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Guest Editor

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IAFOR Journal of Language Learning

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Edited by Dr Bernard Montoneri

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Guest Editor's Introduction

It is our great pleasure and honour to introduce our Winter 2017–2018 issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Language Learning*. This issue is a selection of papers submitted directly to our journal.

The first paper, entitled “Multilingualism in Action: A Conversation Analytic View on How Children are Re-Voicing a Story in a French Second Language Learning Lesson” examines the fine-grained detail of children’s second language learning practices in a multilingual classroom setting. A moment-by-moment video based analysis allows researchers to visualize how the children’s learning practices are interrelated with the sequential structure of multilingual talk-in-interaction. Moreover, the conversation analytic approach gives access to the fundamentally social nature of second language classroom talk.

The second paper, entitled “Written Corrective Feedback: Student Preferences and Teacher Feedback Practices” is authored by Bradley Irwin, an Assistant Professor at Nihon University College of International Relations. This detailed case study carefully examines the intricacies of how learning contexts affect both student preferences for written corrective feedback and teacher practices. Samples of actual teacher feedback were extensively analyzed to explore the methods and practice employed in a current academic writing course. The author concludes by offering practical ideas for improving written corrective feedback. This paper also highlights the need for careful consideration when teachers form feedback policies in their classrooms.

The third paper, entitled “The Importance of CoPs in Transforming New Learning Communities into Experienced Ones in EFL Classrooms” is authored by Akiko Nagao, a researcher working at Ryukoku University. It reports on a series of research studies that visualize the development of the concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. This study supports the supposition that understanding CoP can help teachers clarify learners’ behaviors in classroom communities, which, as a result, can lead to major developments in learning. The participants comprised 58 undergraduate students at various proficiency levels from 3 different classrooms. To examine the developmental changes in the students and their communities, the study conducted pre-, mid-, and post-quantitative analyses of 10 CoP elements, including the following three key components: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. The three elements did not show similar developmental patterns, whereas two CoP components (mutual engagement and shared repertoire) demonstrated similar patterns in one classroom where, toward the end of the semester, the students’ activities gradually increased from an initial moderate level of awareness. Among the three classrooms, only one CoP component (shared repertoire) showed a similar developmental pattern.

The fourth paper, entitled “Investigating the Effectiveness of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Using Google Documents in Enhancing Writing” is co-authored by Regina Maria Ambrose and Shanthini Palpanathan, English teachers teaching in a Chinese Independent High School in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of CALL via Google Documents in improving the quality of writing among a selected group of students in their school. It is also to ascertain students’ perceptions in using Google Documents to write and to identify if Google Documents is able to motivate students to write. Data was collected using a qualitative research method with pre and post questionnaires, writing samples as well as face-to-face interviews. The research revealed that

although the majority of the participating students favoured the use of computer technology in their writing, a balance of both Google Docs writing and classroom writing tasks would create variation and interest in their learning process and avoid boredom.

The fifth paper, entitled “How Effective is Interactive Learning? Investigating Japanese University Students’ Language Patterns in a Collaborative Writing Task” is written by Mitsuyo Sakamoto, an educator in English language and teacher training at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. She takes a sociocultural theoretical perspective in order to understand how Japanese college students come to language with others as a form of scaffolded, shared cognition. Specifically, this action research investigated for two months how students’ online written output affected each other’s writing. Each student was first tracked to see if his/her English language use reflected the output of others, then the linguistic developmental patterns were further investigated in a post-treatment interview. It was discovered that students lacking confidence in English learning are less likely to imitate and internalize from others. The study suggests that the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is closely related to affective domains that give rise to a particular identity formation which in turn impacts language learning.

The sixth paper entitled, “Exploring Challenges Encountering EFL Libyan Learners in Research Teaching and Writing” is authored by Safia Mujtaba and Noura Winis, researchers working as lecturers of English at the English Department of Sebha University, Sebha, Libya. The major challenges faced by Libyan students in research writing as well as Libyan teachers attitudes towards students’ work are investigated. The paper also discusses some pedagogical issues related to research and it presents the notion of research as well as comprehensive insight into the main obstacles encountered by Libyan students while conducting research. It was found that Libyan learners experienced great difficulties in writing research such as writing a literature review, selecting the sample of the study, lack of resources, lack of motivation and background knowledge for their research. The findings of this paper are very helpful and beneficial for teachers and students as it can help teachers develop their teaching methods and be more aware of difficulties that students experience in research. The paper also shares some implications and suggestions. It is suggested that more attention should be paid to investigating challenges of research writing and teaching in the Libyan context and priority should be given to the practice of research writing in the classroom. In addition, learners should be encouraged to do real empirical studies and more advanced research courses should be taught in Sebha University.

The seventh paper, entitled “Incorporating Intercultural Communication Activities in English Language Classes”, is written by Daniel Velasco. This article discusses the relevancy of Intercultural Communication in today’s classrooms, and how students may not even be aware of its importance to their education and future careers. Dr. Velasco exposes two groups of English language learners to Intercultural Communication activities. Results revealed that most of the students felt the exercises helped them to self-reflect and critically evaluate their current biases and beliefs, supporting the need for incorporating more Intercultural Communication exercises and activities in all English language classes.

The eighth paper, entitled “Cognitive Learning Strategy of BIPA Students in Learning Indonesian Language”, is jointly authored by Imam Suyitno, Gatut Susanto, Musthofa Kamal, and Ary Fawzi. The article discusses the cognitive learning strategy used by foreign students in learning the Indonesian language. The study outline in this article was conducted at BIPA Universitas Negeri Malang (State University of Malang), specifically at Critical

Language Scholarship (CLS) Program. The participants of the study were foreign students that have differences in cultural backgrounds and major field of their studies. Data was collected by observing and recording students' activities in the class and outside class when they were learning Indonesian language and interview. Based on the result of data analysis, the study found that in learning Indonesian language, BIPA students used the various cognitive learning strategies. The strategies stretch of mechanical level strategies up to strategies that need high-level thinking process. The selected strategies used by students in learning language depend on types of the learning tasks that students face. Besides that, self-factors of students and learning environment are also the factors influencing the students in selecting learning strategies they use. The findings are important for BIPA teachers and institutions for making policies in designing learning program, selecting learning materials, conducting learning process.

The ninth paper, entitled “Linguistic Error Analysis on Students’ Thesis Proposals”, is jointly authored by Mary Ann Pescante-Malimas and Sonrisa C. Samson, teaching at the Department of Communications, Linguistics and Literature at the University of San Carlos, Cebu, Philippines. The authors analyze the contents of the thesis proposals submitted by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students. This paper identifies the most prevalent linguistic errors namely: grammatical, syntactical, and mechanics.

