ reservations about the effectiveness of peer feedback. Thus, the pattern of feedback preferences reported by the students is indicative of a more positive attitude toward teacher feedback. In other words, while both teacher and peer feedback were seen as desirable sources of information in the English writing class, teacher feedback clearly enjoyed greater popularity and authority.

Such an affective disadvantage of peer feedback could produce negative effects on students’ learning because ‘students’ perceptions about and attitude toward instruction are crucial determinants in their performance as writers’ (Zamel, 1987, p. 699). This issue has given a number of researchers cause for concern. For example, both Hyland and Hyland (2006) and Nelson and Murphy (1993) warn that the affective disadvantage of peer feedback might keep students from incorporating peer feedback into revisions of their work. Just as students’ willingness to participate in a pedagogical activity can contribute to successful instruction (Zhang, 1995), so their unwillingness can be detrimental to the instructional process. If students’ less-than-favourable attitudes toward peer feedback remain unaddressed, the effectiveness of this pedagogical practice is likely to be limited. Therefore, the issue of Chinese students’ strong preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback must be grappled with if peer review is to be used productively with Chinese EFL/ESL learners. Drawing on existing research we examine, in the following section, factors that contribute to Chinese students’ preference for teacher feedback at the expense of peer feedback.

Causes of students’ unfavourable attitudes toward peer feedback

That students prefer teacher feedback over peer feedback is not a new problem reported in the literature on peer feedback in ESL/EFL contexts (see Alavi & Kaivanpanah, 2007; Zhang, 1995). A number of possible causes for such a preference have been identified by researchers. Considering the purpose of this article, only the causes that might be relevant to Chinese EFL/ESL students will be discussed here. These causes mainly fall into three categories: limitations of students as reviewers and writers, cultural influences, and inappropriate implementation of peer review as a pedagogical activity.

Limitations of students as reviewers and writers

One perceived limitation of students as reviewers and writers is their limited knowledge of the target language and its rhetorical conventions (Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010; Nelson & Carson, 1998). This limitation may cause a number
of problems that can exert negative influences on Chinese students’ attitudes
towards peer feedback. For example, students may have problems in giving
constructive feedback when reviewing peers’ writing (Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010;
Sengupta, 1998) and in identifying valid feedback from peers when revising
their own work (Hu, 2005; Stanley, 1992; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Worse still, students’
perceptions of peers’ competence in the target language as limited can lead to a
mistrust of opinions from peer reviewers. Such mistrust tends to be perpetuated
in contexts where, as described by some researchers (e.g., Hyland, 2000; Nelson
& Carson, 1998), teachers’ authority is traditionally respected, as is the case with
many Confucian heritage societies. Students’ reservations about the utility of peer
feedback, often in contrast to their strong faith in teacher authority and expertise,
have been reported in a number of studies, especially those that involve Chinese
students (e.g., Hu & Lam, 2010; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Carson,
1998; Sengupta, 1998). It was also manifest in the students’ explanations for their
choice of feedback collected in our recent survey.

Another perceived limitation of peer review as a source of feedback is some
students’ limited ability to critique another student’s writing. As suggested in the
research literature, many students do not know what to look for in peers’ drafts
or fail to give usable comments (Ferris, 2003). They tend to focus on micro-level
error correction rather than macro-level textual or content issues in a peer review
task (Leki, 1990; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Such concerns with micro-level issues are
reflective of a limited understanding of what constitutes good writing. Even when
students attend to global issues, they tend to give general and vague comments
Indeed, surface-error focus and vagueness of feedback were recognised by many
participants in our survey as two factors contributing to the unhelpfulness of peer
feedback (see also Mangelsdorf, 1992; Nelson & Carson, 1998).

In addition, a lack of productive collaborative skills can cause problems in Chinese
students’ interaction with each other as writers and reviewers. There has been
considerable empirical evidence to suggest that certain student behaviours and
attitudes discourage peer collaboration. For example, Lockhart and Ng (1995), in
their study on the interaction of 27 dyads of Chinese students in a peer feedback
task, found that most of the students took either an authoritative or an interpretive
stance which ‘views peer response as transmission of knowledge and opinion’ (p.
633). This is consistent with the finding reported by Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger
(1992). These restrictive stances operate ‘in an evaluative mode’ (Lockhart & Ng,
1995, p. 646), and therefore ‘[ignore] the dynamic aspect of writing’ (p. 646)
and ‘defeat the intended purposes of peer review’ (Hu, 2005, p. 326). Students
may also experience strong emotional involvement in peer feedback interaction (Amores, 1997). The social dynamics of a peer feedback group can sometimes be really problematic when reviewers become over-critical (Nelson & Murphy, 1992) or disrespectful (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996), and writers over-defensive (Amores, 1997) or intimidated (Nelson & Carson 1998; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). Certain interactional strategies that students use to achieve better social dynamics may also inhibit productive collaboration. For example, the Chinese students in Carson and Nelson’s (1996) study tried to be indirect and soften their criticism, only to cause confusion on the part of the writer. All these problematic behaviors and attitudes, which work against productive collaboration, can hinder the effectiveness of peer review as a pedagogical practice and even generate ‘a sense of discomfort and uneasiness among the participants’ (Liu & Sadler, 2003, p. 194) to negatively affect students’ attitudes toward peer feedback.

Cultural influences
Cultural influences on the effectiveness of peer review as a pedagogical activity and peer feedback as a source of information for writing improvement have attracted much attention from researchers (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Hu & Lam, 2010). Some suggest that students who hold certain cultural beliefs and values antithetical to the pedagogical principles underlying peer review might find it difficult to participate in and benefit from this pedagogical activity (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Hu, 2002; Hyland, 2000). For example, Nelson and Carson (1998) contend that a collectivist belief in group cohesion and harmony in China explains Chinese students’ reluctance to criticise peers’ drafts or explicitly disagree with others in their interaction. Such culturally embedded reluctance to act as critics works against the primary purpose of peer review (i.e., to help students improve their writing) by depriving students of critical but constructive feedback from peers. Another cultural factor contributing to EFL/ESL students’ preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback is the prevalent perception of the teacher as the knower and authority in ‘teacher-centered’ cultures like the Chinese culture (Hu, 2005; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Nelson & Murphy, 1992; Sengupta, 1998). Although the aforementioned cultural influences seem to be especially relevant to Chinese EFL/ESL learners, Hu and Lam (2010) found little cultural impact on most of the Chinese students in their study, a result consistent with the findings of Yang et al (2006). As pointed out by the authors of both studies, the lack of a negative cultural impact might have been a function of the appropriate pedagogical implementation of peer review. This is good news for writing instructors who are interested in using peer review with their Chinese EFL/ESL learners.
Inappropriate implementation of peer review

In addition to the student-internal factors discussed above, inappropriate pedagogical implementation of peer review can also negatively affect students’ attitudes toward it. In some cases, students may feel uncomfortable in performing certain peer review activities implemented inadequately. For example, they may feel rushed if time allotted for peer feedback is insufficient (Ferris, 2003; Mangelsdorf, 1992). Students of lower proficiency in the target language may feel inhibited from contributing to the task in groups of mixed proficiency levels if oral communication is required (Hu & Lam, 2010; Zhu, 2001). In other cases, students may lose interest in peer review if its effectiveness is not demonstrated. For example, Hyland (2000) found that the use of feedback sheets had a negative effect on students’ attitudes toward peer feedback. However, in another study, Berg (1999) found that students greatly benefited from it. This has important implications. Firstly, the ineffectiveness of a certain procedure or technique might be attributed to the specific teaching and learning context to which it is applied. While it helps some students in certain contexts, it may work against others in different contexts. Secondly, its ineffectiveness might also be attributed to students’ inappropriate use of it due to a lack of training. This is another well-recognised cause of unsuccessful peer review (see Hu & Lam, 2010; Rollinson, 2005), which can lead to students’ negative views about peer feedback. This factor may also have played an important role in the feedback preferences of the participants in our survey because none of them had received any training in peer review.

Strategies for making peer review a productive pedagogical activity

Student training and careful implementation of peer review have been recommended in the literature as an effective means of overcoming the problems associated with the classroom use of peer review and of improving its pedagogical effectiveness (Hu, 2005). Since there is a recognised need to tailor peer review to specific learning contexts (Ferris, 2003; Mangelsdorf, 1992), we give special attention to research conducted on Chinese EFL/ESL learners when we draw on the research literature to identify effective training and implementation strategies.

Effective student training

Awareness-raising is a commonly used strategy in studies that report positive training effects (e.g., Berg, 1999; Hu, 2005). Several options are available to raise students’ awareness of peer review as a beneficial pedagogical activity. For example, cognisant of students’ need for initial persuasion about the value of peer feedback (Rollinson, 2005), many researchers (e.g., Berg, 1999; Ferris, 2003; Hu,
either explain or conduct discussion about the benefits of peer feedback, usually supplemented with examples of how accomplished writers make use of peer feedback. Besides promoting peer review as a valuable pedagogical activity, students can also be guided to discuss potential problems of peer feedback and possible solutions (Ferris, 2003; Hu, 2005). Other awareness-raising activities include making students appreciate the purpose of peer review (Mangelsdorf, 1992) and demonstrating the value of peer feedback with actual examples (Stanley, 1992). Such awareness-raising can help students develop an appropriate attitude toward peer feedback (Berg 1999; Paulus, 1999) and is believed to be particularly necessary for students from Asian cultures with cultural norms antithetical to those underlying writing group interaction (Carson & Nelson, 1996). It should be helpful in reducing those cultural influences that might work against Chinese EFL/ESL learners when they engage in offering and considering peer feedback.

An important objective of student training is to teach students to make ‘productive response and revision’ (Rollinson, 2005, p. 27). Demonstration and modelling are widely used techniques to achieve this objective, albeit with variations in specific implementations. For example, while Berg (1999) used his drafts of a conference proposal reviewed by his colleagues to demonstrate appropriate peer feedback and effective revision, Hu (2005) asked his students to examine previous students’ drafts in progress and discuss both the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of peer comments and revision made in response. Modelling is often conducted by the instructor thinking aloud while making comments on a piece of writing (Hu, 2005; Min, 2006). Such modelling allows students to see the instructor’s considerations when critiquing a piece of writing as well as how to offer constructive feedback. If feedback sheets are to be provided in peer feedback sessions, the appropriate use of this tool should be demonstrated (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Min, 2005). One way of doing this is through instructor modelling of how to use the feedback sheets effectively, as Hu (2005), Min (2006), and Yang et al. (2006) did in their studies. Such demonstration and modelling can be followed by practice activities in which students respond to sample drafts collaboratively (e.g., Berg, 1999; Hu, 2005; Rollinson, 2005) to consolidate what they have learned. All these activities have been found to work well to help students make productive responses and revisions.

Another important aspect of peer review training is to help students engage in productive interaction by developing their communicative strategies and teaching them appropriate language for effective feedback (Berg, 1999; Rollinson, 2005; Stanley, 1992). In this regard, research suggests that explicit instruction is an effective and often-used method. In Hu (2005), for example, Chinese ESL students
in Singapore were taught appropriate interactional strategies through instructional activities that engaged them in identifying problems in examples of inappropriate language use, reflecting on various reader stances towards a piece of writing, and discussing appropriate response behaviours. Other instructional activities include using worksheets completed by the instructor to demonstrate how to be polite, clear and specific in feedback (Mangelsdorf, 1992) and discussing characteristics and benefits of effective collaboration based on transcripts of collaborative peer review (Lockhart & Ng, 1995). Stanley’s (1992) method involves more active participation from students by asking them to role play in pairs and then discuss each pair’s successful and unsuccessful communications to explore effective communication strategies. These are all tested ways to help students develop the collaborative skills necessary for successful peer interaction and feedback. They may be combined to achieve even better effects.

In addition, some researchers (e.g., Mangelsdorf, 1992; Min, 2006), aware of the limitations of pre-training, have emphasised the necessity of ongoing support to help students transform declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge. Such support can be provided through teacher-student conferencing (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Min, 2006), in which teacher assistance can be tailored to individual needs. While it has been found to be highly beneficial, support of this nature is rather time-consuming and may not be practical in some classrooms. In comparison, the follow-up activities that Hu (2005) used with his Chinese students are less demanding on instructional time. The activities include responding to students’ written comments and highlighting good ones, drawing students’ attention to rejected valid suggestions and accepted invalid suggestions, modelling appropriate responses by responding to students’ drafts, and conducting peer feedback sessions to discuss students’ problems and provide affective support. Such activities can be carried out regularly and are more practical for teachers with limited instructional time.

**Strategies for implementing peer review**

The literature on peer review suggests that several issues need careful consideration in the implementation of the pedagogical activity to ensure its beneficial effects. These issues mainly concern peer response modes (Hu, 2005; Min, 2005), group configuration (Connor & Asenavage, 1994), feedback structure (Ferris, 2003; Min, 2006), and peer feedback assessment (Ferris, 2003; Min, 2006).

Firstly, decisions about response modes need to be made carefully in the light of student characteristics. Many researchers (e.g., Hu, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006) include both oral and written response in their peer feedback tasks.
so that students can benefit from both modes. Specifically, written response allows students, especially ESL/EFL students who have not attained advanced proficiency in the target language, more time to compose helpful feedback and provides a permanent record for student writers to revisit in revision and for instructors to monitor the effectiveness of peer feedback (see Ferris, 2003; Min, 2005). The oral response modes, on the other hand, can reduce misunderstanding between peers (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006) and facilitate the acquisition of effective communicative strategies and writing skills by involving students in social interaction (Hu, 2005). Furthermore, the order of the response modes is also important. Although Hu (2005) found that the order of written and then oral response could result in problematic written comments caused by misunderstanding of writers’ intentions, this order might make the task easier for EFL/ESL students by allowing them more time out of class to compose their written comments, and misunderstanding can be cleared during the oral phase of the peer review task. Furthermore, the formulation of written comments can also prepare students for the oral response and therefore save in-class interaction time (Ferris, 2003), which is a practical concern of many practitioners with a crowded curriculum to cover.

Secondly, group configuration issues centre on group size and composition. Typical group sizes found in empirical studies of peer review are two to four people. Although multi-member groups may provide more perspectives (Ferris, 2003) and opportunity for collaborative feedback which can build up peer reviewers’ confidence (Mangelsdorf, 1992), pair work increases the opportunity for intensive discussion (Mittan, 1989; Paulus, 1999) and may make participants more comfortable (Nelson & Murphy, 1992). Therefore, Hu (2005) suggests that the dyadic format be used at the beginning stage to familiarise students with peer review as a pedagogical activity and shift to multi-member group work when they are ready. With regard to group composition, some researchers believe that fixed groups with students of mixed proficiency levels can ensure that all students will contribute to and benefit from this activity, possibly in different ways (Ferris, 2003; Mittan, 1989). Others encourage students to work with different peers, for shifting group membership allows students to benefit from a variety of strategic assistance (Hu, 2005) and ‘may discourage the development of negative roles in one group’ (Nelson & Murphy, 1992, p. 189). There is reason to believe that shifting membership, besides the benefits mentioned above, might also create a sense of fairness by allowing students to collaborate with peers at different levels of writing competence.

Thirdly, providing feedback structure by using peer feedback sheets or guiding
questions is a common practice in successful implementation (Hu, 2005; Min, 2006). These implementation strategies can help students focus on important issues at proper points (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Rollinson, 2005) and foster a sense of priority in revision (Arndt, 1993). The questions used to guide students should be arranged in such a way that macro-level issues will be attended to before micro-level issues (Arndt, 1993; Hu, 2005). It should be noted that feedback sheets, unless used strategically, might restrict reviewers to only those issues raised in the sheets rather than encourage them to attend to the needs of a specific text and the writer (Lockhart & Ng, 1995). It is also likely for some students to treat feedback sheets merely as series of questions to answer (Min, 2005). To use feedback sheets effectively, instructors need to provide guidance on how to use them as aids rather than chores to finish off (Berg, 1999; Min, 2005). Students should be given more autonomy once they master the technique of responding (Lockhart & Ng, 1995).

Finally, assessing peer feedback is another useful strategy reported in the literature that can contribute to the success of peer review (Ferris, 2003; Min, 2006). It can be used to motivate students (Min, 2006; Mittan, 1989), hold them accountable for their comments (Ferris, 2003; Min, 2006), communicate the instructor’s high commitment to peer feedback (Mitten, 1989), and provide information that will allow the instructor to make necessary adjustments to peer feedback implementation (Ferris, 2003). It can be easily done by grading students’ written comments. However, it is more helpful if the grade is accompanied by qualitative feedback on the specificity and helpfulness of students’ suggestions, as described by Mitten (1989).

CONCLUSION

Peer review, as a potentially beneficial pedagogical practice, is gaining popularity among university EFL/ESL writing instructors. However, there are indications that many Chinese students may have unfavourable attitudes toward it. The extensive literature on peer review suggests that a variety of factors can lead to such unfavourable attitudes. These include the limitations of students as reviewers and writers, cultural influences, and inappropriate pedagogical implementation. Encouragingly, existing research indicates that most of these problems can be overcome by effective student training and careful implementation of peer review tasks. Useful training and implementation strategies and activities have been discussed in this paper and, hopefully, will help practitioners maximise the effectiveness and benefits of peer review as a pedagogical practice. These
valuable strategies and activities notwithstanding, instructors will need to come up with individual responses appropriate to their students and teaching contexts in their effort to take advantage of peer review in their classroom. For example, they would need to work out the most effective training activities and best group configuration in relation to the needs and characteristics of their own students. In a similar vein, it would be important for them to determine, through close monitoring, whether changing or fixed group membership works best for their students. Above all, they must aim to achieve a judicious balance between the uses of different sources of feedback in their writing instruction so that their students are best supported in their learning journey.

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Performing English: Adapting actor voice training techniques for TESOL to improve pronunciation intelligibility

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If, as performance theory proposes, human communication, especially speech, is essentially performative, then fundamental connections between performance education and TESOL – beyond the common communicative paradigm – become imaginable. One such connection, linking speech and pronunciation in TESOL with intercultural performance and, in turn, with the rich tradition of actor voice training techniques, is developed in this article. A practical classroom application of this connection is then provided, in the form of a set of specific teaching strategies adapted from actor training techniques and developed and tested in an ongoing classroom research project over several years, to help learners improve their pronunciation intelligibility at a segmental level.

Introduction

Over the past several years I have been conducting an ongoing classroom research project addressing two related questions that arise at the intersection of three main professional trajectories (TESOL/academic skills teacher, theatre practitioner/teacher, academic researcher): whether or not the emerging field of performance theory could be productively applied to speaking skills work in TESOL, and if so, what opportunities that might open up for practical teaching and learning.

Drama techniques are widely used in English language classrooms, and the TESOL literature is extensive in this area (e.g., Burke & O’Sullivan, 2002; Copeman, 2002; Maley & Duff, 1982; Stinson & Winston, 2011). There are also numerous websites, such as http://tesoldrama.wordpress.com. The literature mostly tends to focus on the benefits of the use of drama in fostering student motivation, engagement, confidence, receptivity and interactivity. These benefits are, of course, shared by many other techniques within the broad current practice of English language teaching.
Performance theory has the potential to place drama much more centrally within TESOL by positing that all human communication, especially speech, is essentially performative. If this is so, as the first part of this article argues, fundamental connections between performance education and TESOL become imaginable. One such connection is made in the middle part of the article, by linking the teaching of English speech and pronunciation to second language learners with the rich tradition of kinaesthetic voice training techniques for actors. The final part provides a set of specific, practical examples, developed through classroom research, of how actor training techniques can be adapted to help learners improve their pronunciation intelligibility at a segmental level.

**Methodology**

Within a theoretical framework synthesised from the principles and practical traditions of TESOL, performance, and actor training, the project has followed an iterative teacher-as-researcher (participant-observer) process from an emic perspective, with a typical action research cycle of problem identification, planning, action, and evaluation of the action by reflection, with the insights gained in one action cycle providing the planning basis for a further cycle with modified action (Elliott, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988). In practical terms, this process has been applied to a cycle of adaptation of, and experimentation with, actor voice training techniques such as:

- the adjustment and elaboration of student posture, breathing and articulatory muscle preparation for English speech
- the resetting of students' articulatory kinaesthetics as a way of reconceptualising their speech production and improving their intelligibility
- techniques to connect breath with speech and thought and intentionality, and connecting intentionality with intelligibility to improve expressivity
- the enhancement of prosody through kinaesthetic engagement with English metrics, rhythms, and intonation via selected poetry and performative prose
- exercises with gestures, social distance and other speech-associated body language.

Only the first two of these will be addressed in this article, as at this stage of the research they have been, for reasons explained below, prioritised for practical application by TESOL teachers. The others are still being refined and will hopefully be the subject of further reporting.

This particular piece of research was conducted over nineteen pronunciation-
specific eight- or ten-week courses of two contact hours per week plus a number of hours of homework, with a total of 269 students (an average class size of 14). Most of the participants were at intermediate or upper intermediate level. Students' first languages (L1s) were varied, the most common languages being Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Chinese. All classes were of mixed genders and language backgrounds, and all participants were university-oriented, attending either a pre-entry course such as ELICOS or a Foundation Studies course. Some students had already been accepted into a university but still had acknowledged English speaking issues. These were often postgraduate students. Some students were academic teaching staff. Data sources included: journal notes about planning for, implementing, observing the effects of, and reflecting on teaching experience; lesson plans with activities and materials; audio recordings of student speech; and students’ evaluations of their own learning and of my teaching.

**Speech as performance**

As long as four centuries ago, Shakespeare observed that, 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players', but it has not been until the last half century that, with ‘performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of the arts . . . into every branch of the human sciences’ (Carlson, 2004, p. 6), especially language studies. In 1959, Goffman observed that speech is a form of (mostly) improvised performance; not merely the making of decipherable sounds, but carrying the speaker’s (actor’s) communicative intentionality and requiring the actively complicit presence of others (audience), with the speaker endeavouring to regulate the response of those others to the utterance and to shape it so as to construct an idealised notion of self-identity (character) (cited in Richards, 2001, p. 62). This notion has since been elaborated upon by scholars of linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, feminism, education and, of course, performance, with landmark contributions from Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Schechner (1985), Derrida (1988), Bourdieu (1991) and Butler (1993, 1997). A comprehensive and reasonably accessible overview of the evolution of performance theory and its application in a range of social science fields, including language studies, can be found in Carlson (2004). A result has been the destabilisation of the very notion of identity, with the idea that we perform acts of identity, including speech, 'as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than as the expression of a prior identity' (Pennycook, 2003, p. 528). In other words, a person's identity is always a work in progress, always being (re)constructed and constituted – though mostly not consciously.
International English as intelligible intercultural performance

In a globalised world where ‘English is used to perform, invent and (re)fashion identities across borders’ (Pennycook, 2003, pp. 528-529), it is possible to see its use as an intercultural performance, the goal of which is performative intelligibility – speech that can be readily understood by listeners from other cultures without having to exert unusual effort. This notion of intelligibility is central to such intercultural performative interaction. Just as intercultural theatrical performance provokes questions about cultural imbalances of power and representation (Bharucha, 1996; Copeman & Scollen, 2000), similar questions have arisen around Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), because of its hegemonic tendency to produce ‘abstracted contexts and idealised social rules based on (English language) native-speakerness’ (Leung 2005, p. 119). In a world where a minority of English language users are now native speakers, it has become indefensible to teach dominant models of the language and its sociocultural adjuncts. This is also the case in actor voice training – the days of ‘elocution lessons’ are long gone. This means that ‘the modus operandi when considering what should be taught’ must be ‘intelligibility of speech’ (Carey, 2009), which simply means ‘how much a listener actually understands’ (Munro & Derwing, 2006, p. 521). There has been some debate in the literature about differences of meaning between terms such as ‘intelligibility’ and ‘comprehensibility’ (cf. Munro & Derwing, 1995); however, more recent literature has shown a ‘blurring of the distinction’ between these terms (Pickering, 2006, p. 227).

If we have a compulsion to speak, but face physiological obstacles to intelligibility, ‘we cannot make the world concrete for either ourselves or others . . . our feelings have no means of being charted, our ideas stay stunted and unclear, our personalities [identities] remain confused and inexplicit’ (Rodenburg, 1993, p. 12). International student graduates may find themselves nearly four times less likely to be recruited into the Australian employment market than their peers who 'speak English well' – that is, whose performative intentions can be intelligibly understood and whose identities can be intelligibly 'read' by their intercultural interlocutors (Arkoudis et al., 2009, pp. 8-9).

Actor training – deconstructing/reconstructing speech production processes

This is where we can draw from performance training, which builds the actor's capacity to create different identities, not involuntarily, but consciously and purposefully. A great deal of the training is physical (kinaesthetic, embodied), conceiving the actor 'as an instrument (in body and voice) that can be adjusted, refined, improved, and tuned' (Stucky & Tomell-Presto, 2004, p. 103) to achieve
a state that is at once neutral yet charged with potential, into which a panoply of chosen physical characteristics, including posture and gait as well as vocal placement, pitch, tone, pace, articulation and pronunciation (to name only a few) can be introduced to build the identity of the character to be performed. In particular, the voice training involves a conscious deconstruction of the involuntary kinaesthetic processes by which speech is created, and the development of physical capacities to reconstruct them intentionally in a variety of combinations.

The research undertaken suggests that these deconstruction/reconstruction processes can be productively adapted for teaching the speaking of English in TESOL contexts. The present article focuses particularly on pronunciation, because in the literature, intelligible speech is linked to this above all (AMEP Research Centre, 2002; Fraser, 2000, 2001). As Fraser (2001, p. 1) puts it, ‘with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, a speaker can be very difficult to understand, despite accuracy in other areas’. Furthermore, the practical teaching examples set forth later in the article focus mainly on segmentals, not because it is felt that this should be the primary site for pronunciation teaching, but because the CLT paradigm is perceived to have skewed the focus towards suprasegmentals at the expense of segmentals, to fluency over accuracy. This largely remains the case despite research such as that by Jenkins (2000) underpinning her lingua franca core syllabus for English as an international language (EIL), which demonstrates persuasively that segmental pronunciation issues are the most common cause of communication breakdown (Pickering, 2006, p. 222). TESOL teachers are frustrated by the lack of strategies provided by CLT to help students who are ‘unable to produce segmentals acceptably or with any permanency after exposure to traditional methods of minimal pair drills, simplified articulatory explanations and aural discrimination exercises’ (Carey, 2009). The latter part of the present article is a step towards redressing that dearth of strategies. In particular, it introduces a method that adapts, in reverse, processes I have used in coaching actors to speak English with foreign accents, by providing kinaesthetic feedback enabling learners to reconceptualise and re-articulate habituated phonology more intelligibly.

Reconceptualising pronunciation kinaesthetically

Reconceptualisation is fundamental in this process because, as Fraser (2001, p. 20) observes:

the problem is not that the person can’t physically make the individual sounds, but that they fail to conceptualise the sounds appropriately – to discriminate them, organise them in their minds, and manipulate them as required for the sound system of English.
Concepts, she believes, are ‘mental structures which lie between external reality and our understanding of that reality’ and ‘mediate our understanding of the world’ (2001, p. 21). This impacts upon second-language pronunciation because between the ear and the tongue we deconstruct and reconstruct sounds according to our L1 phonological concepts (2001, p. 23). To address this, Fraser proposes a CLT-based approach of teaching a metalinguistic understanding of the phonological system of English in the communicative context of relevant words and phrases (2001, p. 42). She also advocates a focus on ‘auditory properties’ rather than articulation, because, she claims, ‘learners can’t really conceptualise information about the movements that go on inside their mouths in a way that helps them modify their pronunciation’ (2001, p. 43). My research suggests otherwise: that changing articulatory kinaesthetics can actually induce changes in the conceptualisation required for more intelligible pronunciation.

Actors are trained to use external, kinaesthetic cues to help them conceptualise the mental and emotional structures and physical attributes of the characters they portray. Theatre movement teacher Mackavey (2002, p. 201) argues that, for instance, an actor playing a love scene

needs a physical prep! Get her out of her dreamy mindset, her ideas about love, and into her body. Have her run up and down four flights of stairs. Body overload! Racing heart, blood-filled organs, flushed and lively. Now that's a place to start. External, yes. Mechanically induced, yes – and transformational.

Yet not only actors do this. Many of us, for example, have at some stage tried the trick of simulating the kinaesthetics of laughter for long enough that everything becomes genuinely funny.

My research indicates that this 'fake it till you make it' process can be applied to L2 pronunciation. At the segmental level, this can involve working with so-called minimal pairs. However this is a term I avoid using in the classroom because ‘minimal’ in this context refers to phonemic differentiation – the difference in sound reception – rather than to the different settings required for sound production. If learners conceptualise the difference as minimal, that is what they will probably produce, whereas kinaesthetically the variance may not be minimal at all. The term ‘phonemic contrasts’ (Brown, 1988) seems more appropriate.

**Functional load**

Some of my segmental examples involve phonemic contrasts that Brown (1988) would classify as having low functional load (FL) – a ranking derived from the
frequency of occurrence in speech both of the particular contrast and of its constituent phonemes, as well as the contextual position of the phoneme within the utterance, and the annulment of certain phonemic distinctions in some regional accents. Brown argues that, in pronunciation teaching, contrasts of low FL should be given low priority relative to higher-frequency ones. So, for instance, the contrast between /ʊ/ and /u:/ is dismissed as ‘unimportant’ because these are ‘both infrequent phonemes, are conflated by many Scottish speakers, and produce few minimal pairs’ (1988, p. 603; 1992, p. 10). It is therefore unlikely, he asserts, that a listener will be confused by any transposition of these vowels. However, as Munro and Derwing (2006) observe, even though the FL ranking concept may make ‘intuitive sense . . . for prioritizing segmental contrasts for classroom focus’ (p. 529), it remains only theoretical; there has been very little empirical research to demonstrate correlations between such rankings and actual intelligibility on the part of listeners (p. 522). Indeed, the same research by Munro and Derwing (2006) indicates that intelligibility may be affected not only by the frequency of phonemic contrast errors, but also by their nature.

Furthermore, FL rankings appear to assume that other variables affecting intelligibility – the speaker’s grammar, for example – are unproblematic. They also seem to take no account of what Munro and Derwing have elsewhere termed ‘listener response latency’, whereby ‘the time required for recognition of accented . . . segments may be greater if those segments differ considerably from category prototypes’ (1995, p. 289), so that while ‘the speaker’s message may ultimately be understood, the listener may have to work especially hard to decode it, perhaps even “replaying” it from short-term memory’ (p. 290). Thus, for example, if a second language speaker whose English pronunciation is mostly accented towards standard Australian says /puːt ʃə fuːt/ for ‘put your foot’, there may well be a moment in which the listener has both to adjust to the unexpected change to a Scottish accent, and to ‘replay’ the utterance to render the meaning intelligible. At that point the listener may comprehend the utterance, but the processing time to achieve this comprehension may impede the listener’s attention to the speaker’s next utterance, thus compounding the intelligibility problem.

So, in the absence of persuasive research-based demonstrations of the applicability of FL theory in practice, phonemic contrasts of allegedly low FL are included in the next section, to help illustrate how the principles of kinaesthetic reconceptualisation can work. It is up to individual teachers whether or not to use them – or FL rankings themselves, for that matter – in making curriculum choices according to their particular contexts and student needs.
Preparing learners for kinaesthetic reconceptualisation

As for any concentrated physical activity, this work is most productive if preceded by a warm-up. It should include breathing and posture exercises as well as limbering up of the articulatory muscles and organs, not only to prepare the learners' bodies for the work, but also to raise awareness of their own vocal apparatus and so that they can begin to exercise voluntary control over it. In dedicated pronunciation classes, there is usually no need to devote class time to warming up more than once. After the first run-through, learners can follow a guidesheet to do their own preparation prior to attending the lesson. A good set of actor voice warm-up exercises can be found in Rodenburg (1998, pp. 89-95), but variations on them can readily be found on the Internet.