The tenth paper, entitled “Bringing the Brain to Bear on Context and Policy in Primary Languages Practice in England” is written by Magdalen Phillips. It examines the current primary languages context in England through a literature review. Its problematisation of the essentially sociocultural PL learning environment recognises the interconnectedness of multiple contributory factors; amongst these are the effects of policy on primary class teachers’ languages skills and confidence, and on the choice of skills that pupils are likely to learn within timetabled sessions. Its overview of learning theories provides important distinctions between declarative and procedural skills and the conditions needed for them to be successful. Neurobiological insights of young language learners’ proclivities provide useful, and arguably irrefutable, guidelines as to the learning conditions required for such learning. The analysis of data drawn from the literature is schematised within an Activity Theory framework which indicates provisos for approaches suitable for pupils’ successful learning of languages. Results point to the dysfunctional connections between some contributory factors in the Activity system.

Please note that we welcome original research papers in the field of education submitted by teachers, scholars, and education professionals, who may submit their manuscripts even though they did not participate in one of the conferences held by IAFOR. We also welcome book reviews, reviews of the literature in the field, and contributions introducing key educational scholars.

The *IAFOR Journal of Language Learning* is an internationally reviewed and editorially independent interdisciplinary journal associated with IAFOR’s international conferences. Like all IAFOR publications, it is freely available to read online, and is free of publication fees for authors. The journal continues to publish two issues per year. The next issue, Volume 4 Issue 1 is scheduled for publication at the end of 2018; this issue may be a selection of papers submitted during some of conferences organized by IAFOR as well as papers submitted directly to our journal. IAFOR publications are freely accessible on the IAFOR website (Open Access).

Best regards,

Bernard Montoneri

IAFOR Journal of Language Learning



**Multilingualism in Action: A Conversation Analytic View on How Children
are Re-Voicing a Story in a French Second Language Learning Lesson**

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Abstract

Our paper provides an empirically based perspective on the contribution of Conversation Analysis (CA) to our understanding of children's second language learning practices in a multilingual classroom setting. While exploring the interactional configuration of a French second language learning activity, we focus our analytic lens on how five children and their teacher rely on multilingual resources (French, German, Luxemburgish, and Portuguese) in order to initiate and to improve the re-voicing of a story in French. Through a moment-by-moment (CA) video based analysis we can show how co-constructing the second language learning object involves various embedded linguistic and interactional competencies. We will point out how the participants engage in the re-voicing activity through their mutual orientation to each other's language conduct. Effective second language learning becomes possible because the teacher's student-directed talk provides opportunities for the children to provide oral narratives in a jointly constituted multilingually shaped interaction. Moreover, by offering insights into the interactional features (turn-taking system), CA allows us to visualize how the children's second language learning practices are interrelated with the sequential structure of multilingual talk-in-interaction. Thus, in our case study we emphasize the fundamentally social nature of second language classroom talk.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis; second language learning; interactional competence; oral narrative

Introduction

This paper focuses on the use of Conversation Analysis (CA) (Sacks et al., 1974) to shed light on how five children and a teacher engage in a French second language learning activity in a multilingual classroom setting. The issue we address through our subsequent fine-grained CA driven analysis is to show how the participants are achieving interactional competence through mobilizing multilingual resources, and how the children simultaneously display their linguistic skills. Thus, in the following, we will showcase CA's analytical potency in fostering a deeper understanding of how the children's multilingually occurring interactional competence "allows them to participate in interaction in the first place", and "also furnishes the conditions to engage in the social activity of language learning" (Kasper, G. & Wagner, J., 2011, p. 119).

The case study data for this paper are drawn from a larger sample of classroom activities. In the analyzed episode, one of the children (T) is asked by the teacher to tell a story, that is, to "re-voice" a previously read aloud story, in the target language French. As she hesitates to face the challenge of performing in French, the other participants rely on multilingual resources to overcome the dis-fluency. Adopting a CA approach allows us to point out how the co-participants develop the second language learning activity by effectively organizing talk-in-interaction with respect to each other. Furthermore, we can show how the children and the teacher, through paying mutual attention to each other's language conduct, jointly orient to situated second language learning (Gardner, 2008).

The paper is divided into three general sections. The first one presents the theoretical framework we rely on to analyze the participants' interactions as well as methodological issues related to video data. We then describe the classroom setting. Next, we present our CA based analysis by underlining how the children and the teacher mutually coordinate their verbal conduct and open up opportunities to provide oral narrative in the target language French.

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

Conversation Analysis and Second Language Learning: A Brief Sketch

In the last two decades, CA has had a growing impact on studies of second language learning as a follow-up to "the controversial landmark paper by Firth and Wagner (1997) that appeared in the *Modern Language Journal*" (Gardner, 2008, p. 229), in which the authors argued for a more context-sensitive and participant-relevant approach. A number of recent empirical studies have indeed addressed the issue of what insights CA can offer into language learning activities (e.g. Seedhouse, 2004; Hellermann & Pekarek-Doehler, 2010; Markee, 2008).¹ For instance, Markee and Kasper (2004) point out that CA was not originally designed to analyze language learning. They argue however that language learning may be understood as a "conversational process that observably occurs in the intersubjective space between participants" (p. 496). They further assert that this perspective suggests that language acquisition and use are intertwined as to be inseparable in so far as language as a learning object is inseparable from talk-in-interaction in which it is embedded. Thus, as "CA

¹ We do not pretend to provide an exhaustive overview of CA based research on second language learning; we shall only draw together some common threads that advocate CA to investigate language learning activities.

is uniquely placed to examine the finest details of talk-in-interaction” (Gardner, 2008, p. 229), the use of CA has much to offer to shed light on language learning events.

We should note that our paper does not intend to discuss second language learning theories. Nevertheless, with regard to our understanding of second language learning activities, we emphasize here that we draw upon a sociocultural view on learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) to investigate joint classroom activities (Arend, Sunnen, Fixmer, & Sujbert, 2014). Thus, referring to Mondada & Pekarek-Doehler (2004, p. 504), we assert that “CA and sociocultural theory offer complementary elements.” According to the authors, “the complementarity of the two approaches, however, cannot be reduced to using CA merely as an analytical tool in the service of sociocultural theory” (id.). Indeed, “one of the crucial contributions of CA’s analytic mentality is that it allows us to re-specify crucial notions such as task or competence from a member’s perspective” (id.).