Resetting/reconceptualising vowel articulation

The most important step is to break a learner’s entrenched kinaesthetic habit. So, for example, learners who pronounce ‘work’ (/wɜ:k/) almost identically to ‘walk’ (/wɔ:k/) can be prompted to pronounce ‘were’ (/wɜ:/), then to add ‘k’ (/k/): work = were/k. This produces immediate results in many learners, as they perceive and conceptualise and make the prototype sound for the first time. That is why the sentence ‘I want to walk to work’ is the first on my teaching list (Appendix 1). The instant achievement motivates and engages students and increases class attendance. Learners who pronounce ‘were’ as ‘war’ (/wɔ:/) can be guided to an interim step using ‘wear’ (/weə/) instead of ‘were’: work = wear/k. The important effect for learners is to hear and make, for the first time, a different approximation from the habituated one. From there, it is often only a short time before they actually start hearing, and making, the more conventional sound, often spontaneously. Kinaesthetically, this works because the articulatory setting for the interim sound /eə/ (air) is much closer to the one for the conventional sound /ɜ:/ (er) than for the habituated /ɔː/ (aw); the tongue is high, and the sound forward in the mouth.

For similar kinaesthetic reasons this method is applicable to many other common vowel phoneme contrast problems, as follows:

- Learners who pronounce /e/ (bet) as /æ/ (bat) can break their entrenched conceptualisation with an interim step via /ɨ/ (bit), so that where they would say ‘Ed said get ready’ as ‘Ad sad gat raddy’, they practise it instead as ‘Id sid git riddy’.
- Learners who say the diphthong /eɪ/ (beit) as /e/ (bet) take /i:/ (beet) as the interim step; thus ‘Aim straight at the gate’ normally said as ‘Em stre at the get’ is practised as ‘Eem street at the geet’.
Another problematic diphthong, /əʊ/ (so), often spoken as /ɔ:/ (saw), can be approached with an interim step of /ɜ:/ (sir), which will train the tongue towards the higher conventional position of the first part of the diphthong. Thus 'Go slow, Joe', mispronounced as 'Gaw slaw, Jaw', is practiced as 'Gur slur, Jur'. Once that setting is achieved, lip settings can be trained forward to add the second /ʊ/ part.

Where the vowel /ʊ/ (good) is habituated along the lines of /u:/ (goed), the interim step is /ɔ:/ (gawd), so 'Put your foot on the hood' normally pronounced something like 'Poo/t your foo/t on the who/d' is practiced as 'Pawt your fawt on the hawd'; once the vocal kinaesthetics are thus re-set, the difference in vowel length can be addressed relatively easily.

Technically, of course, the difference between /ʊ/ and /ɔ:/ is not just length; nor is it between /i/ and /i:/ or many other vowel phoneme contrasts, but for articulatory resetting such subtleties are of little consequence, because once the deconceptualisation of the habituated setting takes place, the conventional sound can be heard and the more intelligible setting usually found by the learners themselves. I therefore encourage my students to over-exaggerate the length of all long vowels until the contrasts are inscribed in their muscle memory.

**Resetting/reconceptualising consonant articulation**

Similar principles can also be applied to the re-training of commonly misplaced consonant settings. For example:

The common problem of articulatory confusion between /r/ (rot) and /l/ (lot) can be tackled kinaesthetically. The technical problem is that, while /r/ is an alveolar approximant, with the tongue held near but not connecting with the roof of the mouth, some learners allow the tongue to actually touch. Merely telling them this seldom produces change (though it is important to tell them nonetheless, so they at least gain a theoretical understanding as a first step). However, many learners with this challenge can unproblematically make the labiodental fricative sound /f/ (fit), with the upper front teeth proximate to the lower lip. If this position is not only held but exaggerated into a buck-toothed Bugs Bunny grimace when attempting /r/, the blade of the tongue tends naturally to pull back and down, and so be less likely to make alveolar contact. It is useful if the learner can work with a mirror. Once the original habit has been thus deconceptualised, the learner can abandon the Looney Tunes snarl, but should be encouraged to persist with a more relaxed labiodental /f/-like position. Once /r/ is worked through, learners usually reconceptualise and reset /l/ for themselves.
• The same Bugs Bunny facial distortion can help learners who mispronounce /f/ bilabially, as though blowing away a fly, or /r/ bilabially as /w/, to reset their articulation of these two consonants.

• Where the consonant /n/ (new) is found in final or medial position in connected speech, as in 'It's in Italy', some learners mispronounce it as /ŋ/ - for example 'It's ing Italy' – even though they can pronounce it conventionally in an initial position (now). This can be reset by reconceptualising the syllables, for example, as 'Itsy nitaly'.

• Similarly, some learners can pronounce the voiced consonant /g/ conventionally in the initial position (get), but in final or medial position pronounce it as the voiceless velar fricative /x/ (loch [Scottish English]). This can be addressed via the interim step of substituting the unvoiced version /k/, for example saying 'sugar' as 'shooka', or 'bag' as 'baak' (where 'aa' indicates a lengthening of the vowel to distinguish it from 'back'). Once this is habituated, most learners eventually start to voice the consonant of their own accord, but even if they do not, the production is far more intelligible than previously.

• Where /ŋ/ comes before /θ/, as in 'length', some learners substitute /n/ for /ŋ/, saying 'lenth'. An interim step here is to insert /k/ after /ŋ/, as in 'lengthkth'. Again, if the new form rehabilitates instead of progressing to the prototype, it matters little because greater intelligibility has been achieved.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding the emphasis of the foregoing on segmentals, there should also be time devoted to suprasegmental features, for example using as a point of departure the 35 sentences in Appendix 1, adapted from an actor exercise designed to work out a wide range of vowel and consonant juxtapositions (Berkley, 2001). The same 35 sentences are used in the first session as a diagnostic test allowing identification of each learner’s intelligibility issues, and patterns of similar issues shared with other learners. This in turn enables prioritisation of teaching around the shared problems while still leaving room for work on other problems particular to individuals. Learners are given further practice sentences containing target language (see Appendix 2) for homework, and also required to formulate and practice their own sentences, using 'interim' modes as appropriate. These learner-generated items are especially critical for new conceptualisations and articulatory settings to become habituated. In the last session of a course the learners are again tested by cold-reading a set of sentences containing examples of the phonemic issues they have been working on. These tests demonstrate that
students who regularly attend classes and do the homework over the length of a ten-week course (20 contact hours) usually achieve noticeable intelligibility gains not only in structured exercises and drills, but also in their general speech. The courses consistently receive very positive formal evaluations, with comments such as ‘I never before understand the roots of my pronunciation problems’, ‘the most useful was to find middle way to improve pronunciation’ and ‘remarkably good in identifying what is wrong and how to improve it’.

Even though the pronunciation strategies outlined here are adapted from actor voice training methods, knowledge of such methods is not a prerequisite to their use. These approaches to remediating pronunciation difficulties should be teachable without specialist experience or training, or even extensive preparation beyond personal familiarisation with, and practice of, the settings and the processes of achieving them. Indeed, it is to be hoped that teachers who become familiar with the principles underlying the strategies elaborated upon in this article will be able to start developing their own strategies for dealing with other phonemic contrasts and pronunciation issues. TESOL teachers with interests in drama may also find that by linking English speaking with performance theory they can open up other new and productive ways to help their students learn, as I have. Future research could focus on continuing to expand and report upon these links.

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References


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Appendix One

Speech Articulation and Pronunciation Worksheet


1. I want to walk to work.
2. Eat each green pea.
3. Aim straight at the gate.
4. Ed said get ready.
5. It's in Italy.
6. I tried my kite.
7. Oaks grow slowly.
8. Father was calm as he threw the bomb on the dock.
9. An awed audience applauded Claude.
10. Go slow Joe, you're stepping on my toe.
11. Sauce makes the goose more succulent.
12. Up the bluff, Bud runs with the cup of love.
13. Ned led men to the heifer that fell in the dell.
14. Maimed animals may become mean.
15. It's time to buy a nice limeade for a dime.
16. Oil soils doilies.
17. Flip a coin, Roy, you've a choice of oysters or poi.
18. Sheep shears should be sharp.
19. At her leisure, she used rouge to camouflage her features.
20. There's your cue, the curfew's due.
21. It was the student's duty to deliver the Tuesday newspaper.
22. He feels keen as he schemes and dreams.
23. Much of the flood comes under the hutch.
24. Boots and shoes lose newness soon.
25. Ruth was rude to the youthful recruit.
26. It's vivid, livid and vivifying.
27. Vivid experiences were lived vicariously.
28. Oddly, the ominous octopus remained calm.
29. The pod will rot if left on the rock.
30. Look, you could put your foot on the hood and push.
31. Nat nailed the new sign on the door of the diner.
32. Dale's dad died in the stampede for gold.
33. Thoughtful thinkers think things through.
34. Engineer Ethelbert wrecked the express at the end of Elm Street.
35. Lend your strength to lengthen the tent by a tenth.
**Appendix Two**

**Sample Practice Drill Sentences for Problem Phonemes**


**Vowel /e/**

1. Let the men help us get the bed.
2. They begged for rest before the extra session.
3. Everyone said it was an elegant dress.
4. His entry was an excellent etching of an elk.
5. One method is direct measurement of pressure.

**Vowel /3:/**

1. She saw Bert and Bert saw her.
2. Can a bird learn to purr?
3. Irwin urged the girl to work.
4. Earl worked in a dirty shirt.
5. If you prefer, we’ll rehearse the first verse.

**Vowel /əʊ/**

1. Don’t throw snow at your pony.
2. Open the window and close the door.
3. Don’t go out in the boat alone.
4. We’re both going home.
5. We won’t go home till we know who stole the gold.

**Vowel /ʊ/**

1. Would you look for the cushion?
2. The rook stood on one foot.
3. He shook himself and pushed off into the woods.
4. I could eat a bushel full of cookies.
5. She’s good-looking when she puts on the wool dress.

**Consonant /r/**

1. Harry tried to rip the orange ribbon.
2. Don’t run across the narrow bridge.
3. The crows swarmed around the fruit.
4. Robert rode the roan right up the ridge.
5. I’ll tell the story tomorrow morning.
Consonant /f/

1. My father takes me fishing every fall.
2. He felt footloose and fancy-free.
3. Did you find enough coffee for breakfast?
4. What seems fine at fifteen seems foolish at fifty.
5. A falling inflection frequently indicates finality.

Consonant /n/

1. Nell’s nonsense isn’t funny.
2. The Chinese and Japanese weren’t friendly recently.
3. Nine fancy brown hens ran out of the barn into the rain.
4. Many are accompanied by downward inflections.
5. You can transfer what you learn into conversation.
A theory-practice divide: EFL teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar instruction

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The last two decades have seen a growth in research into language teachers’ and students’ beliefs about second and foreign language teaching and learning. This article reports the findings of an initial survey, which was part of an in-depth longitudinal case study of Vietnamese EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding grammar instruction. Findings from the survey show that both teachers and students held relatively similar beliefs about grammar instruction. Both groups strongly favoured a deductive approach to grammar and grammatical accuracy. The article concludes with some suggestions for second language teacher education.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, researchers in the field of second language teacher education have demonstrated an increasing interest in the topic of teacher cognition, which is ‘personally defined, often tacit, systematic and dynamic’ (Borg, 2006, pp. 271-272). Interest in this avenue of research has stemmed from dissatisfaction with the behaviourist and cognitive paradigms that have dominated second language acquisition (SLA) research for the better part of its history, leading to what Breen (1985) first recognised as a ‘neglect [of] the social reality of language learning as it is experienced and created by teachers and learners’ (p. 141). For this reason, research which aims to unpack ‘what language teachers think, know, believe, and do’ (Borg, 2003, p. 81) can assist in informing second language teacher education courses. In Borg’s words:

Teacher cognition research extends our current understandings of formal instruction not only by shedding light on what teachers do, but also by providing insights into the cognitive bases of these practices. Such data can play a central role in L2 teacher education and development initiatives which stimulate teachers to reflect on and hence to improve the quality of their own grammar teaching practice. (1999, pp. 28-29)
This article reports on a study which aimed to provide baseline information for a subsequent in-depth case study on teachers’ beliefs about form-focused instruction, and is situated within the Vietnamese high school context.

**Background**

In Vietnam, English has been mandated as a compulsory subject for all high school students from Year Six to Year Ten. The teaching of English in Vietnam has been characterised by many researchers as emphasising students’ memorisation of grammatical rules, grammatical accuracy, mechanical drills, and repetition (e.g., Bernat, 2004; Canh, 2000, 2007; Hiep, 2007; Oanh & Hien, 2006). Tomlinson and Bao (2004) surveyed 300 intermediate-level EFL adult learners in Vietnam and one of their findings was that students viewed grammar as an indispensable component of their English language course, which ‘can be linked to both intellectual and affective needs’ (p. 217). However, the authors found that students had a negative attitude towards lengthy grammar presentations and mechanical practice of grammar.

In a recent attempt to improve school graduates’ communicative competence in English, the Ministry of Education and Training has officially introduced a new curriculum which emphasises communicative skills as ‘the goal of the teaching of English at the secondary school level while formal knowledge of the language serves as the means to the end’ (Ministry of Education and Training, 2006, p. 6, author translation). A significant characteristic of the new curriculum is claimed to be the promotion of ‘learner-centred, communicative, task-based’ pedagogy, which encourages students to participate to a high level in class and to engage in thinking and problem solving. The 35-week curriculum is prescribed for all grades and school types nationwide from Year Six to Year Twelve, with a weekly class time of 135 minutes, split into three lessons of 45 minutes each.

Despite the rhetoric of communicative language teaching, the common professional discourse shows reservations about the readiness of school teachers in Vietnam to adopt this prescribed teaching approach, and the voices of Vietnamese teachers have remained largely unreported, other than in a few unpublished theses (e.g., Ellis, 1994; McCook, 1998). This study aims to address this research gap.

**Teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction**

The teaching of grammar remains one of the most controversial topics in the second language education literature. Despite some researchers’ negative attitudes towards the effectiveness of grammar instruction (e.g., Krashen, 1985; Terrell, 1977), Folse (2009) argues that:
In learning a language, I think vocabulary is the single most important component for comprehension, but grammar is the backbone of the language. To improve their English proficiency, ELLs [English language learners] need to reduce errors. A paragraph that has at least one error in every sentence is not good writing, just as a conversation that has an error in every sentence does not represent good speaking. (p. 57)

In order to address the debate on whether and how grammar should be taught, scholars have recommended that the beliefs of both teachers and students regarding the role of grammar and grammar pedagogy should be investigated to inform second language teacher education (Borg, 2006; Burns, 2009; Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997). In response to this, an increasing number of empirical studies in second language grammar pedagogy, from a teacher cognition perspective, have been documented in L2 teacher education literature over the last few decades (Andrew, 2003; Borg, 1992; Borg & Burns, 2008; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Grottsch, 2000). The focus of these studies has been on what teachers and students know, think, and believe in relation to grammar and grammar teaching as well as on what they actually do in the classroom. Findings have shown that grammar teaching is a complex issue, which calls for a reconceptualisation of composite views on grammar pedagogy derived from experimental studies in second language acquisition.

Two groundbreaking studies in this regard are those undertaken by Schulz (1996, 2001). In his 1996 study, which was conducted on 824 students studying different foreign languages and 92 foreign language and EFL teachers at the University of Arizona, Schulz found that students were more positive about grammar instruction than the teachers, while teachers were divided with regard to the role of explicit grammar instruction. In 2001, Schulz replicated the study on 607 Colombian foreign language students and 122 Colombian foreign language teachers and obtained similar results. In addition, the study revealed that Colombian teachers and students seemed to be more inclined toward explicit grammar instruction and correction than their American counterparts. These studies raise questions about the significance of culture as an influence on teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar and grammar pedagogy.

Following Schulz’s (1996) study, Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) surveyed 60 college-level ESL teachers of academic English to adult learners, of whom 30 were from the New York area and 30 from Puerto Rico, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 45 years. They used a three-point scale questionnaire and open-ended post-hoc interviews with eight teachers from each group and found that the Puerto Rican teachers, unlike their New York colleagues, who
favoured a purely meaning-focused approach to language teaching, believed that formal attention to grammar was needed. These Puerto Rican teachers explained that an explicit approach to grammar satisfied their students’ expectations as well as syllabus requirements.