Following this line of research, we can point out in our presented case study that CA grants insights into second language learning as sequentially unfolding in the participants’ situated multilingually coordinated utterances. Moreover, CA allows us to show that the children’s “other-oriented” *re-voicing/telling a story* is inseparable from the conversational structure of talk-in-interaction in which it is embedded.

Furthermore, from a theoretical and empirical stance, CA has greatly influenced the current conceptualizations of interactional competence in CA-SLA (Conversation Analysis for Second Language Acquisition),² (e.g., Kasper, 2006; Kasper & Wagner, 2011). From a CA perspective, interactional competence can be considered as the ability to jointly use communicative resources to co-construct understanding and co-accomplish shared (context-specific) goals, that is, the ability “to manage the turn-taking system with co-participants adopting appropriate interactional roles” (Barraja-Rohan, 2011, p. 482).

In the subsequent analysis, we will show how the children and the teacher jointly aim at accomplishing the *re-voicing/telling* task, that means, how they jointly orient to the learning object *French* through “responding to turns in a coherent and sequential manner, displaying common understanding and repairing any threat to or breakdown in communication, showing engagement and empathy when relevant or intended” (Barraja-Rohan, 2011, p. 482).

Conversation Analysis: Some Key Features

In the following, we will point out some key features of CA which are relevant for the purpose of our study.³ Conversation analysis studies the methods human participants orient to when they organize social action through talk. In other words, CA is concerned with how people achieve courses of action in and through talk and how they make their respective understanding of the actions accountable to each other. Thus, conversation analytic research states that humans always adjust their actions to a specific recipient. Sacks et al. (1974) refer to “recipient design” as “a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants”. That means that by building on assumptions

² The concept of interactional competence is not extensively discussed in this paper; for a deeper understanding, readers are referred to papers focusing on interactional competence as a prevalent object of inquiry within CA-SLA (e.g., Kasper, 2006; Hall, Hellermann & Pekarek-Doehler, 2011).

³ See also Arend (2016), Arend & Sunnen (2016, 2017a, 2017b).

about the interactional partner's knowledge and expectancies, participants adjust their turns to the recipient, thus constituting a continuously modified "partner model" (Deppermann & Blühdorn, 2013). In the episode analyzed below, we will point out how the children and the teacher orient to each other by relying on diverse languages, thus displaying both through the addressed language choice(s): their assumptions about the partners' linguistic competence as well as their inferences as to the appropriated language use with regard to the learning object/the task accomplishment. We will show how the participants' ability to build recipient-designed turns is simultaneously instantiating and carried on through suitable other-oriented as well as object-oriented language use.

According to CA, communication is sequentially organized. Sequences are ordered series of turns through which participants accomplish and coordinate an interactional activity. The relevance of any turn is to be understood from its occurrence in a series of turns. Turns are unfolding in time referring to what has been said (done) before. They simultaneously initiate expectations about relevant next turns. The most common type of sequences are dyadic adjacency pairs uttered by two different speakers who produce one turn each. More specifically, turn taking is to be considered in terms of TCU (turn constructional units) and turn allocation at TRP (transition relevance places) (Schegloff, 2007).

In most instances, turn transition (speaker change) is accomplished smoothly at TRP, and such places are accountably projected. At TRP, the different parties negotiate who is taking the next turn. Sacks et al. (1974) propose three options. First, the current speaker can select the next; another option is self-selection; third, if the current speaker does not select the next participant and there is no self-selection from another party at TRP, the current speaker can decide to continue. Moreover, the basic principle for self-selecting to become the next speaker is, according to Sacks et al. (1974), to start as early as possible at the first available TRP. We will see that in the analyzed excerpt, next-speaker self-selections are displaying shared understanding and engagement in the re-voicing/telling process (i.e. visualizing interactional competence).

We further emphasize the following "rules" of turn taking: Only one person talks at time. Overlap of speech is common but brief. Participants proceed to the next turn with very little gap. Longer gaps and silence should be avoided; when they occur, they are most of the time perceived as trouble. With regard to the setting and the *re-voicing/telling* process the participants engage in, we should also consider the following issues: In multiparty interaction as opposed to two-party interaction, it seems especially relevant to investigate how the participants negotiate who is the present speaker and who he or she is addressing as the primary recipient. Thus, to analyze participation in a multiparty setting, it may be beneficial to take into account verbal as well as nonverbal resources (body posture, gesture, gaze) that participants rely on to achieve the unfolding activity (Mortensen, 2008).

As the analyzed episode is concerned with oral narrative (i.e., re-voicing/telling a story), we note in addition that "stories go on over more than a single turn at talk, or a single utterance" (Sacks, 1992, p. 18). In the following, we will not focus on how the story is told; our analytic lens will pay attention to how the children's and the teacher's multilingually other-oriented conduct prompts telling a story in the target language French.

Some Methodological Issues

To study the second language learning event in its sequential organization as an emergent and interactional phenomenon, we rely on video data which give access to a situated view of social conduct (Mondada, 2009). Talk is transcribed according to the conventions commonly used in Conversation Analysis. Standard orthography is used for words and partially completed words.

As the participants utter in French, German, Luxemburgish and Portuguese, free translations in English are given; the languages used are indicated at the start of the turns.

Setting the Scene for a Multilingually Co-organized Event

The analysis carried out in this paper uses a video excerpt recorded in a primary school in Luxembourg with a large majority of immigrant children. The event shows five (9-year-old) children of a third grade engaging in a group-based activity and with a teacher. At the time of the recording, the children had their second year of French Second Language class.



Figure 1: Students in the class.

In first grade in Luxemburgish primary schools, the language of literacy is German; children engage in reading and writing activities in German. French is part of the curriculum from second grade onwards. Students and teachers commonly rely on Luxemburgish⁴ language across the whole curriculum of primary school. In the analyzed episode, German and the target language French have to be considered as second languages. We note also that Laura's (L), Nadir's (N) and David's (D) mother tongue is Portuguese, Tania's (T) mother tongue is Luxemburgish and Melissa's (M) first language is Serbian. The five children and the teacher (Te) speak Luxemburgish fluently.

Analysis

In the subsequent analysis, our research will shed light on the interactional configuration of a *French* second language learning activity by focusing on how the participants multilingually co-manage turn taking in order to produce oral narrative.

⁴ Luxemburgish is recognized as national language since 1984.

When we join the scene, David has just read aloud (in French) a story about a giraffe, a little crocodile and a big mouse meeting in a swimming pool. The teacher then asks the children (while addressing Tania through his gaze) if they (she) could *re-voice* the story (see transcription below). Through re-voicing, the children are supposed to display both, their understanding of what they have heard and their oral skills in the target language.