As revealed in the studies described above, teachers and students working in both second and foreign language contexts demonstrated strong support for explicit grammar instruction. These studies also imply that educational theories do not always play a prominent and direct role in shaping teachers’ epistemological knowledge about their work. Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) claim:

Reasons given for how and why conscious grammar was taught were based mostly on teachers’ perceptions of their own experience as teachers and learners. It is interesting that our participants rarely justified their approaches by referring to research studies or any particular methodology. (p. 255)

Given the importance of gathering knowledge about teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar instruction (Borg, 2006) and the theory-practice divide, the study reported in this article attempted to explore what teachers and students believe regarding the importance of knowledge of the grammar of a language and grammar pedagogy in an as yet underexplored context: Vietnam.

The study

The study reported in this article was set up to identify teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction, and to identify any differences between the beliefs of each group. The overall research objective was firstly to examine, and then to compare and contrast, teachers’ and students’ epistemological understandings of grammar and grammar teaching. To achieve this, a mixed methods approach was adopted (Creswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007) in which ‘the results of the first method inform the development of the second’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 165). During the first stage, 10 high school teachers studying for a Master’s degree in TESOL at a university in Hanoi were invited to write a guided narrative on their beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction in learning English as a foreign language. A narrative frame in the form of guiding questions was designed to provide guidance and support in terms of both the structure and content of what was to be written (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). These guiding questions were:

1. How important do you believe grammar is in learning English as a foreign language? Is it possible not to teach grammar? Why do you think that way? Where do such beliefs come from?
2. How important do you believe the explanation of grammar rules is to your students? Why do you think that way? How do you explain rules to your students in your teaching?

3. Describe as specifically as possible the way you teach grammar to your students. Why do you teach that way? Where does your idea of grammar teaching come from? Give examples of your activities/steps in a grammar lesson.

4. In your teaching how do you correct your students’ grammatical errors? Do you correct oral errors and written errors in the same way or differently? Why do you correct errors that way?

The teachers’ narratives, which were written in English, were coded under three broad themes: (i) the importance of grammar; (ii) approaches to grammar; (iii) approaches to grammatical error correction. Sub-themes were identified for each broad theme, which were then used to inform the writing of a questionnaire, which constituted the second stage of the study. The process resulted in a ten-item questionnaire administered to students and teachers. Although the two questionnaires were mostly conducted in parallel, the wording was slightly different for each group to take into account the different audiences. Both questionnaires were written in Vietnamese to make sure that the respondents understood the statements in the questionnaire and to make the process of completing it more comfortable for respondents.

Teacher and student participants for the second stage of the study were selected from separate sources. The teachers comprised 39 staff, each of whom taught at a different secondary school in a variety of different provinces in Vietnam. They agreed to participate in this study after they were sent an email explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. Most of these teachers had less than 10 years’ teaching experience. The students were from four secondary schools located in both the northern part and southern part of the country. In total, there were 516 student respondents: 189 (36%) from Year Ten, 159 from Year Eleven (31%) and 168 from Year Twelve (33%).

Findings

Role of Grammar in Foreign Language Learning

Table 1 presents a percentage of student responses (N=516) concerning the role of grammar in learning English as a foreign language. The table also presents comparative teacher response rates for the total teacher sample (N=39).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. S&amp;T*: Grammar knowledge is the most important element for success in learning English.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. S&amp;T*: It is impossible to use English without mastering grammar rules.</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. S*: I find it necessary to learn grammar in order to do well at exams.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T*: The teaching of grammar is necessary to help students to do well at exams.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In cases where percentages do not add up to 100, not all respondents addressed the particular item.

*S&T*: Item on both student and teacher questionnaire
*S*: Item on student questionnaire
*T*: Item on teacher questionnaire

Table 1: Teachers’ and students’ beliefs about the role of grammar

Table 1 shows that 72% of the students but only 41% of the teachers believed that ‘grammar knowledge is most important for success in learning English’. Also, the majority of the students (79%) believed that ‘it is impossible to use English without mastering grammar rules’, yet only 36% of the teachers felt that this was the case. Interestingly, 100% of the teachers believed that teaching and learning grammar was necessary for examination success while 87% of the students felt that way. Teachers’ belief in the importance of grammar was indicated with a majority of the teachers (90%) disagreeing with question 14 (not included in the student questionnaire) that ‘the teaching of grammar would be unnecessary if it wasn’t required in the textbook’. The results are supported by teacher entries in their first-phase narratives. For example, one teacher wrote, ‘Grammar is the railway through which your message will be transported. Without it, in the same way as a train cannot move without railways, you won’t be able to convey your ideas fully.’ Another teacher wrote:

As an English teacher, I think it is impossible not to teach grammar for Vietnamese students in general and my students in particular because of some reasons. First, students in Vietnam need grammar knowledge to pass many examinations . . . Secondly, with my teaching experience, I realise that my students also want to learn grammar. Thirdly, grammar is
the focus of the syllabus. Finally, I think grammar is an essential factor to support the students’ progress in four English skills.

**Role of explicit grammar instruction**

Table 2 below illustrates students’ and teachers’ beliefs about the role of explicit grammar instruction. Although two-thirds of the teachers (70%) believed that they ‘need to explain grammar rules carefully to help students learn grammar well’, a higher percentage of students (82%) liked their teachers to do this in the classroom.

However, the most marked discrepancy was found in the students’ and teachers’ beliefs about taking an inductive approach to grammar. While 90% of teachers believed that ‘the teachers should provide examples to illustrate the target grammar point then let the students work out the rule rather than explain the rule, unless the students fail to work out the rule’, only 48% of the students liked this approach to grammar. With regard to the medium of grammar instruction, more teachers (95%) than students (84%) disagreed that English should be the medium of grammar instruction. The teachers’ responses to the questionnaire were consistent with those expressing their views through narratives. One of them wrote, ‘it is not a good idea to explain the grammar rules from the start. It is much better to give learners authentic tasks which help them work out the rules themselves. In case they cannot, I explain the rules.’ Another confirmed this approach:

> It is important to make a connection between the examples and the rules. After the explanation of rules, I again give students meaningful examples of how the grammar point is used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5: I like the teacher to explain grammar rules carefully.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T*: The teacher needs to explain grammar rules carefully to help students learn grammar well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. S*: I like the teacher to explain grammar rules in English.</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T*: Teachers should explain grammar rules in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. S*: I like the teacher to provide examples illustrating the target grammar point, then let the students work out the rule rather than explain the rule, unless the students fail to work out the rule.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T*: In teaching grammar, the teacher should provide examples to illustrate the target grammar point then let the students work out the rule rather than explain the rule unless the students fail to work out the rule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In cases where percentages do not add up to 100, not all respondents addressed the particular item.

*S&T : Item on both student and teacher questionnaire
*S : Item on student questionnaire
*T : Item on teacher questionnaire

Table 2: Students’ and teachers’ beliefs about explicit grammar instruction

Role of practice
Items 6 and 7 asked the students and teachers about their beliefs with regard to practising grammar. Again, as indicated in Table 3, as many as 72% of the students and slightly fewer teachers (61%) agreed on the need to do as many grammar exercises in the classroom as possible. Doing grammar exercises seemed to be the only way of practising the target grammar points for a great number of students. As with other items in the questionnaire, there is a discrepancy between teachers and students with regard to the role of grammar exercises, although the gap is not wide.

Item 7, regarding the role of communicative tasks, received a negative response from a majority of the students and the teachers. Teachers and students both agreed that students should not ‘practice using English through communicative tasks without teaching grammatical structures’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. S*: I like the teacher to give as many grammar exercises as possible in the classroom. T*: Teachers should give students as many grammar exercises to do in the classroom as possible.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Students’ and teachers’ beliefs about the role of grammar exercises**

**Error correction**

The teachers in the study seemed to be concerned with students’ linguistic accuracy while the students did not appear to be nearly so concerned. Comparing the responses of the teachers and students to Item 8, on the importance of linguistic accuracy, there were sizeable discrepancies in their beliefs (i.e., discrepancies of approximately 10%). Yet, the discrepancies between responses given by the teachers and the students to Item 9, on error correction, were smaller, i.e., around 5%. Overall, 86% of the students, compared to 80% of the teachers, agreed that students’ oral errors should be corrected immediately.

*Note: In cases where percentages do not add up to 100, not all respondents addressed the particular item.*

*S&T: Item on both student and teacher questionnaire
*S: Item on student questionnaire
*T: Item on teacher questionnaire
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. S*: When I speak or write English I am always concerned about how to speak or write English accurately.</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T*: Teachers should pay attention to helping students to speak and write English accurately.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. S*: I like the teacher to correct my oral errors immediately.</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T*: If the teacher doesn’t correct students’ oral errors immediately they will be in the habit of using English ungrammatically.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In cases where percentages do not add up to 100, not all respondents addressed the particular item.

*S&T: Item on both student and teacher questionnaire
*S: Item on student questionnaire
*T: Item on teacher questionnaire

Table 3: Students’ and teachers’ beliefs about error correction

Teachers’ concerns about students’ grammatical accuracy were also present in the narratives. One teacher commented:

Many people say that the teacher should not correct students’ grammatical errors. I don’t agree with the idea because if we don’t correct their errors, time over time, the errors will become habitual.

Discussion

Findings from this study complement those of studies by Schulz (1996, 2001) and Brown (2009) which suggest that there are mismatches between teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar instruction. In addition, the degree of discrepancy between the two groups of participants in this study was similar to that found in Schulz’s studies. Areas where the gap between students’ and teachers’ beliefs are not so wide are the role of explicit grammar instruction, the role of grammar exercises as a type of grammar practice, the priority of grammar exercises over communication, and the role of grammar for passing the examinations. The similarity in the findings of the studies conducted in various contexts could be
taken to suggest that teachers’ and students’ strong inclination towards grammar and error correction does not seem to be influenced significantly by the teaching context (Bernat, 2004; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Tomlinson & Bao, 2004). The findings of the study reported give some support to the view that beliefs are socially constructed and distributed (Cross, 2010).

Unlike the students in the Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers study (1997) who advocated ‘some use of conscious instruction combined with communicative practice’ (p. 250), students in the study reported in this article appear to believe more strongly in the value of doing discrete-point grammar exercises and explicit instruction of grammar while devaluing communicative tasks. This difference can be related to the students’ learning culture and learning styles which was nurtured by what has been described as a spoon-feeding, grammar-centred approach to language teaching, a pattern long dominant in Vietnamese language classrooms (Canh, 2000, 2007; Oanh & Hien, 2006).

The study reported here would also appear to suggest, as have others, that neither the debates on grammar instruction, nor new theories of grammar instruction (Ellis, 2006) have influenced the beliefs held by the teachers and the students. There is further support for the contention by Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley (1988, p. 46) that:

Teachers do not have the luxury of being able to formulate and adhere to some theory or position on education, with only another theorist’s arguments to question its validity. They have to accomplish the practical task of teaching, which requires getting the job done through whatever conceptions and methods work best, under practical constraints that include physical resources, numbers of pupils, nature of pupils, time constraints, set syllabuses and so on.

In second language teacher education, teachers tend to ground their teaching in their own epistemological knowledge, which also has an impact on students’ beliefs (Freeman, 1996). However, it is suggested (Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler, 2002, p. 8) that:

There is no guarantee that the knowledge generated at local sites is correct or even useful. Teachers working together or a teacher working with his or her students might generate knowledge that turns out to undermine rather than improve teaching effectiveness. Local knowledge is immediate and concrete but almost always incomplete and sometimes blind and insular.
As indicated in the study reported, many of the teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction appeared to be based on questionable assumptions. Shulman (1987) asserts that the best classroom practice is informed by the wisdom of research and that the best research informed by the wisdom of practice. This constitutes a sound strategy for narrowing the gap between theory and practice.

**Conclusion**

Grammar teaching is a complex issue in language teaching methodology, where there remains a wide gap between what researchers say and what practitioners do. While theoretical perspectives on the role of explicit grammar instruction are quite mixed, both teachers and students in a context where English is taught as a foreign language in the school curriculum showed a strong inclination towards prioritising explicit grammar instruction. Teachers and students did not seem to have engaged with the prolonged debate in the literature on the contribution of grammar instruction to fluency and foreign language acquisition. Their behaviour was more informed by beliefs derived from the pragmatic choices they have had to make in light of purely practical circumstances (e.g., the available resources, the nature of their students, their simple understanding of the socio-educational situation within which their teaching and learning is situated) rather than methodology informed by theory. The views that teachers and students hold about language teaching in general, and grammar teaching in particular, form the beliefs that seem to guide their teaching and learning.

The findings suggest that there is a need to promote an interaction between teachers’ epistemological knowledge and formal knowledge in the field so that they can restructure their pedagogical knowledge. Such a restructuring would help teachers to critically examine and challenge their beliefs in order to accommodate innovative ideas in language teaching so that they might theorise their teaching rather than routinise it. Any effective teacher education program should mediate that interaction. Once teachers’ beliefs have changed, their teaching will be likely to change accordingly, which in turn will lead to changes in their students’ beliefs about language learning (Littlewood, 2000). This is more demanding in under-resourced contexts like Vietnam, where access to formal knowledge is quite limited and teachers have to rely on their experience in the form of taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching.

This article has reported an initial survey in which there was a great difference in the number of responses from the two groups compared, so it has a number
of limitations. As a survey, it only captures a snapshot of a sample of teachers’ and students’ beliefs at a certain moment in time. A more detailed picture can be obtained through ongoing research that examines the relationship between beliefs and actions as well as the relationship between the psychological aspects and the social aspects of teachers’ and students’ beliefs.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the reviewers and journal editors for the constructive criticisms and insightful comments that helped to improve my article. Any limitations are my own responsibility.

References


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Welcome to the first issue of the new-look *English Australia Journal* in 2012. Sadly, we have to say goodbye to Stephanie Schembri, who has so ably edited Classroom Talk since its first appearance in 2009. We will miss her, and wish her all the best in her future career. Meanwhile, as the new editor, I hope to see this section continue to grow and evolve as a space for teachers to share lesson ideas and action research as well as tips, techniques, tools and general food for thought.

In Classroom Talk this issue, Hakimeh Pourjamal and Mansour Sha'bani demonstrate how scheduled frequency practice can be a powerful tool for consolidating learning both in and out of the classroom, while Yaser Khajavi overviews technology-based techniques that are changing reflective practice.

We are also excited to introduce our first ever Classroom Talk interview segment, ‘Ten Questions’. This is a chance to pick up advice and ideas from some of the most inspiring figures in ELT, and get a glimpse of the experiences and beliefs that motivate them. Our first victim is corpus linguistics expert and well-known author, Michael McCarthy. We hope you enjoy it, and if there’s someone you’d like to see interviewed in future, let us know!

Classroom Talk is, as always, ‘by teachers, for teachers’, and we continue to seek innovative articles that are firmly grounded in actual classroom practice, professional experience and development for language educators. Whether you are a creative teacher with original activities to share, a technophile with exciting ideas for using a particular web tool, or action researcher with interesting findings to report, please contact me to find out how to get involved.

Sophia Khan
sophiakhan.eajournal@yahoo.com
Scheduled frequency practice to assist appropriate language recall:

A connectionist approach

Hakimeh Pourjamal & Mansour Sha’bani

One of the major causes of difficulty in English as a Foreign Language learning is that learners do not come by a newly learnt item as often and as systematically as they need to. Textbooks rarely expose them naturally to the items that they have learned in the preceding lessons, a limitation which hinders recall of the new words and structures. Most often, learners do not re-encounter the items until the midterm or final exams. Too frequently, new items are practised only in the session they are taught and there is no subsequent reinforcement through use in input or production. Of course, students may provide themselves with increased input by simply reviewing the previously learnt material. However, this review must be systematic, planned and purposeful to be effective. As teachers, we should teach strategies for providing timely, systematically planned revision schedules to help students master language they might otherwise struggle to learn. Importantly, students should be made aware of the fact that they are practising some items systematically with the purpose of gaining mastery through frequent practice.

Related models (the frequency hypothesis and connectionist models)

This article will describe a ‘scheduled frequency practice’ technique intended to address the problems mentioned earlier. It draws on principles of the frequency hypothesis (Hatch & Wagner-Gough, 1976) and connectionist models of language acquisition (e.g., Ellis, 2002). The frequency hypothesis states that language acquisition is influenced by the frequency with which linguistic items occur in the input that language learners receive. In other words, the more learners encounter and re-encounter a linguistic item in their reading, listening, or even production, the better they will be able to acquire it. This hypothesis has been strongly supported by connectionist models of language acquisition, which view linguistic knowledge as a network of interconnected nodes in the brain. The strength of the connections between nodes in this network is greatly influenced by an item’s input frequency. Output frequency might also play a noticeable role in strengthening
the connections between the nodes because if learners activate a route several times, they become able to travel it faster and more efficiently each time, and the process becomes more and more automatic. A connectionist view of language learning can be characterised as ‘the associative learning of representations that reflect the probabilities of occurrence of form function mappings’ (Ellis, 2002, p. 144). Ellis also claims that language learners count the input that they receive, and that they do so unconsciously (2002, p. 179). According to this viewpoint then, frequency must play a key role in language learning.

**A sketch of scheduled frequency practice**

The essence of the scheduled frequency practice technique is that every time learners come across a new item (vocabulary, structure, etc.), they add it to a list, including the item’s meaning or an example sentence, and attach the list to one of the upcoming units so that they can revisit it at a scheduled future time. When they re-encounter an item, they practise it through an appropriate activity, then re-list it for a future encounter. The procedure may be repeated several times, until the learner feels competent in remembering the item and using it in automatic production. In this way, learners become engaged with frequent input and plenty of consequent production or output. The beginning or end of the unit, or even just before a new structure, may be potential places for sticking the lists. The learners should include the date on which they write and practise the items so that they can follow and evaluate their learning systematically and in a scheduled way.

For example, the grammar point of Unit 3 focuses on past habits with *used to*. After some practice, the learners are asked to take a piece of paper and write a sentence of their own, such as ‘I used to keep a diary when I was in high school’, and attach it to Unit 4. When they get to Unit 4, they are reminded of the structure and must practise how to produce it, perhaps by writing a new sentence such as ‘I didn’t use to play piano as a teenager’. The paper is then re-attached to Unit 5. This process goes on until learners encounter and practise the structure frequently enough to commit it to their long-term memory and are able to use it every time they intend to.

The scheduled frequency practice technique can be carried out in a number of ways or places. If the learners are reading books in their mother tongue, they can attach the papers every 10 pages so that as they are proceeding through the story, novel, etc., they have the opportunity to practise their English. If they are college or school students, they may even make use of their textbooks in other subjects for this purpose. Notebooks or diaries that learners use for planning
their future activities may also be very helpful by providing the opportunity to practise when they write their daily schedule.

Teachers can help their students in evaluating their own and their classmates' progress by providing opportunities for class conferences and discussions using the practised items, and can subsequently provide useful feedback on the points which they assess as problematic for a majority of their students.

**Extended usage of the technique**

Learners can extend their sentence-long production to more contextualised and purposeful writing or speaking about diverse subjects. For instance, when asked to write about a topic, the students can go through a number of recently studied structures and lexical items, choose the ones they associate with the topic and write them down in two boxes on top of the page they want to write on, one box for grammatical structures and the other for words or phrases. The two boxes function as reminders of what the students want to practise and incorporate in their production. The same list of words or structures can be gone over every time the learner writes on a new theme (although different items may be selected). This way, the entire vocabulary or structure list is reviewed every time the learner wants to start writing or speaking about a topic.

**Review activities**

The final part of this article describes a number of activities teachers can use to enhance the review process, depending on the nature of the items and what the class conditions demand.

**Hot seats**

In this variant of the well-known game, one student chooses a word from the agreed revision list (for example, *manufacturer*) but keeps it secret. This student is ‘in the hot seat’. The rest of the class is required to guess the word, either by giving its exact meaning or formulating a sentence including the word. The student in the hot seat says ‘yes’ if the sentence includes the selected word/definition or ‘no’ if it does not. The activity may go on until an appropriate definition (*a person or company that makes things using machines*) or example (*KIA Motors is a car manufacturer*) is provided by the students. This activity can be continued for the entire revision list. Finally the list can be attached to some part of the book to be revisited and practised another time, either in-class or as self-study.

**Charades**

For a group of concrete words, such as musical instruments, charades can be a
helpful way to review: one of the students mimes using a particular instrument and the others guess what it is. If they have problem with some of the words, they should be asked to keep these on their list for future practice.

**Partner-finding game**
This activity might be applied to review grammar items. The teacher divides the class into groups, and provides each with the same sentences, but written on different coloured cards, for example, red for one group and yellow for the other. The number of sentences should equal the number of students in each group, so for a class of 10 students the teacher writes five duplicated sentences. The teacher asks the red card group to paraphrase the sentence(s) using the target structure, and the yellow card group to paraphrase in a different way. When finished, the students of each group should walk around the class to find their partner. Together, they check if the sentences match and if they need correction. The teacher can help in case any correction is required. For example, to practice the structure get used to, the card might say:

*Rosa was not living in a big city. Then she immigrated to the United States (New York). First living in a big city was difficult for her but some time later she started feeling comfortable.*

The red group, who must use the target structure, might write:

*It took a while for Rosa to get used to living in a big city.*

The yellow card group, who can paraphrase, might write:

*When Rosa moved to New York, she wasn't comfortable living there.*

The group should keep the sentences for future review.

**Team game**
The class is divided into 3 groups, and given a list of revision words. They are given some time to go over the words and prepare sentences using them; they must cooperate at this stage if they want to achieve a high score in the game later. When ready, Group A chooses a member of Group B to incorporate a selected word into a sentence or give its definition; Group C is the referee and decides if a sentence/definition is acceptable or not, with guidance from the teacher if necessary. Change the group roles each time, until everyone has had a turn, or the revision list has been exhausted. Any difficulties that arise can be noted by the teacher and revisited.
REFERENCES


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Reflective teaching:
Some IT-based reflections for language teachers

Yaser Khajavi

Reflective teaching practice has received the attention of many teachers, teacher trainers and researchers in recent years. It provides teachers with opportunities to think carefully about their own teaching behaviours and to see other colleagues in action and consequently reflect on that. Teachers find themselves engaged in a meaningful process of query, which leads towards greater self-esteem and interest in teaching. Becoming a reflective teacher can help teachers keep track of what they are doing and what each student is learning and, in turn, helps students achieve new learning benchmarks. As a result, there is a chance for both teacher and student growth.

Currently, a number of strategies and techniques are applied for reflective practice, such as journaling, portfolios, peer assessment, and so on; however, with the emergence of new technologies, new techniques can be applied in order to implement reflective practice more efficiently than before. In this article, first an overview of conventional reflective devices is presented. Then, other techniques based on information technology are suggested, with the aim of helping teachers and teacher trainers in their courses and classes.

Defining reflection
Richards (1990, p. 1) defines reflection as an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response to past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action. According to Akbari et al. (2010, p. 212), ‘a reflective teacher, is one who critically examines his/her practices, comes up with some ideas as how to improve his/her performance to enhance students’ learning, and puts those ideas into practice’. Farrell (2003, p. 20) holds that reflective teaching can help ESL/EFL teachers avoid impulsive and routine performance. Moreover, it allows them to operate in a purposeful and planned way and keep away from the ‘I don’t know what I will do today’ syndrome.
Conventional methods for reflective practice

There are a number of conventional methods which are used widely for reflective practice:

Peer observation
Receiving constructive feedback from a colleague can be encouraging and confidence-building. It can provide a helpful means to share and evaluate teaching initiatives, and bring to light good teaching practice. It can also be a good way for the observing teachers to gain new ideas and/or to begin thinking more critically about the way they teach. However, a lack of constructive feedback and the time-consuming nature of the process are drawbacks.

Journal/diary writing
A journal or diary is a place that teachers can record their experience, practice and performance in the classroom and then reflect upon these or ask colleagues to comment on their performance.

Recording lessons
Audio or video recording of teaching can help teachers reflect on their own and others' teaching. One advantage of this technique is that no details are missed. However, it may change the atmosphere of the class in an unfavorable way because some students or teachers act unnaturally or conservatively when they know they are being taped, and this affects their performance.

Some new ideas
In addition to the above mentioned techniques, the following tools can also be used for reflective practice:

Teacher forums and groups
Some teachers have found that the need to share their reflective discourse with peers can be met via the use of electronic communications (Ray & Coulter, 2008). On the World Wide Web (and increasingly, via Twitter and Facebook) there are a large number of groups and forums dealing with different aspects of teaching and learning. For example, areas of discussion in The Foreign Language Teaching Forum (www.cortland.edu/flteach) include school/college articulation, training of student teachers, classroom activities, curriculum, and syllabus design. In such forums, teachers have the opportunity to share their ideas and also to reflect upon or comment on each other’s practices. Furthermore, teachers can raise their
questions to be answered by members from around the globe. One tremendous and vital privilege of membership in these groups is that one can find teachers or teacher trainers who teach in similar situations or have students with similar characteristics.

**Webinars**

Every year, many seminars and conferences on different aspects of language teaching are held globally. These assemblies provide teachers with valuable opportunities to exchange their ideas and also reflect on each other’s practice. One recent development is web conferences, or webinars. Through the use of webcams on their computers, a large number of teachers from different countries can interact. The use of webinars has become common in recent years mostly because they are very cost-effective and time-saving. In addition, teachers can transfer a vast amount of information in the form of films, files, documents or other data in a short time. Sometimes attendance certificates are issued for participants. Teachers can obtain information and updates about webinars by registering in a number of groups and web sites, such as www.macmillanenglish.com and www.teachingenglish.org.uk.

**In-service virtual workshops**

Organisations often hold in-service workshops in order to update teachers' knowledge and expertise. In these meetings, often facilitated by a senior staff member acting as trainer/leader, teachers can discuss their problems in classes and come up with solutions, or a specific issue can be put up for analysis and scrutiny, and strategies suggested. And as with webinars, these workshops can be held virtually in order to avoid the limitations of participating in person using VoIP software such as Skype, or possibly a virtual world such as Second Life.

**Student e-mails**

Students' opinions and perceptions can add a different and valuable perspective to a teacher’s reflections, and teachers can use students' feedback as a practical source for evaluating the success of their teaching. Sometimes a chat may be enough, but students are often uncomfortable expressing their ideas directly to their teachers. To work around this, teachers can receive students' comments through e-mails from a non-identifying or specially created account, which allows them to remain anonymous. Allowing free comments is possible, but it may be more constructive to guide the feedback process by using questionnaires, for example:
How satisfied are you with the explanations provided in the class?


Of course, at times students’ comments may be illogical or unconstructive. It is the teacher’s art to find the patterns which are conducive to improved teaching.

**Digital databases**

Teachers can create ‘digital databases’ of reflective teaching on their computers simply by saving the reflective entries which they make for their classes. The files can be classified according to class, date, level or other criteria and allocated to a folder for this purpose. These databases enable teachers to keep a record of their practices according to specified criteria. Whenever they wish, teachers can evaluate and observe the evolution of their practices and gain a general view of what they have achieved.

**Reflective inventories**

In cases when it is not possible to ask colleagues to comment on their teaching, teachers can self-evaluate through inventories for reflective teaching. This is one of the easiest tools for self-reflection due to its simple procedures and the fact that teachers can undertake it alone. Through such inventories, teachers are able to see the extent to which they are reflective in different situations or classes. One example of an inventory is the L2 teacher reflection inventory designed by Akbari et al. (2010), which encompasses practical, cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective, and critical reflection elements. The inventory is in the Likert form and requires respondents to respond to the statements in a continuum, e.g., from 1-5. For instance:

**I think about my students’ emotional responses to my instructions.**


or

**I discuss practical/theoretical issues with my colleagues.**


On completion, a general score is calculated which can determine the degree of reflection in the class. Using Excel to record reflective inventories makes it even easier to calculate scores and compare them across classes and contexts and over time.
CONCLUSION

New strategies to assist reflective teaching were presented, based on the Internet and IT. These new methods have the advantages of being time-saving and cost-effective, and having an extensive span in terms of the teachers involved. It is hoped that the suggestions will help teachers and teacher trainers develop their opportunities for reflective practice. It is worth noting that teachers should determine what functions best for them, as what works for one person does not necessarily work for another. We would suggest, however, that language teachers use a combination of these methods in order to increase their success.

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In the first of our new interview series featuring prominent names in ELT, we welcome Michael McCarthy, well-known authority in corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, and one of ELT’s most prolific writers. Co-author of *English Grammar Today* (Cambridge University Press), and *Vocabulary Matrix* (Heinle Cengage Learning), as well as many in the ubiquitous *English Vocabulary in Use* series (Cambridge University Press), he has written or otherwise contributed to over 40 books and over 80 articles – so far! Amazingly, he still had time to answer some questions for the *English Australia Journal* . . .

McCarthy speaking at the 2011 English Australia Conference in Adelaide
What has your experience as a learner taught you about teaching?

When I was a schoolboy in ‘Old’ South Wales, we had to do Welsh as a compulsory language. We learnt it in the same way as we learnt Latin or even maths, in that it was presented as a system of rules and abstract principles, not related to real communication, even though there were native speakers just ten miles outside the city of Cardiff where I lived. I also did Spanish, with a teacher who brought the language to life with lots of oral practice, songs, poems, and general good fun. I know which experience has informed my ideas about teaching ever since . . .

Which area of typical teaching practice would you most like to see change in, and why?

Grammar. It is still presented in so many textbooks as if it is a set of rules divorced from meanings and actual communication. Grammar has meanings, just as vocabulary does, and many of the meanings are interpersonal and contribute to the success (or failure) of interaction, whether in writing or speaking.

Do you think current teacher training needs to evolve, and in what way?

When I look at teacher training programmes I am often surprised at the lack of training about corpus linguistics and how the corpus revolution has changed so much of our teaching resources, from dictionaries to grammars, vocabulary materials and whole course syllabuses.

What are you excited about in terms of current research?

At the moment I am excited by the power of large learner corpora to show us how and what learners learn. The empirical data provided by good learner corpora could potentially upset the apple cart of Second Language Acquisition studies which are based on what I call ‘observe the rats in the laboratory’ approaches.

How do you see teaching materials changing in response to the growth of the Internet and blended learning?

What we need to do in online and blended learning is two things: (1) recreate, using the power of technology, as many of the supports that classroom teachers offer to learners as we can, such as good feedback, interesting stimuli, individual attention, etc., and (2) provide learners with presentation and practice that they can do in their own time, in an inhibition-free environment and with choices that enable them to follow their own needs and aspirations. To date, we are only part way to achieving these aims.
What are your views on the current explosion of interest in technology in ELT? Do you think it will fundamentally change the nature of teaching and learning?

Inevitably it will change things. Educational administrators have a glint in their eye when they realise that they can, through online learning, teach more students, employ fewer teachers, have complete control over every phase of the registration, learning and assessment processes, etc. This may not be entirely good news for teachers and students. On the other hand, more learners will be able to pursue their studies at home, in their own time, at their own pace and teachers can access automatically every step of every learner’s progress – all positive aspects.

Which ELT book has had the most influence on you?

Michael Swan’s *Practical English Usage* (Oxford University Press) – still a classic after so many years. I just hope my own *English Grammar Today* (Cambridge University Press) lives up to the inspiration Mike’s book has given me over the decades.

Which of your own ELT books is closest to your heart and why?

*Academic Vocabulary in Use* (Cambridge University Press). Because I was an academic myself, I felt I could really get to grips with what students needed, and we had an excellent corpus provided by CUP so we could see exactly what words and phrases were used in academic discourse in both speech and writing and how the items were used.

What advice would you give to a new teacher starting out?

Listen to the old hands! I had some wonderful older colleagues in my first jobs who had seen it all and who gave me great advice on classroom skills and on the language itself. Don’t think you know better than them just because you have an MA or technical knowledge which they don’t possess.

What was your first ELT job like and what did you learn from it?

Aha! It was in [a well-known chain language school] in Spain – it was absolutely rigid with a textbook from which you weren’t allowed to depart by one word. I soon learnt that this made students lose the will to live! What mattered, I soon learnt, was to address them personally and to motivate them through engaging with their worlds.

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Reviews

Literacy For ELT:
Improve Your Grammar/Spelling/Writing/Study Skills

Susan Baing

Oxford University Press, 2011

Reviewed by Ian Synnott

Literacy for ELT is a language skills series designed for learners in Australia and New Zealand. The series comprises four publications aimed to provide practice in the basic skills of grammar, spelling, writing and study. Each of the small workbooks contains up to 80 pages of exercises which teachers can use in class or as homework activities, and opens with short segments entitled ‘To the student’ and ‘To the teacher’ which explain the content of the units and how the exercises can be used.