Transcription

- 1 Te (Fr) you can tell the story/
 2 T uh:m uh:m
 3 Te (Lu) if you can say the story/
 4 T (Lu) I beg your pardon/ ((while turning her head towards Melissa))
 5 M (Lu) if you can say the story/
 6 T (Lu) [not correctly ((gazing at the teacher))
 7 D (P) [you have heard/ ((turning towards Laura))
 8 L ((affirmative head movement))
 9 D (Lu) she has understood she can tell it ((pointing to his left to L while turning his head to his right towards the teacher))
 10 D (P) would you tell what happens in the story/ ((shifting his head towards L))
 11 L ((shrugs her shoulders, nods her head))
 12 D (Lu) she wants to tell it Sir ((pointing to his left to L while turning his head to his right towards the teacher))
 13 Te (Fr) in French/
 14 L (Fr) yes
 15 Te (Fr, Lu) yes in French that is good we will listen *we will listen*
 16 D (P) thus tell what happens in the story (..) tell
 (...)
 17 L (Fr) it is about a (.) a little giraffe and a (.) a little crocodile
 ((Laura is re-voicing the story in French, holding the floor for more than one turn-constructural unit))
 (25s)
 18 T (Lu) may I tell in German/
 19 Te (G) you can say it as you want
 20 T (G) uhm it is (.) uhm about a (.) uhm little (.) uhm gi (.) giraffe
 ((Tanja is *re-voicing* the story in German, holding the floor for more than one turn-constructural unit))

Interactional Competence as Multilingually Expanding a Question-Answer Sequence

The beginning of the episode is quite troubled in the sense that there are sequentially unfolding “hesitations” and reformulations (2–5) after the teacher has addressed his question “you can tell the story/” (1). We note here that the teacher’s “vous/you” uttered in French can be considered as the plural form of the pronoun. Thus, initially we may say that he addresses his question to all five children. Actually, the next speaker, Tania, is selected by the teacher’s gaze orientation to her at the end of his turn. Furthermore, as the teacher starts the sequence in French, he supports that the language of re-voicing should be French.

With regard to the above-mentioned rules of turn-taking, Tania is responding to the teacher’s allocation of the turn to her by vocalizing “uh:m uh:m” (2) at the transition relevance place (TRP). Thus, she acknowledges being the next speaker. Her turn is launched and, by “a

slightly lengthened turn-holding (“uh:m” . . .), she has diminished the likelihood of incursion into her turn space” (Gardner, 2008, p. 232) from her fellow students. In turn 1, the teacher has prompted the children to give an account of their ability to accomplish oral narrative in French (“you can tell the story/”). By reformulating then his question in Luxemburgish (3), the teacher displays that he is understanding Tania’s “uh:m” as a hesitation related to the subject matter French: or T has not understood his former question as uttered in French or, instantly providing the response in the second language French is probably impeded by the pressure to draw on new linguistic resources.

Moreover, in terms of syntax, the teacher makes translation recognizable as such by using the reported speech structure to build his turn. The phrase “if” appears to introduce a second turn part (an indirect question), whereas a potential first part, that is an introductory clause, is not uttered. Furthermore, the teacher relies once again (this time in Luxemburgish) on the plural form of the personal pronoun “you” while eliciting Tania’s response through his gaze orientation (3). Subsequently, Tania achieves a retardation of the requested response by uttering “I beg your pardon” in Luxemburgish (4). Simultaneously with her verbal utterance she turns her head towards Melissa thus selecting Melissa as next speaker, that is, seeking help. Melissa immediately replies to Tania’s request (5) by building on the teacher’s prior translation. Melissa also designs a reported speech turn constructional unit (TCU) in Luxemburgish (if you can say the story) thus making her utterance recognizable as a translation “of second degree”: Melissa is exclusively addressing Tania as recipient by using the singular form of the pronoun you.

We can see that the teacher and Melissa are building bridging turns in Luxemburgish (3, 5) in order to provide some support for Tania who delays twice the preferred response “yes” (2, 4) to the teacher’s initial question (1). By this means, the teacher and M display inferring T’s hesitations as arising out of linguistic lapses in the second language French. In terms of sequence organization, we can identify an insert-expansion (Schegloff, 2007, p. 106) in the question-answer sequence. Through their other-oriented utterances (2–5), the teacher, Tania and Melissa co-construct mutually complementary post-first and pre-second inserts thus organizing sub-sequences. The co-participants jointly look backward to clarify the talk of the first pair part (1) while simultaneously looking forward to implement the second pair part which is pending. Tania’s accounts of hesitation ensuing delays meet the teacher’s and Melissa’s reformulations (translations) aiming at accomplishing the sequence.

Then, subsequently to Melissa’s mediational turn, Tania provides her answer (in Luxemburgish) (6) while gazing at the teacher, thus closing the sequence. Tania’s utterance is overlapping with David’s turn (7). Tania has finally answered the teacher’s initial question through her utterance not correctly, thus evaluating her ability to re-voice the story as not good enough to perform correctly. Through her answer, Tania validates her former stances (2, 4) as hesitations, that is, as attempts to postpone the requested re-voicing. Furthermore, the occurring delays invite potential incoming speakers to take the floor. Thus, David self-selects synchronically with Tania at transition relevance place after Melissa’s turn.

Interactional Competence as Multilingually Moving Ahead the Interactional Process of Task Accomplishment

David is orienting to the forward movement of the task accomplishment (re-voicing his story) and acting upon the fact that at some moment in the unfolding sequence a problem has arisen in its progression towards completion (Jefferson, 1984). The occurring overlap (6, 7) can be

considered as both the temporally and locally situated ending point of the teacher initiated sequence (1–6) and the starting point of a new sequence. David is orienting to Laura while asking “you have heard/” (7). From this point onward, Laura is directly involved in a new sequence initiated by David self-selecting and addressing her as a next potential performer. Without any delay Laura responds “yes” to David by a head movement while gazing at him (8). We note that David is addressing Laura in Portuguese thus identifying Laura and himself as members of a Portuguese speaking community. Then, David addresses the teacher while pointing at Laura and suggests that she has understood (and) she can tell it (9). Here David switches to Luxemburgish displaying his assumptions about the teacher’s language knowledge and by that way his own interactional competence. In the following, David will several more times address Laura in Portuguese (10, 16) and “transmit” Laura’s reply in Luxemburgish to the teacher (12). Furthermore, David puts on equal terms having heard (7) and having understood (9); he thereby assumes that Laura’s French language skills (comprehension and performing) allow her to tell the story.