Improve your Grammar Skills contains 27 units covering individual grammar points including parts of speech, tense and time, sentence structure and question forms. Grammar is generally presented with minimal metalanguage so that the explanations are accessible to all. For example, pronouns are ‘to show who owns something’ and a sentence is ‘a group of words that makes sense on its own’. Clauses ‘must have a subject and a verb’ and ‘helping verbs’ are contrasted with main verbs. However, this simplicity can also be disadvantageous as some of the practice activities involve no thinking on the part of the learner, and therefore are of less value to the learning process. One such gap-fill exercise for pronouns simply instructs the learner to complete sentences by writing ‘you’ in the gap, without needing to demonstrate any understanding of grammar. Grammar
explanations are also sometimes misleading and suffer from a lack of functional focus. For instance, the present perfect tense is never actually named and the explanation of form instructs learners to ‘put have or has and the past tense verb’. The function is explained simply as the action being finished, with the rather ambiguous example sentence ‘She has started the weeding’. In this quest for simplicity, questions forms are similarly touched upon but not thoroughly explained. One unit states that ‘some questions can begin with a verb’ without actually clarifying the difference between open and closed questions. Similarly, another unit explains that ‘sometimes a statement is followed by a tag’ but the function of these tags is not investigated.

*Improve your Spelling Skills* is made up of 33 units in two sections: ‘Spelling help’, which includes details of common spelling rules, and ‘Word groups’, which aims to help students to learn and spell new words. The useful ‘To the student’ section encourages learners to use new vocabulary often in order to assist acquisition. Spelling rules that are well presented include the confusing double consonant following a short vowel sound, and three rules for ‘ie’ or ‘ei’. A useful practice exercise to aid retention is where learners have to find appropriate letters for spelling by breaking the code in a puzzle. Another valuable unit highlights word pairs that commonly get mixed up such as *effect/affect* and *quite/quiet*. It must be noted that for the majority of spelling patterns presented, no rules are actually offered. Indeed, the second half of the book contains 16 units devoted to building vocabulary rather than explicitly improving spelling skills.

*Improve your Writing Skills* includes 31 units covering what students need to know to do different kinds of writing. An impressive variety of writing genres are introduced, including recounts, narratives, information reports, various letter types, processes and opinion essays, along with their structure and common features. Cultural awareness is promoted with units covering writing topics such as Anzac Day, ‘the history of my country’, and traditional stories. The diversity of tasks included provides excellent opportunities for vocabulary development. In addition, many of the tasks covered are applicable to test preparation courses such as Cambridge and IELTS. Writing tasks include writing about an ordinary day, a diary plan, a journal and a biography, and each task includes a helpful vocabulary bank of ‘useful words’. Grammar explanations are minimal but some of the instructions are somewhat ambiguous and misleading. For example, in the journal task, learners are instructed to ‘use the future tense to talk about things that have not happened yet’ with an example provided using ‘will’ – there is no differentiation of the functional aspects of various future forms. For an autobiography, the instructions are to ‘write in the past tense because everything
you write has already happened’. This overly simplistic approach could limit tense choice and usage, and ultimately lead to bad writing habits. It is unfortunate that grammar and metalanguage are once more excessively minimised – for instance, there is no mention of the use of passive voice for process writing. The book concludes with a page devoted to a ‘Writer’s word list’ containing 128 words ranging from ‘able’ to ‘zoo’ – it appears something of a random afterthought with no clear purpose.

*Improve your Study Skills* begins favourably by emphasising the importance of continual practice in the ‘To the student’ and ‘To the teacher’ sections. The book has 21 units covering four sections: Dictionary skills, Reading skills, Writing skills, and Examination skills. The first three units cover efficient and effective dictionary usage; a useful skill that many learners never actually master. Reasons for reading are then well presented with students encouraged to consider both why and how they are approaching a text when reading. Readers are encouraged to consider groups of words together rather than individual words. One interesting exercise is for partners to watch the movement of an individual’s eyeballs to determine how they read. Useful reading subskills including skimming and scanning, predicting, ambiguity tolerance, determining cause and effect, and finding facts and opinions. Note-taking and summarising are other valuable academic reading skills presented. Six units of the book are dedicated to developing writing skills including planning, brainstorming, checking first drafts and appropriate paragraphing. It could be suggested that these areas be included in the previous *Improve Your Writing Skills* publication. The final two units provide invaluable advice for preparing for examinations and how to behave during a test.

The four publications in the *Literacy for ELT* series set out with the objective of developing skills in four key areas. On the whole it is debatable whether this is effectively achieved, as some of the ideas and exercises are overly simplistic or notably ambiguous. However, while *Literacy in ELT* would probably not form a central part of a program, these publications could be a useful addition to the resource shelf in a teachers’ room or as supplementary self-study materials for individual students.

*Ian Synnott* has taught various teacher training, exam preparation, ESP and general English courses in Australia, Japan, Korea and Ireland. He is currently head of teacher training programs at Greenwich College, Sydney.
At all levels of language learning, the ability to remember words and grammar is an integral part of the process. However, how to remember new language is often put on the backburner. Teachers may not spend much time ensuring students can recall target language already covered and students often are not equipped with the skills or knowledge to effectively use memory in their self-study. *Memory Activities for Language Learners* brings these issues to the forefront. Full of interesting theory from differing disciplines of research, Bilbrough explains why language learning in the classroom moved away from memory-based activities, and argues passionately yet rationally for why it needs to shift back. Part of the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series, edited by Scott Thornbury, its 218 pages of theory, explanations and activities are accompanied by a CD-ROM with PDF files of all activity resources.

*Memory Activities for Language Learners* is simply set out, with an introduction, activities, references for further reading and a list of websites. The introduction provides a basic background as well as the premise behind the book, but the core of the book is the classroom exercises. These are divided into seven sections based on their role in memory function. ‘Mental Stretching’ comes first, with exercises designed to generally warm up and focus the memory. ‘Making Language Memorable’ helps ensure students remember the target language the first time they see it. ‘Retrieving’ is about challenging learners to re-use what they have already learnt, both receptively and productively. The tasks in ‘Repeating and Reactivating’ challenge them to recall input after listening and reading. ‘Memory Techniques and Mnemonics’ are simple strategies and methods to help students remember language, for example: learning the pronunciation of a new word by
associating it with a known word that rhymes. In ‘Learning By Heart’, Bilbrough emphasises the importance of memorising ‘chunks’ of language, and puts forward some simple texts to try, along with techniques to help students memorise them. The book finishes with ‘Memory Games’, which are great for creating start-of-class or end-of-week energy while recycling language in meaningful ways.

Each section begins with a brief explanation of how the specific memory function works. These explanations really form the backbone of the book, enlightening teacher and allowing them to clearly focus on the objectives of the task. And this is the real value of this book. Once you appreciate the role of memory in the language classroom, it inspires you to focus on memory more and more, and the book is explained and organised in such a way that you can easily bring this focus into your lessons. Each activity is an accompanied by short and simple instructions, some basic materials and some suggestions for variation. There are also suggestions for different student levels and different areas of language. Although at times the theory may be a bit heavy for some, the activities themselves are quite straightforward. I found my intermediate students were engaged and challenged, and the memory focus has helped me to better recognise and test their progress.

Memory Activities for Language Learners aims to be a resource for teachers to draw upon to help students remember the language they are exposed to, and at this basic level, the book certainly succeeds. There is a great range of activities here that can engage students and really focus them on remembering and recalling language, but they are probably most useful at beginner to intermediate level, when students are acquiring large amounts of new language – teachers may find that not all activities are easily adapted to the challenge of classes at more advanced levels. Also, to be honest, a lot of the activities are already well-known and used, although perhaps under different names; for example, ‘Hot Seat’ I know as ‘Backs to the Board’, and ‘Pelmanism’ is the card game ‘Memory’ that I played as a child. Another thing I found slightly frustrating was the talk of a need of 'acquiring a critical mass of lexis and phraseology' as an argument for the importance of the book, but no details were given of what this critical mass was or how to teach it. Also, the function and role of memory is covered well but not extensively – there just isn't time or space for it. However, the reading references and websites given at the end of the book do offer a wealth of information for further exploration.

Overall, despite some limitations in scope and level, Bilbrough does succeed in arguing his case for refocusing on memory in the language classroom, and Memory Activities for Language Learners succeeds in being a valuable resource.
of activities that any teacher can use to focus on and develop memory. Definitely worth a read and a useful resource to draw upon.

James Chalmers is an English Language Teacher at the Institute of Continuing and TESOL Education (ICTE) at The University of Queensland, Brisbane.

Upper Intermediate Academic English with IELTS Practice Online

Macmillan Practice Online

Macmillan, 2011

Reviewed by Simon Burrell

Upper Intermediate Academic English with IELTS Practice Online (which I shall call Upper Intermediate EAP Online for short) is another of the Internet-based publications within the Macmillan Practice Online platform, which consists of over 80 courses covering General English, Business English, English for Academic Purposes and exam preparation. Upper Intermediate EAP Online is aimed at adult learners of Academic English and intended to correspond to level B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference, that is, learners at FCE level or whose English would be assessed at somewhere between IELTS 5.5 to 6.5, according to the equivalency tables published by Cambridge ESOL and IELTS. While the course includes some IELTS practice activities, these give the appearance of having been something of an afterthought – it focuses predominantly on teaching and practise the language functions and skills usually associated with EAP courses, and in fact describes itself as ‘an Upper Intermediate [EAP] course’.
Just as with other parts of their online platform, access is purchased directly from Macmillan via their website and gives unlimited use for 12 months from date of purchase. The price includes access to an extensive set of Grammar Reference activities and the *Macmillan English Dictionary Online* (both British and American English editions), which are easily accessible from the Home Page of *Upper Intermediate EAP Online*. The Home Page also takes the user to the course itself, which is divided into 12 units. The first two introductory units lay the groundwork for much of what is to come later. Unit 1 consists of two web projects, in which users are guided to various relevant websites to begin learning about university life in the English-speaking world and to acquire language to describe people and places on campus. Unit 2 introduces key reading, listening and comprehension skills. The remaining 10 units contain a variety of resources and activities which are not grouped together in such a way that each unit follows a similar pattern, but which instead provide for well-thought out cycles of teaching and learning. Within these units, there are many reading, listening, writing, grammar and vocabulary activities, as well as further web projects, requiring an integrated set of EAP skills to be practised and developed.

In the case of all of the practice activities except those related to writing and the web projects, users enter their answers into the on-screen spaces or select from drop-down menus and then click on ‘Submit’ to receive their marks. They can then click on ‘Answers’ to discover them. All scores are automatically transferred into a markbook, which can be accessed at any time via the Home Page, enabling learners to monitor their progress. Comprehensive instructions on how to use the program are contained in the Help section, which is written in user-friendly language which learners in the target ability range ought to have little difficulty understanding.

As an EAP course tailored specifically to upper-intermediate learners, *Upper Intermediate EAP Online* has much to recommend it. Its wide range of useful, well-designed activities should help the learner get to grips with some of the key EAP skills which often seem the hardest to learn, including effective listening in lectures, becoming an intelligent reader, good essay writing and appropriate use of language when participating in discussions. For example, there are reading and listening activities which focus on gleaning the main idea or summarising or categorising, rather than getting lost in the detail; a set of highly effective reading activities designed to help learners identify writers’ purpose, positioning, opinion and attitude; and a large number of well-chosen models of writing, with feedback, commentaries and notes to provide useful guidance on particular aspects of good essay writing style. The text types selected are all appropriate for the level and the EAP context, as are the grammar points, which include relative and participle clauses, position of adverbs and correct punctuation. The vocabulary and lexico-grammar activities are all appropriately contextualised. I particularly liked the...
well-constructed web projects, which provide an excellent opportunity to practise and extend the core skills which the course seeks to teach. Apart from the course itself, the access to the additional 469 Grammar Reference activities is a great benefit, covering a wide range of grammar points in a helpful manner, with both commentary and practice activities. The online dictionary is another extremely useful learning support, as is the users’ ability to construct their own wordlists.

My only reservations concern the IELTS practice activities, grouped together in sections at the end of units 3, 6, 9 and 12. Unlike the EAP content, these practice activities are not supported by the same degree of teaching input and, as regards the reading and writing activities, contain some material that is relatively poorly designed and some (too much, in my opinion) which is just not authentic as IELTS practice material. For example, in Unit 3, the third part of the reading activity does not contain an actual question, but simply asks the learner to click on the correct answers – clearly there is some text missing. In Units 6 and 9 there are multiple-choice questions with far too many choices for an authentic IELTS exercise. Finally, the Task 1 Writing activity uses the old ‘Write a report . . . ’ rubric rather than the current ‘Summarise the information . . . ’ version; the feedback is provided according to what seems like the criteria for Writing marking for Cambridge tests, not the correct IELTS Writing marking criteria; and I find it highly unlikely that the writing sample would have scored as high as a 6 in a real IELTS test, contrary to what is stated in the commentary.

An additional criticism relates to the functionality of Upper Intermediate EAP Online. In the sections containing writing samples, it is impossible to move from one activity to the other without reloading the particular unit’s ‘Resources’ page where the samples are listed. Also, in the listening activity about Gandhi in Unit 2, there is a glitch with question 10. The program deducts a mark for the correct answer, while at the same time both ticking it correct and stating that a wrong answer is the correct one. This sort of problem really should have been ironed out at the beta-testing stage.

Upper Intermediate EAP Online, therefore, should prove extremely valuable in ‘enhancing classroom teaching’ of EAP for its target learners, as the Macmillan Practice Online website suggests. However, the bolted-on IELTS practice activities fall somewhat short of the high standards set by the remainder of this online product and should be re-visited by the publisher.

Macmillan Practice Online is being relaunched in autumn 2012 with an all-new look and updated products.

Simon Burrell is an Academic English Teacher and exam trainer. He works in both the UK and Australia.
For researchers, academics, theorists, and anyone genuinely interested in approaches and methods in language teaching and learning, *Translation in Language Teaching (TILT)* offers a collection of arguments reflecting some commonly-held beliefs about why translation isn’t a successful language learning activity, plus some stimulating contradictions to these beliefs. And in this age of increased travel, mobility and intercultural, social connectivism, with the frequent use of second languages to forge business, social and other ties between peoples, Cook’s call for understanding in language learning ‘to be accurate and as explicit as possible’ (p. xii) is well-timed.

In *TILT*, Cook presents us with a 21st century opportunity to (re)consider the issue of translation as a language teaching activity. While some of us actually did spend time in language classrooms translating texts, there is possibly a larger number of language teachers who have never had translation presented as an appropriate classroom task – and who may even have learned that it was ‘wrong’ in the second language classroom. As Cook describes in Chapter 1, translation was essentially outlawed by the newer approaches to teaching language around the early stages of the 20th century. In Cook’s view, the Direct Method (as he calls all approaches that exclude any use of the students’ L1), and its four pillars of monolingualism, naturalism, native-speakerism and absolutism, has directed the currents in language teaching ever since.

Cook’s arguments for reconsidering translation appear in Chapter 2. This absorbing chapter outlines major trends in language teaching but, most importantly,
highlights the complete absence of academic research into the effects of translation on language learning. If indeed anything was explored, Cook mentions, it was the Grammar-Translation approach rather than the activity of translation itself. In Chapter 3, he explores a new mood in language teaching that is more accepting of the bilingualisation of classrooms, examining current political and academic issues such as globalisation, multilingualism and more. The final section of this chapter advocates for translation and not just for own-language use in the second language classroom.

Chapter 4 was at first a little puzzling. The title of this chapter is ‘What is translation?’ – a topic that at first glance I felt he should have explored right at the start. However, the first three chapters really illustrate the disregard for translation together with the more current empathy for a variety of classroom approaches that see teachers being more open-minded as to the use of learners’ L1s. This provides the necessary background to tackle this complex question. Indeed, the difficulties of defining translation make for a long chapter. Cook demonstrates how searching for equivalence of meaning between two languages becomes an almost impossible end when meaning comes from so many differing sources – cultural, pragmatic or discourse perspectives to name but a few. In saying this, he initially appears to blow his argument for using translation out of the water, but on the contrary, he goes on to make the case that the real learning is not in the end but in the journey of translating and dealing with all the difficulties along the way. He goes on to suggest that this ‘should make it a key and high profile constituent of language learning’ (p. 79).

Finally, in Chapters 5-7, Cook lays out his arguments for a reinvigoration of inquiry into translation. He discusses evidence-based, educational and pedagogic arguments for the use of translation in language learning. Overall, these chapters present a considered set of points for why he believes translation should become a focus of further academic research.

Although it was clear that Cook did not set out to write a practical methodology of classroom exploitation of translation, while I was reading I kept wondering how all of this was going to be of any practical use to me in my classes. However, his final chapter of pedagogic arguments for translation does include some practical ideas for classroom use. These are described as ‘types’ of activities, for example, type 1 is ‘corrected close translation’, in which students have to try and translate as closely as possible to the original sentence rather than paraphrasing; and type 4 is discussion of translation problems. Some of these types are easier to visualise than others and for the most part do not feature the kind of activities that can be lifted and taken into class. I had hoped that the final two activity types: ‘TILT in
mixed-language classes’ and ‘TILT for teachers who do not speak their students’ language(s)’ were just the thing if I were going to do a little action research in my particular multilingual teaching context. But, alas, the activities did not break a whole lot of new ground for me. For example, one of the four suggestions for translation in mixed-language classes was to encourage learners to make use of bilingual resources such as bilingual dictionaries. For me, and I imagine many teachers working in multilingual classroom contexts, this is already a fait accompli. What I found perhaps more interesting than the activities, were two reflections on my own teaching practice. Firstly, I am indeed using some translation-based approaches with what I do in my classes. And secondly – as Cook suggests, and as my learners’ behavior has been (or should have been) telling me – learners have never stopped using it.

Cook’s conclusion maintains moderation, calling for practice that represents more a ‘symbiosis in which students can benefit from varying and complementary strategies’ (p. 156) rather than the extreme adoption or dogmatism of any one approach. Translation in Language Teaching may indeed be the valuable kickstart to the research process behind this practice.

Kristin A. Walters is a teacher trainer at the Australian TESOL Training Centre, Navitas English, Brisbane.
The extensive reading movement is gaining momentum and credibility with the First Extensive Reading World Congress conference having been held recently in Japan. And well it should – numerous studies have shown that students participating in extensive reading improve in many areas, including vocabulary, comprehension and reading speed. I think that the most notable gain is that students often develop a very positive attitude to reading and become motivated to read more. Teachers looking for ways to improve their students’ vocabulary and stimulate an interest in reading owe it to themselves to get informed about extensive reading, and Bringing Extensive reading into the Classroom (BERC) is a great introduction and hands-on guide.

BERC belongs to OUP’s Into the Classroom series of short guides for teachers on what is new in the teaching world and how to apply it in the classroom. Written by 10 expert researchers, teachers and authors, it is easy to read and clearly set out, with lots of practical guidelines, activities, advice and suggestions. It doesn’t have to be read in sequence, though it is recommended that teachers who are new to extensive reading (ER) read the first chapters on the theory of ER, Day and Bamford’s 10 principles of ER and the advantages of ER, as understanding these guiding principles and theoretical underpinnings will make for more effective use of the rest of the book.
The book is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on the theory of ER, and answers the question: what is ER and how do you use graded readers in an ER program? It points out the benefits of ER and also compares it to other approaches. The second section covers the practice of ER – how to use graded readers, libraries and reading circles in ER. The third section consists of four case studies examining ER programs in high schools and universities in Jordan, Bahrain and Japan. It also deals with problems and assessment in ER programs, and introduces the Moodle Reader, a new program where students can take quizzes on the books they have read and record their progress. The book concludes with a glossary and a list of useful websites for each chapter.

BERC is easy to follow, and the theory of ER is well explained. Key terms are in bold and defined in a glossary at the back of the book. There are lots of ‘Get It Right’ and ‘Try this’ pointers with practical explanations and suggestions, which I found very useful. Although primarily aimed at English Language teachers at high school level, it is also suitable (or easily adapted) for ESL teachers of tertiary age students. I particularly liked the idea of the Reading Circle which I’m going to trial with a high intermediate General English class at a university language centre. Additionally, two of the case studies in the third section focus on ER programs in a university. However, primary school teachers will not find the case studies relevant to their classrooms.

It is hard to find fault with such a well-written book, but I thought it puzzling that there was no recent research listed – the most recent study was in 2008. I was also hoping to find some information on assessing and evaluating reading programs and this seems to be sorely lacking. And a minor irritation was that it did not include graded readers from publishers other than OUP, which seemed like a deliberate marketing ploy. However, these small points aside, this book is an invaluable resource for English Language teachers who want to know more about extensive reading and how to implement it in the classroom.

Sylvia Cher is a teacher at Deakin University English Language Institute, Victoria. Her report on developing extensive reading skills at beginner level, conducted as part of the English Australia/Cambridge ESOL Action Research in ELICOS program, was recently published in *Cambridge ESOL Research Notes*. 
The school where I work devotes one hour a week to specialised pronunciation lessons. Very often we hand out printed versions of the phonemic chart and try to familiarise our students with the symbols and the sounds they represent. During one of these sessions I was attempting to bring the phonemic chart to life with a variety of games and activities. Midway through the lesson a student turned to me, waving the chart, and asked, ‘Why do I need this? I have Google!’

I couldn’t help but think he had a point. Why should he study symbols when Google can tell him how to pronounce every word? That evening I thought of a few replies, like the need for students to isolate difficult sounds, and the unreliability of Google as an English teacher, but at the time I just mumbled something about the chart being ‘very important’. However, I am sure Adrian Underhill would have had a wonderful reply.

Underhill is, of course, author of the phonology bible, Sound Foundations (first published in 1994) and the creator of the version of the phonemic chart that most teachers recognise, which has been circulating since 1982. In Underhill’s chart, the phonemes are carefully arranged to represent the physicality of the sounds, according to the shape of the mouth as it produces them. For instance monophthongs (single vowel sounds) are grouped on three different lines with each line representing the degree to which the mouth is open when making them, so /i:/ is at the top (more closed) and /æ/ is at the bottom (more open). Each row of this arrangement represents the position of the lips, the sounds on the left being those where the lips are furthest back, and the sounds on the right are where the lips are furthest forward, so /i:/ sits furthest left and /u:/ furthest right.

The Sounds app is based around Underhill’s phonemic chart, making it very useful for both teachers and students attempting to get to grips with the phonological symbols. Users can touch one of the symbols to hear the sound it represents, and hold their finger down to hear a word that contains the sound. They also have the option of American or British English, although unfortunately the unique
variants of Australian pronunciation are nowhere to be found. Another feature is a list of common English words in alphabetical order written both normally and in phonemic script, again with the option to touch the word to hear it pronounced. A recording feature allows users to record themselves saying the word and then play it back to compare their attempt with that of the recording (NB: first time users may think the feature is faulty but in fact there is a four-second delay after you hit the record symbol).

The practice section provides every opportunity to master the phonemic chart. The READ, WRITE and LISTEN activities are basic but challenging and very useful: READ shows a word in phonemic script and users are required to spell it normally; WRITE provides written words for users to transcribe phonologically; and LISTEN requires users to hear a word then transcribe it. In each case, users can choose to isolate and practise one particular sound, or all of them together. For ESL/EFL students, trainee teachers, and practicing teachers who simply want to get to know the chart better, this is a great opportunity to isolate individual English sounds and see how they group together to form words. I found in doing these exercises I really had to say the sounds out loud; it was more than just a mental exercise. They really force the user to identify the sounds accurately.

If practice is not enough fun, things are made more interesting with the QUIZ feature. The exercises are the same as for (READ, WRITE and LISTEN) but without the option of choosing one sound to focus on, plus an added element of suspense: users can pick either ‘three lives’, which allows three errors before ending the game, or ‘3 minutes’, in which they race the clock to beat their personal best.

Another useful feature is TYPE. As many teachers are aware, phonemic symbols are not readily available on word processors, and typing them usually involves sourcing them on the Internet and copying and pasting them into the document. TYPE is a handy tool that allows you to type using phonemic script; the symbols can then be pasted into any compatible program available to your phone. Yes, this includes SMS. Impress your fellow teachers by sending them texts in phonemic script and watch with glee as they attempt to decipher the /hidǝn mesiʤ/!

Finally the MORE section provides links to pronunciation resources and Macmillan publications. For teachers there are tips for using the app and the chart in class, including a link to Underhill’s blog. For students there are tips to help improve their pronunciation. For me, one of the most impressive extras here is a one-hour workshop on teaching the phonemic chart by Underhill himself, modestly tucked away under MORE ABOUT PHONETICS>FOR TEACHERS>VIDEO. As he explains at the beginning, his goal is to take pronunciation out of the head and into the
mouth, and the result is a fascinating guided tour of your own mouth and the way the muscles work to produce speech. His teaching approach focuses on visualising the sounds through mime and becoming aware of the muscles that produce the different sounds. Rather than the standard listen and repeat formula, Underhill's audience are conducted like a choir to produce sounds themselves, using his gestures to guide their mouths. As they travel from /i:/ (as in feel) to /u:/ (fool) they discover /ɪ/ (ill) and /ʊ/ (full) along the way, with Underhill's hand movements turning the long sounds into short ones. The audience is paused at each sound to note the position of their mouth, the shape of their lips, the position of their tongue. Teachers intending to use this app would be well advised watch this tutorial carefully to see how the chart can really be brought to life both for teachers and students.

The Sounds app is a marvellous self-study application that allows both teachers and students to really master the phonemic chart in ways that are far less tedious than reading or repeating audio tracks. Exploring this app develops an intimate awareness of English sounds and allows users to identify, isolate and practise those that need the most work. But what Underhill himself shows us is that there is no substitute for good teaching, only supplements.

*Version 2 of Sounds is available now with additional features and downloadable lesson plans.*

**Nicholas de Wilde** is a General English teacher at Greenwich College, Sydney.
The back of this resource book poses this question: ‘Do you need to supplement an EAP course with fun, interactive activities that address the serious aspirations of academically focused students?’ Well, yes. And I’m sure many other EAP teachers feel the same. Although I have come across several excellent resources on EAP theory, there seems to be a lack of teacher resource books with practical activities that specifically target the unique set of skills required by EAP students. *Communicative Activities for EAP* may have filled this gap.

This title, a new addition to the Cambridge Handbook for Language Teachers series, is indeed a comprehensive and ambitious resource book. Within its 318 pages, there are 124 activities, an informative introduction and an appendix which includes a list of recommended reading material for teachers, as well as a compilation of over 30 online resources useful for EAP students. The activities are aimed at intermediate level and above, and a difficulty level is also given in each activity.

The book is divided into six chapters, addressing the four macro skills, plus sections on vocabulary development and grammar. Each activity includes an overview, step-by-step instructions and a suggested follow-up activity. Most activities include a model text and useful support material, which can be printed from the CD-ROM. Although some of the instructions are quite dense and time-consuming to read, it’s great that detailed answers or suggested responses to the tasks are included, as well as student models and scaffolding help. This information helps to clarify the instructions and possible outcomes of the activities and certainly saves the teacher time in terms of preparation.
The range of sub-skills and language targeted in the activities is impressive. Guse not only focuses on the broader outcomes of what students will have to do at university but has broken this into the micro skills which underpin these outcomes. For example, the writing chapter focuses on skills as diverse as spelling and punctuation, cohesion, planning and organising, writing in an objective style, and paraphrasing. The grammar and vocabulary chapter offers engaging and interactive practice in areas often neglected by EAP books but sorely needed by students, such as noun phrases, complex sentences and softening a stance using hedging. Guse has even revamped some old favourites for EAP, including dictogloss, running dictation and ‘grammar auction’. This latter includes a bank of academic sentences ready to go, for use as a warmer.

A unique feature of this book is its promotion of authentic materials and its inclusion of topical themes from different content areas. Guse has managed to incorporate a wide range of authentic or adapted academic texts with topics ranging from architecture to social media. It is true that some of the lowest-rated activities contain texts which could still prove difficult for some intermediate students. It must be emphasised, however, that the activities are written so that the teachers can choose their own texts and content area in order to make the material more meaningful for their particular students, and many activities refer the teacher to websites where appropriate texts might be found.

Student-written texts are also approached with authenticity. Many of the writing activities call for analysis of student models, often in comparison with a model text. This may involve a ‘writing workshop’ approach in which students edit or peer-edit their work based on their newly gained awareness of the target language point or skill. I have found this personalised approach to be very popular and useful with my own EAP students, and the many excellent ideas in this chapter can easily be adapted to or integrated into any writing syllabus with minimal preparation.

An additional strength of the activities in this book is their fostering of independent learning, a principle mentioned by Guse in her introduction. Many activities incorporate students’ self-evaluation and reflection on their own skills and progress. The follow-up activities encourage them to build upon their learning, and important strategies and tools are introduced, including online dictionaries and corpora, individualised error logs and a variety of note-taking grids.

Initially, some teachers may find this book somewhat difficult to navigate. The table of contents cannot be simply skimmed to find an activity, as only the macro skill and activity titles are listed. This difficulty could be solved by simply adding the sub-skill. Another possible source of confusion from the Table of Contents...
are the names used to organise the framework, based on Freebody and Luke's Four Resources Model of literacy skills. For example, Speaking is divided into 'code user', 'text maker', 'text user' and 'text agent'. It is recommended that teachers read the introduction to help them understand the framework. The index, however, is very useful.

Another possible challenge for newer EAP teachers using this book is its extensive use of meta language. Terms such as 'back-channelling', 'pre and post modification', and 'anaphoric and cataphoric references' could prove daunting, even though they are explained well. In addition, the introduction claims that these activities can be used by relief teachers. While this could be true of some of the activities and of some relief teachers, some of the instructions and texts are rather dense, as noted earlier. A relief teacher may prefer an activity that does not require so much mental preparation.

Overall, Communication Activities for EAP is an excellent collection of activities. Are they really fun? Well, perhaps as 'fun' as can be expected, given the serious focus; they are certainly motivating, student-centred and focused on the relevant skills for future tertiary education students. This book would be an inspirational addition to any staffroom with EAP teachers.

Meredith MacAulay teaches EAP at the University of New South Wales Institute of Languages.
Not long ago, Jim Scrivener spoke at a conference lamenting the disappearance of the situational grammar presentation. I was in total agreement; it should play a foundational role for language teachers, less experienced ones at least. Alas, the text-based presentation is almost the sole method exploited in many of the great coursebooks of recent years. So when I heard he was bringing out a ‘how to’ book, replete with ideas for establishing meaning, concept-checking questions, and tricks and traps for newer teachers I was very excited. I’ve seen many trainees and newly qualified teachers (and quite a few experienced ones) struggle with effective grammar presentations and always wanted that ‘panacea book’ to send them to. As a fan of Scrivener’s Learning Teaching (see my review elsewhere in this issue) I was sure this would be good. Sadly, despite many good elements, Teaching English Grammar doesn’t quite hit the mark.

The introduction gives a brief background to the main techniques of the situational presentation, such as setting context, eliciting and asking concept checking questions. Whilst adequate, for teachers to really use and exploit this teaching method they usually want and need much more insight into the ideas and beliefs that underlie the individual techniques than the seven pages given. This is especially true if the author is trying to revive an out-of-favour, ‘old-school’ method. Indeed, the section on how to use finger movement to show contractions is longer than the two on setting a context and eliciting put together.

The rest of the book, like most grammar books, is divided into units, each focusing on an individual grammar point, such as subject/object pronouns, past perfect and
modal verbs. Each unit starts with the form, gives a suggestion for a situational presentation, suggests a few practice tasks and some concept checking questions, then gives some detail about the meaning and use, lists some common problems students have, and ends with a few teaching tips. Some of the units also address pronunciation issues relevant to the particular grammar point. Aside from the odd order of these elements, this all sounds great. Let’s look more closely though.

The majority of the presentations involve the teacher using the target language they wish to teach almost immediately. This seems questionable use of the Situational Approach. As Scrivener himself states clearly in his excellent Learning Teaching, meaning should come first, before the learners meet the target structure: ‘the students understand the concept . . . hopefully, feel the need for [it], before the teacher introduces [it]’ (2011, p. 161). Yet he isn’t following this here. Often the presentation involves little more than showing a picture then modelling a single sentence before eliciting more from students. As one example, present simple negative is presented by showing a drawing of an unusual looking person and then saying some interesting things about him, such as ‘he usually wears purple trousers’, being sure to include ‘a number of negative examples’. But saying it doesn’t clarify it. It needs to be simply expressed with other words or via visuals, gestures, and the like.