We note that we can uncover here a flexible organization of teacher-student interaction diverging from prevalent normative practices for turn-taking (such as teacher dominates next speaker selection, students have limited rights for self-selecting) (Gardner, 2013). Besides self-selecting, David is submitting a solution to re-enact the pending interactional agenda “telling the story” through multilingually uttered complementary actions: he proposes a new speaker to the teacher (in Luxemburgish) and he elicits the new speaker’s involvement in the process (in Portuguese). In producing and sequentially organizing differentiated “partner model” focused turns, David shows a quite remarkable interactional competence. Moreover, David’s body posture (9, 12) (turning to his right towards the teacher) and his simultaneous gesture (pointing at Laura to his left) are further accounts of his double-oriented procedure.

Thus, recognizing the teacher’s silence as validating his previous submission (9), David asks Laura if she would tell the story. L answers by shrugging her shoulders and nodding her head. David then translates his understanding of Laura’s movement by addressing the teacher “she wants to tell it Sir” (12). We can observe a finely tuned progression in David’s turn design. Besides a well-orchestrated other-oriented language switching, he proceeds in several stages: first he checks if Laura has heard the story (7); then, he invites her politely to tell the story (10). Laura replies to each question with an agreement token (8, 11) subsequently transmitted to the teacher by David (9, 12). The teacher acknowledges Laura as potential next storyteller; in his phrasal TCU “in French” (13), he asks for reassurance regarding Laura’s use of the target language French. Laura confirms (14). We should note here that the teacher and L are re-activating French abandoned at some point (after the first turn). The teacher positively comments on Laura’s response and projects the (her) next turn by announcing that the co-participants will listen (in French) (15). He extends his turn by repeating, “we will listen” in Luxemburgish. David then prompts Laura to tell (16). She will develop the recounting event in multi-unit turns.

As mentioned above, we assert that CA and sociocultural theory offer complementary elements. In that respect, David’s procedure invites us to look at mediation as an organizational activity instantiating in interactional competence thus participating in the ongoing construction of the language learning activity.

Tania’s subsequent self-selection (18) can therefore be considered as fostered in the multilingually organized interactional space of other-orientation and empathy. Indeed, immediately after Laura’s performance, Tania self-selects and, while gazing at the teacher,

she asks in Luxemburgish if she could tell the story in German (18). The teacher provides his agreement in German (19) by that way supporting Tania's request and enabling her to display her understanding of the story (even if she does not rely on the target language to address the issue). Tania then re-produces the story in German (20). Thus, she makes accountable that she is still aiming at giving the preferred answer to the teacher's initial question uttered in turn 1. She shows that she can tell the story. There is no evidence in the data as to whether Tania uses Laura's prior re-voicing as a resource or not. However, Tania dares to take the initiative to launch a new re-voicing, in another second language.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we point out how a turn-by-turn CA driven analysis allows us to get insights into second language learning activities in terms of interactional competence. We show that deploying language competence is mutually interwoven with "responding to turns in a coherent and sequential manner" (Barraja-Rohan, 2011, p. 482). Furthermore, in our case study, "showing engagement and empathy when relevant or intended" (id.) reveals being inseparable from supporting the fluent progress of the second language learning activity. The teacher and the students jointly orient to the learning object French. The participants' multilingually other-oriented conduct ensures the maintenance of mutual understanding. Although the teacher recognizably re-orient to the learning object French, he allows the children some interactional space to multilingually co-organize the activity. We can demonstrate how the teacher's engagement with the children's propositions and his conversational actions of agreement (enacted in language switching) open up opportunities for successfully providing oral narrative and/or displaying understanding, both in the target language French.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude and great appreciation to Professor Dominique Portante for his warm and kind guidance and his generous support in developing our research work.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account. The parents gave their informed consent in writing. The names are fictitious in order to maintain the participants' anonymity.

Transcript Conventions

Talk is described according to conventions commonly used in CA.

Abbreviations used in the text and in the transcriptions:

L: Laura

N: Nadir

T: Tania

Te: Teacher

M: Melissa

D: David

(Fr): French language

(G): German language

(LU): Luxemburgish language

(P): Portuguese language

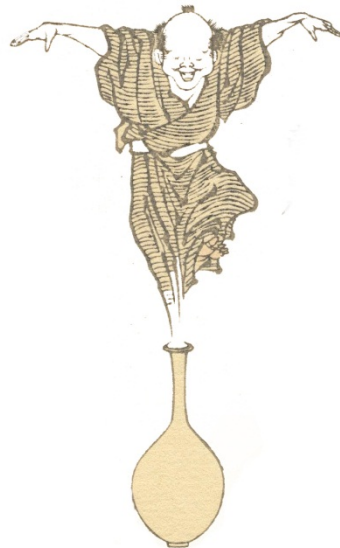
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Written Corrective Feedback: Student Preferences and Teacher Feedback Practices

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Abstract

This case study explores the intricate interaction between students' preferences for written corrective feedback and actual teacher feedback practices in a second year academic EFL writing class in a Japanese university. Specific institutional and instructional details establish the context in which written feedback is being provided. A quantitative data analysis approach was incorporated using questionnaires and by thoroughly examining samples of teacher feedback. Data was collected from students using a survey and protocol questionnaire at the end of the course. Teacher written feedback practices were examined by collecting and analyzing students' graded essays and also by interviewing the teacher at the end of the school term. The results showed that while many of the students' feedback preferences were addressed by the teacher, there were some points of divergence. The results also show that while the teacher attempted to offer various types of feedback, it remained largely teacher centered, resulting in students having a somewhat passive role in the feedback process. This study concludes that while there is a need for teachers to take their students' feedback preferences into account, diversity and a range of feedback strategies are more important considerations.

Keywords: Teacher feedback; student preferences; L2 writing

Introduction

In the last twenty-five years, approaches and methods to teaching English composition to ESL writers have continually evolved. However, throughout all of these years of changes, one aspect of composition instruction has remained consistent: the inclusion of teacher feedback. In fact, for many ESL composition instructors, teacher feedback is considered the largest investment of time and energy, eclipsing even the amount of time spent preparing and conducting lessons (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005)

Written corrective feedback in product oriented ESL composition classes, such as those where the teacher only reads a final draft of paper or essay, tend to reflect a summative assessment approach and is often used as a way to justify a grade. This type of feedback has been described as an ineffective and futile exercise (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981). Connors & Lunsford (1993) and Straub (1996) also argue that a summative assessment approach in product oriented ESL composition classes can lead teachers to become careless and insensitive with their comments. This type of feedback also tends to result in short, overly directive comments that run the risk of undermining students' writing styles (Connors & Lunsford, 1993). Moreover, Truscott (1996) has argued that not only is corrective feedback of this nature (done once, on a final draft) ineffective and that it does nothing to reduce the amount or frequency of errors in subsequent student writing, it can also negatively impact students' ability to write for communicative purposes. So strongly does he feel about the ineffectiveness of this practice, he argues that corrective feedback should be abandoned all together (Truscott, 1996; 2007).

Because of the vast amount of time and energy spent on the feedback process, pinpointing the most effective methods is essential for all instructors. Teachers should not have to worry that all of their effort has gone to waste, or worse, that their feedback strategies have been counter-productive. Indeed, there are cases where even carefully considered feedback has resulted in revisions that have made students' work weaker (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Thankfully, there is a wealth of research that has consistently shown that students not only see teacher feedback as critical to improving their composition skills but that they value it above other forms of feedback such as self or peer evaluation (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Lee, 2008; Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, written corrective feedback is broadly defined as direct or indirect error correction, words of encouragement or praise, comments, advice, and suggestions that instruct students to make changes to their written compositions.

Perspectives on Teacher Feedback

Ferris (1997) found that over three-quarters of the error corrections and advice about structure and content proposed by teachers were incorporated into subsequent drafts. This points to the fact that students take teacher feedback and comments very seriously. Ferris & Hedgcock (2005) even go so far as to lament that the high levels of incorporation of teacher comments and the diligence with which these comments will not be ignored, places a burden on instructors to make sure that, "feedback is helpful, or at least does no harm!" (p. 188).

While the study conducted by Ferris (1997) indeed makes the case that teacher commentary is valued and taken seriously by some students, other researchers have remarked that some

students may not even read the advice and feedback provided by the teacher unless explicitly instructed to do so (O’Flaherty, 2016). These wide ranges of uptake strategies by students’ point to the need for instructors to carefully consider the kinds of feedback that are being provided and whether or not it is necessary to explicitly instruct students to take time to read the comments. There is nothing more disheartening for a teacher who has spent hours carefully crafting feedback than to pass back an assignment and watch as his or her students casually tuck their papers away into a file without taking more than a moment to casually glance at the red marks on the page.

What is it that makes feedback in one case so successful while in another case an exercise in futility? Until recently, much of the research into students’ perceptions of feedback, as well as the effects of teacher feedback, has been presented in a decontextualized manner. So, while we know that students tend to see teacher feedback as useful and a means to help improve their writing (Ferris, 1997; Hyland, 1998), we know almost as much about the type of feedback being provided by teachers as we do the contexts in which they are being presented. That is to say, we know very little about either.

As Ferris (1997) and O’Flaherty (2016) illustrate, a wide range of factors can contribute to the success or failure of teacher feedback. Classroom contexts such as class size and grade level; instructional contexts such as product or process oriented writing classes; even the kind of writing itself, whether it be journals, essays or tests, have to be considered when trying to determine the efficacy of teacher feedback (Hedcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991; Lee, 2005). Other research has pointed to the type of feedback being provided as having an important role in shaping student perception. Local or global feedback (Hedcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, Zamel, 1985), peer or self-evaluation (Ferris & Hedcock, 2005), and direct or indirect error feedback (Saito, 1994) have all been shown to contribute significantly to students’ perceptions of teacher feedback practices. Perhaps the most difficult factors to consider when evaluating the success of feedback are individual learner traits such as linguistic and educational backgrounds, cultural differences, proficiency with the target language and even motivations for taking a class (Ferris & Hedcock, 2005; Lee, 2008). Oladejo (1993) even points to the amount of exposure to the target language (unrelated to L2 proficiency) as effecting students’ attitudes and utilization of teacher commentary. As Ferris and Hedcock (2005) state, “We cannot simply look at teachers’ written comments or transcripts of their oral feedback as well as students’ revisions and conclude that we know everything we need to know about a particular teacher, student, or class” (p. 189).

Because much of the previous research into written corrective feedback has been done in a decontextualized manner, a case study approach was preferred over collecting larger pools of data. In this way, it was possible to provide a much deeper understanding and level of detail to connect the learning context with attitudes towards written corrective feedback. This richer description can also help form best practices when expending the time, effort and resources it takes to adequately provide feedback in composition classes. The present study will address the following research questions:

What expectations do students hold regarding teacher feedback practices?

To what extent do teachers’ feedback practices address their students’ expectations and desires?

Method of Study

Participants

The participants in the study were thirty-eight second year students enrolled in an international relations program at a Japanese university. Classes at the university were streamed using the Assessment of Communicative English (ACE) Placement Test. The ACE placement test was designed by the Association for English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) and was administered in December at the university while the students were in their first year of study. This means the students were placed in the class approximately four months prior to the beginning of the school term in April. The average score of the ACE Placement Test corresponded roughly with an A2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale.

Of the thirty-eight students, eighteen were female and twenty were male. Thirty-seven of the students spoke Japanese as a first language while one female student, who was from China, spoke Chinese as her first language. Twenty of the students had studied (or were studying) a foreign language aside from English (Spanish, German and French). Although several students were planning on studying abroad during the summer break, none of them had any experience of studying or staying in an English speaking country for an extended period of time (longer than a week).

All of the students in the international relations program took required first year English classes during the spring and fall terms of their first year at university. The first year courses were ninety-minute lessons held twice a week for fifteen weeks in the spring term and fifteen weeks in the fall term. Aside from the student from China, all other students had studied English in junior and senior high school for six years in a form focused (grammar intensive) environment. The secondary school education of the student from China was unknown.

The teacher who participated in the study had over fifteen years of experience teaching English composition in an EFL (English as a foreign language) setting and had been working at that particular university and teaching the English academic writing class for over four years.

Classroom Context

The course the students were enrolled in was an elective course that met weekly for two ninety-minute sessions during a fifteen-week term in the spring (April - July). The course was designed as a basic academic writing course to help students develop skills to write short essays. This course was the first time that students would have had the opportunity to take an academic writing course at university. While the course was not designed to teach novel (or new) grammar points, grammar instruction was included so that students could have an opportunity to produce meaningful English while consolidating their prior knowledge of major syntactic rules.

The instructor adopted a process-oriented approach to English composition that incorporated elements of communicative language teaching. There were four major writing assignments throughout the course. Of the four assignments, three followed a draft-revision cycle where the teacher provided feedback at various stages of the student writing. The remaining assignment (the first assignment of the course) was a timed writing assignment where the

teacher only provided feedback on the terminal (and only) draft. In this case, the teacher used the feedback as a means to justify a grade. The instructor also conducted one feedback conference with each of the students at the end of the second writing assignment (the first multiple draft essay the students wrote).