It also seems contradictory that Scrivener advocates eliciting to find out ‘what [students] already know of the target language’ (p. 8) but in the actual presentations the teacher is first required to repeat the target language structure half a dozen times. When he does, in specific instances, suggest teachers elicit the target language rather than just using it a few times themselves, he doesn’t actually say how; for example, ‘use pictures to elicit sentences exemplifying the prepositions you wish to teach’. However, teachers using this book are likely to be looking for more guidance than this.

The practice tasks are fine, giving some good ideas for varied practice, although again, newer teachers would benefit from more detailed guidance on how to actually run and give feedback on them. A brief list of some possible mistakes students might make on each task and how to address them would also be valuable. The inclusion of suggestions for concept checking questions is a great idea and they are generally well done for the more complex grammar structures. However, the questions for some of the less complex structures and grammar points may be problematic. For example, with the present simple, Scrivener uses ‘Henri plays football’ as an example, then asks ‘What sport does Henri like?’ – a question that focuses on the story, rather than the grammatical concepts. With the present continuous example, ‘Jacob’s playing tennis’, Scrivener suggests
asking, ‘Is Jacob playing tennis now?’ – of course, the use of the identical target structure in the question begs students for a positive answer regardless of meaning. And several structures, such as imperatives, do not get any concept checking questions at all.

On a more positive note, the meaning and use sections are generally very good and are much more accessible than many other grammar resource books for teachers. Likewise, the ‘watch out for these problems . . . ’ and teaching tips sections are genuinely useful. It’s also excellent to see the inclusion of a pronunciation focus in a ‘how to’ on grammar teaching, but it’s a shame it’s only included in a few units rather than consistently across the board. Again, there is almost nothing in these sections on how or when to deliver this information to the students, which is definitely an area where novice teachers need help – and half the subtitle of the book.

In short, parts of Teaching English Grammar present information on grammar points very clearly for newer teachers, and if it were a grammar resource book alone I would happily direct those teachers to it. Unfortunately, the ‘how to’ elements don’t give enough guidance and sometimes don’t use methodology effectively. As new teachers aren’t able to easily see what they can use and what they should treat with caution, it would be problematic for me to recommend this to trainees. There is definitely a need for this book, but to my mind, certain elements require a thorough review first.

References


Ian Aird has taught English in Spain, France, Germany, England and Australia. He was a CELTA trainer for several years and currently is Director of Studies at the English Language Company in Sydney.
Interactive whiteboards (IWBs) have been around since 1991 but their use is still filtering down to the average language school, and real awareness of how to best use this technology for ELT is far from widespread. The overall aim of *400 Ideas for Interactive Whiteboards* is therefore to describe procedures for language and skills development activities, in which one or more stages use this technology. Note that this book does *not* aim to teach you how to use the technology itself, although at times you might wish for more clarification of exactly what software to use and how to use it to do trickier things. It will be of interest to any teachers who are curious about how one might use technology in the classroom, and teachers with different levels of experience can gain some ideas or be inspired to explore their own IWB in more depth.

The foreword is enthusiastic about the benefits, including ‘the heads-up participatory nature of IWBs’ (p. 6), but also rightly clarifies that the activities given are simply ‘springboards for the new forms of creativity’ (p. 6). The introduction is clear and succinct, with a brief explanation of what an IWB is, some general practicalities for the mixed readership of buyers and users (such as size), then a short list and brief explanation of some of the main features of IWBs, such as screen reveal and capture. It again considers benefits, but also mentions two main challenges: reliability (the authors recommend having contingency plans and allowing extra time for set-up), and the danger of teacher dominance.

The kind of software used in *400 Ideas* ranges from standard computer or Internet
software (Chapter 1) and whiteboard software packaged with a SMART Board or Promethean Activeboard (Chapter 2) to software accompanying published course books (Chapter 3). The final chapter (Chapter 4) deals with creating or adapting your own materials for IWBs. The sequence of the four chapters is logical, and the tasks in each are clearly labelled: Grammar, Vocabulary, Speaking, Writing, Listening, Reading, Learner Training, and Games or Projects (although some are mislabelled: for example, speaking task 8 [S8] is actually a listening task, albeit on the topic of oral presentations). Users can delve into them according to whim or necessity, skipping the introduction or earlier chapters and flipping back and forth between activities. The activities are for a range of levels, though a few are described as being more suitable for younger learners. Each is described in terms of level, interaction, aim, language focus, and technology needed, as well as steps before and during class; some also have suggestions for follow-up or variations.

Chapter 1 presents ideas for using an IWB to display and interact with standard software (that is, available on your computer or the Internet, or easily downloadable), such as search engines, media players, photo websites, and online encyclopaedias and dictionaries. Teachers can run through the software on the IWB using their finger or the IWB pen (admittedly a step up from using the mouse or keyboard for a data projector or laptop) or using a whiteboard with a visualiser/overhead projector. The tasks themselves are familiar, revolving round ordering, sorting, matching and so on, as well as typical skills, like describing, discussing, writing (although words or sentences only), listening and reading.

The second chapter lists activities using IWB-specific tools before or during class, to drag, cover, reveal, colour and the like for various typical task types, such as pelmanism, gap-fills and crosswords. Be aware that most activities described here are specific to SMART Board and Promethean users, with a few tips for other types, such as Mimeo, which uses a traditional whiteboard surface. Following on, the third chapter describes procedures using IWB software from publishers’ websites, DVD/CD-ROMs and learning platforms (mainly illustrated by New Inside Out Digital) to access written and spoken text, zoom in, toggle, highlight, and more. Again, the actual tasks are familiar: matching, ordering, predicting and so on. Finally, Chapter 4 suggests possibilities for creating and adapting your own materials using IWB technology. If you have not yet experimented much with your IWB – and even if you have – you will no doubt find some inspiration here.

Each chapter concludes with some brief ‘case studies’ documenting different experiences and reactions to IWBs, such as a first-time user discovering the benefits of a wireless keyboard and mouse, and how using e-notebooks saves paper and eliminates the problem of lost handouts. Other case studies (which
made me wonder about bias) include one on the set-up costs, training and back-up required for someone using an alternative type of IWB; and comments from happy users of SMART Board, Promethean Activeboard, and the Macmillan English website and e-lessons.

It should be noted that the 400 procedures in this book focus mainly on language points or use of texts, rather than the technology itself, and the majority of procedures focus on grammar and vocabulary. The language points are usually decontextualised and at the word or sentence level, and the procedures are spelled out in perhaps unnecessary detail. Teachers would likely adapt these or create more relevant language tasks or texts for their own students.

I misunderstood the title of this book, assuming it was a cornucopia of ideas about using technology in the classroom; it is really 400 examples of language points or texts, addressed with the help of an IWB. Also, they are not necessarily ‘instant’ – preparation is required, and often, paper handouts. At times it seems the use of the technology has become the end in itself, so some procedures need extending to include clear rationales. However, any reader using IWBs would no doubt learn something from this book – I often found myself wondering, ‘Can my IWB can do that?’ Nonetheless, the issues of teacher dominance in the lesson, and how to activate students who are not at the board, remain. The best use of the book may indeed be as a springboard: use these activities (and your own) to explore what your IWB can do – but keep evaluating and reflecting on the rationale for its use.

Clare McGrath is a teacher trainer with the Australian TESOL Training Centre (Navitas), Sydney. She is involved in training and professional development for trainees and colleagues using various Web tools and devices, including IWBs.
Most language teachers will have had the experience of creating or adapting some kind of learning materials for their classes due to different constraints, such as mixed abilities, cultural differences, timetable concerns, syllabus demands, personal interest, and so on. The most common questions are: ‘what are appropriate materials?’ and ‘how can they be created and used effectively and efficiently in language teaching?’ This revised and updated edition of *Materials Development for Language Teaching (MDLT)* offers comprehensive answers to these questions.

Part of the Cambridge Language Teaching Library, *MDLT* contains 17 chapters grouped into five parts, and written by such well-known names as Brian Tomlinson, Rod Ellis, Andrew Littlejohn and many more. It will be of interest to teachers, teacher trainers, writers and researchers who wish to have deeper insights into approaches and techniques, and practical examples to illustrate them. Topics include how to set a framework for materials writing; how to create, analyse and evaluate course materials; the process of writing a traditional coursebook; and integrating corpus and ICT (Information and Communications Technology). Whereas some other books simply focus on what to do but not why, *MDLT* includes background on the theories involved and enables readers to raise their awareness of how and why materials are written from the differing perspectives of linguists, teachers and publishers.

The first two chapters in Part A, ‘Data collection and materials development’, focus on using corpora and concordances without a computer, and will challenge
experienced materials writers who have created materials without using a corpus. These chapters provide background theory and useful applications with a list of suggested corpora websites and tools. They also give helpful advice on the use of corpus when computers are unavailable in the classroom and how to use the same approach and techniques with different target learners (e.g., a lab report for science students versus business proposal for business students). A third chapter by Ronald Carter, Rebecca Hughes and Michael McCarthy focuses on the interaction between grammar, spoken language and materials development. In Part B, there are three chapters discussing the process of materials design, touching on such issues as the importance of evaluation, the commitment from different members of the production team, and the practical issues involved in the publishing process. Personally, I have found that materials writers may also encounter conflicts when faced with the real-life difficulties of coursebook production. From this perspective Bell and Gower’s chapter ‘Writing course materials for the world: a great compromise’ is particularly interesting.

The four chapters in Part C investigate the process of evaluation of materials including a general framework for analysing language teaching materials, macro- and micro-evaluations of task-based teaching, a look at what teachers want from coursebooks, and the evaluation process from a publisher’s perspective. The communication gap between the material producers and end users has been the source of many disappointed expectations, so it is good to see an emphasis in this section on theories relating to the teachers’ needs and wants.

Part D focuses on developing language learning materials with technology. A lot of highly adaptable ideas are suggested here for maximising the effectiveness of the learning process through new technology, including Wikipedia, blogs, virtual learning environments, interactive whiteboards, Second Life, interactive learning programmes, and so on. I found the suggested ideas and lists of websites very useful for customising my own materials.

Finally, the four chapters in Part E discuss some general ideas for materials development including the importance of helping second language learners visualise, the usefulness of understanding certain critical factors before adopting materials, the Lozanov method, and designing self-access materials. This might seem like a somewhat eclectic mix but it is well worth keeping an open mind as this section is an interesting overview of various issues and methodologies affecting the use of materials in class and for self-study.

Overall, I liked the depth of this book as it covers a wide range of relevant psychology, pedagogy, knowledge, technology and techniques, all carefully
woven into materials production issues including curricular, cultural, technical, administrative, communication and commercial factors. The reader is gradually led from academic to real-life concerns, and encouraged to understand, identify the needs and wants, communicate and compromise at different production stage in order to create the most appropriate materials to benefit every party.

Perhaps it would have been beneficial to integrate Part A into Part D to give a smoother flow into the theme of ICT. I also felt a lack of some discussion on how mobile technology and social networking programmes (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) can be used for learning. The implication for ELT professionals seems to be that ICT is a layer on top of the traditional paper-based approach to materials development. In fact, the majority of learners are computer literate and many use social networking programmes as second nature, and ELT has started moving from paper-based to computer-based territory (consider some language exams such as TOEFL, and the rise of e-coursebooks). It would be useful to see some more exploration of this new trend.

To sum up, I would strongly recommend this book to ELT professionals who want a realistic look at all aspects of materials development. It empowers teachers not to produce the best coursebook in the world but, rather, to produce the most appropriate materials for their context. After reading this book, they should be in a better position to create, choose and use the necessary materials based on their professional judgement and make use of realistic alternatives to adapt or modify materials to suit their target learners. As this holistic view echoes throughout the whole book, everyone can find some inspiration here to explore materials development in new ways.

**Alan Wong** is the Regional Programme Director of Goal Training Limited (Hong Kong) and has been involved in TESOL teacher training, ELT materials development and Education Management for the past decade.
The subtitle of this book is ‘the essential guide to English language teaching’. It couldn’t be more apt. I bought the first edition in the late 90s, and it was a good book then. Now, in its third edition, it’s a great book. It’s true that the new edition hasn’t made as huge a step forward as the second edition did from the first, but the latest additions are certainly very valuable. In case there are some readers who are not aware of the earlier editions, this review will start with a brief overview of what’s in this book before focusing on what’s new in this edition.

As suggested by the subtitle, Learning Teaching contains everything a pre-service or novice English language teacher needs to know, and plenty more to support continuing professional development. It covers everything from basic classroom management techniques and introducing new vocabulary or grammar, to correcting students’ mistakes and helping with pronunciation difficulties. There is a chapter on all the different kinds of specialist classes, like business or academic English, and a range of ideas for how to use resources (whiteboards, music, the Internet, and more) in lessons. In short, if you can think of it, chances are Scrivener has included it. This sounds like a lot, and it is. At over 400 pages Learning Teaching genuinely aims to give a teacher a solid grounding in the ideas and practice of English language teaching. Having said that, it isn’t heavy on theory; it’s very focused on concrete and immediately practicable ideas.

Reading this book, you’ll notice two features of the way information has been presented. Firstly, there’s a focus on the reader thinking about things first before
finding out the author’s ideas. Scrivener doesn’t make the reader go hunting in the rear of the book to find the answers to the tasks, though; they follow immediately after. The second feature is the total lack of dogmatism or prescription in the way the author presents the ideas. In teaching there are many conflicting ideas, opinions, methods and techniques as well as many that complement each other. This is probably how it should be – each student and each class are unique, and their learning will best be aided in a relatively unique way. Scrivener understands this, and leaves plenty of room for teachers’ and students’ individual needs, styles and talents to be explored and respected.

So what’s new in this edition? There are a few general updates to cover changes to exams offered to English language learners and so on. There is a little section on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) which clearly and concisely introduces a particularly unclear area in a brief four pages. But the big changes in this edition are the section on using technology and the DVD.

The section on technology is an introduction on how to effectively integrate new media opportunities into lessons and learning. It suggests ways to introduce these technologies step by step and is sensitive to less tech-savvy teachers and students. There is also an introduction to e-learning and blended learning.

The DVD features several brief clips of Scrivener and friends demonstrating various teaching techniques such as using gestures, eliciting and monitoring, plus a full lesson video. This is important, as for many learning teachers all the reading in the world doesn’t make things as clear as simply seeing it in action. And new and trainee teachers often get into a total muddle with so many new ideas to understand and absorb, especially when these ideas so often conflict with their previously acquired beliefs about learning and teaching. They confuse language concept-checking questions with reading questions, start focusing on grammar in the middle of a listening lesson and skip vital elements of lessons to prioritise tasks not relevant to their lesson’s aims. So seeing it all done by professionals in a DVD of lesson videos is invaluable. Personally, I found many of the short clips delivered in a way that felt somewhat wooden and condescending to the students, but the full lesson video is gold. It includes some listening skills, some grammar and some vocabulary, all delivered with such clarity and skill that a learning teacher could do little better for their development than watch it over and over and try to emulate it.

My main complaint regarding the DVD is that the observation tasks do little to guide noticing of the techniques and methodologies being modelled. They are generic, generally unchanged from the previous edition, and simply too vague. It
seems a real shame to underexploit such a valuable learning tool by not including appropriate observation tasks, preferably also with ‘answer’ guides to let the learning teacher know if they noticed or understood the important ideas shown by the lesson or not.

All things considered though, this book is essential reading for anyone new to English language teaching or about to do a teacher-training course such as CELTA. I would also say it could be valuable for any teacher who has non-native English speakers in their classrooms. It is, of course, a must for every English language teaching staffroom.

**Ian Aird** has taught English in Spain, France, Germany, England and Australia. He was a CELTA trainer for several years and currently is Director of Studies at the English Language Company in Sydney.

If you would like to write a review for the *English Australia Journal*, please contact the Reviews Editor, Sophia Khan: sophiakhan.eajournal@yahoo.com
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Guidelines for contributors

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The *English Australia Journal* is a peer-reviewed journal and each article will be reviewed anonymously by at least two readers.

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