Data Collection

A quantitative approach was used to analyze data collected in the form of a survey conducted at the end of the school term. Because of similar instructional contexts, a form or Lee's (2008) survey was adopted for this study. The survey was comprised of twelve questions, eight of which consisted of a five point Likert scale. The remaining four questions asked students to select an answer which most closely matched their opinions about a range of topics. A protocol questionnaire was also administered by the teacher during individual writing conferences to gain an understanding of the students' general opinions about the course, their teacher's feedback, and their perceptions of their own English ability. The survey and protocol questionnaire appear in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.

Regarding the teacher's feedback practices, twenty random samples of the teacher's feedback (five from each of the four assignments) were collected for analysis. With the exception of the first assignment, the last three assignments required students to write a rough draft (first draft) and a final draft. In the case of these three final assignments both the first and final drafts were analyzed together since feedback was provided by the teacher on each copy. This was done to examine the focus of the feedback students were receiving in terms of structure and organization, content or language. In the case of the final three assignments, the teacher provided the majority of the corrective feedback on the rough draft. The type of feedback provided on the final copy consisted mainly of written commentary about the student's strengths and weaknesses. Since the teacher had remarked that feedback was a chance to give students the individual attention they deserved, the focus of the written commentary was also examined.

Results

Teacher Feedback Practices

Of the twenty essays collected for analysis each averaged approximately 150 words in length. There were a total of 525 feedback points which averaged 26 distinct feedback marks per essay, or approximately one feedback point for every 5.7 words. Table 1 shows the type of feedback that the teacher provided across all of the assignments.

Table 1: Feedback Categorization.

| Feedback type | Feedback Points | Feedback Percentage |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| Lexical Feedback: misspelling and incorrect word choice | 89 | 16.9% |
| Grammatical Feedback: verb tense, pronoun, article, and preposition errors | 158 | 30.1% |
| Structural Feedback: punctuation errors, sentence fragments, comma splices (etc.) | 105 | 20% |

| Feedback type | Feedback Points | Feedback Percentage |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|
| Content Feedback: feedback relating to details and ideas | 105 | 20% |
| General Comments: words of praise or encouragement | 68 | 13% |
| Total | 525 | 100% |

Lexical feedback was defined as feedback that specifically addressed lexical errors such as misspellings and incorrect word choice. A total of 16.9% (89) feedback points were classified as lexical feedback. Grammatical feedback was defined as feedback that addressed usage errors such as verb tense, pronoun, article, or preposition errors. 30.1% of the feedback the teacher provided addressed these types of mistakes. Structural feedback was defined as feedback that addressed structural problems such as punctuation mistakes, sentence fragments, run-on sentences and comma splices. This type of feedback accounted for 20% of the total feedback provided. Content feedback was defined as feedback that directed students to develop further or add more details to certain statements or ideas. This type of feedback was generally seen as statements from the instructor like, “Can you tell me more?”, or, “More details, please”. Content feedback represented 20% of the feedback provided. Finally, general comments mainly consisted of comments such as, “Nice idea”, or “Interesting point”. These type of comments accounted for 13% of all the feedback provided by the teacher.

After consulting with the teacher about the type of feedback strategies used it became apparent that two distinct feedback strategies were being employed. Because the first assignment was an in-class writing assignment, the teacher had only a terminal draft to provide feedback on. The remaining three assignments followed the typical draft-revision cycle of a process-oriented approach to English composition. Table 2 shows that content feedback became much more pronounced in the final three assignments. The teacher was more concerned with developing thoughts and ideas when the students were writing multiple drafts.

Table 2: Differences in feedback type between single draft and multiple draft assignments.

| Feedback Type | Assignment 1 Feedback Points (%) | Remaining 3 Feedback Points (%) | Total Feedback Points (%) |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Lexical Feedback: misspelling and incorrect word choice | 45(30%) | 44(11.7%) | 89(16.9%) |
| Grammatical Feedback: verb tense, pronoun, article, and preposition errors | 53(35.3)% | 105(28%) | 158(30.1%) |
| Structural Feedback: punctuation errors, sentence fragments, comma splices (etc.) | 38(25.3)% | 67(17.9%) | 105(20%) |

| Feedback Type | Assignment 1 Feedback Points (%) | Remaining 3 Feedback Points (%) | Total Feedback Points (%) |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Content Feedback: feedback relating to details and ideas | 7(4.7%) | 98(26.1%) | 105(20%) |
| General Comments: words of praise or encouragement | 7(4.7%) | 61(16.3%) | 68(13%) |
| Total | 150(100%) | 375(100%) | 525(100%) |

The feedback strategies between the two types of assignments not only shifted focus from accuracy to content but also changed in the way they were presented to students. For assignment 1, the teacher used a direct method of providing feedback. The teacher provided the corrections for the students. For the three remaining draft-revision assignments, the teacher used a combination of direct and indirect (or coded) feedback that pointed out the errors but allowed for the students to make the corrections. Table 3 analyzes the direct and indirect feedback strategies concerning the lexical, grammatical and structural feedback of the final three assignments. Assignment one was not included because all errors were corrected by the teacher. A total of approximately 216 feedback points were analyzed (Lexical = 44, Grammatical = 105, Structural = 67).

Table 3: Feedback strategy for assignments 2, 3 and 4.

| Feedback Strategy | Lexical Errors (44 feedback points) | Grammatical Errors (105 feedback points) | Structural Errors (67 feedback points) | Total Feedback Points for Each Category |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| Correction Provided (direct feedback) | 0% | 28% | 71% | 77(35.7%) |
| Underlined / Circled Error (indirect feedback) | 87% | 10% | 3% | 51(23.6%) |
| Categorized Errors (coded / indirect feedback) | 13% | 62% | 26% | 88(40.7%) |
| Total Direct Feedback | 0% | 28% | 71% | 77(35.7%) |
| Total Indirect Feedback | 100% | 72% | 29% | 139(64.3%) |
| Total Feedback | 44(100%) | 105(100%) | 67(100%) | 216(100%) |

The teacher did not provide any direct corrections for lexical errors. For all words that were misspelled the teacher simply underlined the words with the expectation that the students would provide the corrections. For incorrect word choices, the mistake was underlined and the code WW (wrong word) was written beneath. In the case of grammatical errors, the teacher provided corrections for the students slightly over a quarter of the time. It was noted that the teacher thought some of the mistakes students were making were beyond their grammatical ability and it was easier to simply provide the correction than attempt lengthy grammar explanations. Codes such as VT (verb tense), SV (subject - verb agreement) and A (article) were commonly used to draw the students' attention to specific mistakes. Finally, structural error feedback represented the category with the most direct feedback provided by the teacher. The teacher felt that structural feedback was the most difficult type of feedback for the students to understand. However, for punctuation mistakes or run-on sentences, concepts that the teacher was fairly certain the students understood codes such as P (punctuation) or RO (run-on) were used.

Another point of analysis examined the amount of corrective feedback provided relative to the total number of mistakes in each essay. The teacher had stated that, from the stand point of student motivation (or demotivation), it was not always desirable to correct every single mistake a student made. Therefore, each essay was reexamined to determine how many mistakes were not addressed in the feedback the teacher provided. After reexamining each essay, an additional 205 potential feedback points (errors that were not addressed by the teacher) were noted. Similar to earlier findings, there was a marked difference between the teacher's approaches to providing feedback for the single draft assignment (assignment 1) compared to the multiple draft assignments (assignments 2–4). For the single draft assignment, far fewer potential feedback points were noted. Therefore, the teacher corrected a higher percentage of the students' mistakes for the single draft assignment reflecting the summative nature of the feedback on this single draft essay assignment. Each feedback point was then categorized to provide an idea of the types of errors the teacher was not addressing. Table 4 represents the differences between assignment one and the remaining assignments as well as the percentage of each type of mistake that was not addressed. Content feedback and general comments were not included in the table because it could not be determined if or where the teacher might have provided this type of feedback.

Table 4: Categorization of unmarked errors.

| Unmarked Errors (errors the teacher did not address) | Assignment 1 (single draft) | Remaining 3 Assignments (multiple drafts) | Total Unaddressed Feedback Points |
|---|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Lexical Errors | 2(9.1%) | 18(9.8%) | 20(9.7%) |
| Grammatical Errors | 8(36.4%) | 44(24.1%) | 52(25.4%) |
| Structural Errors | 12(54.5%) | 121(66.1%) | 133(64.9%) |
| Total Errors | 22 | 183 | 205(100%) |

When asked how the determination was made regarding which errors in the students' writing were not addressed, the teacher gave varying responses. Since lexical errors (misspelled or incorrect word usage) were the most obvious type of mistake the teacher tried to provide feedback as often as possible. Grammar mistakes that did not greatly impact the students'

meaning (or, “make the sentence sound funny” in the words of the teacher) tended to be left unaddressed. Finally, with regard to structural errors, the teacher did not always feel confident of some of the rules concerning punctuation (commas, semi colons, colons, etc.) so these mistakes were either ignored intentionally or missed altogether because of a clear understanding of the grammar rules.

Since the teacher had provided 525 points of feedback out of a potential 730 mistakes in the student essays, the teacher had addressed approximated 72% of the mistakes the students had made. In the single draft essay, the teacher corrected 86% of the mistakes students made while for the multiple draft essays, the teacher only corrected 67% of the total number of mistakes the students made.

Finally, on each of the final drafts of the process oriented assignments (assignments 2–4) the teacher provided a scoring rubric and written commentary to each student. The commentary tended to be approximately one paragraph in length (about five sentences with a total average of approximately fifty words). The written commentary for each student followed a similar pattern. The student was addressed by name, one or two sentences praised the students’ strengths, one or two sentences pointed to specific weaknesses in the writing and one or two sentences suggested points that the student should be careful of in future essays. The commentary was always hand written and signed by the teacher similar to how someone might write a short personal letter.

Students’ Perceptions on Feedback

A general survey in the form a questionnaire using a five point Likert scale was conducted to determine the students’ experiences and preferences regarding written corrective feedback in their English classes at university. For each question, students were instructed to check a box that most closely matched their experience or preference. Table 5 represents the students' experiences and preferences.

Table 5: Students experiences and preferences for written corrective feedback.

| | Always (100%) | (75%) | Sometimes (50%) | (25%) | Never (0%) |
|--|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|---------------|
| 1. How often have your previous English teachers provided feedback on your compositions or essays? | 42.1% | 18.4% | 26.3% | 13.2% | 0% |
| 2. To what degree do you want your teacher to provide written feedback on your assignments? | 47.4% | 36.8% | 13.2% | 2.6% | 0% |
| 3. To what degree do you read the written feedback your teacher provides? | 44.7% | 23.7% | 23.7% | 7.9% | 0% |
| 4. Is your teacher's feedback legible? | 63.2% | 23.7% | 13.2% | 0% | 0% |
| 5. When your teacher provides feedback in English, to what degree | 29% | 44.7% | 26.3% | 0% | 0% |

| | Always (100%) | (75%) | Sometimes (50%) | (25%) | Never (0%) |
|--|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|---------------|
| do you understand it? | | | | | |
| 6. To what degree do you prefer feedback in English? | 28.9% | 42.1% | 21.1% | 7.9% | 0% |
| 7. To what degree do you want your teacher to correct every mistake you have made? | 52.6% | 23.7% | 23.7% | 0% | 0% |
| 8. Does your teacher's feedback help to improve your writing? | 73.7% | 23.7% | 2.6% | 0% | 0% |

Questions one and two dealt with the frequency of feedback provided by teachers and the frequency that the students wanted to receive feedback. Students reported that their English teacher often (18.4%) or always (42.1%) provided feedback on their written assignments. However, 84.2% of students answered that they often (36.8%) or always (47.4%) wanted feedback from their teacher.

When asked about the frequency with which they read their teacher's feedback, only 44.7% of the students responded that they always read the feedback provided. While this percentage largely matches the number of students who responded that they always want their teacher to provide feedback (47.4%), it still represents a large number of students who are not taking full advantage of the feedback their teachers' are providing.

One issue that has arisen in other studies (Ferris, 1995) but seems to be absent with these students is the legibility of their teacher's feedback since 85.9% of respondents reported that their teacher's writing was often (23.7%) or always (63.2%) legible.

An important question to consider was how well the students understood the written feedback when it is provided in the target language. In this survey, 29% of students answered that they always understood the feedback, 44.7% answered that they often understood the feedback and 26.3% answer that they sometimes understand the feedback. No students answered that they rarely or never understood the feedback when it is written in English.

These percentages correspond closely with the next question which dealt with the student's preference for the feedback language: 28.9% always wanted the feedback in English, 42.1% often preferred English, and 21.1% sometimes preferred English. However, 7.9% of students indicated that they preferred the feedback in English on rare occasions.

More than half of the students surveyed (52.6%) indicated that they wanted their English teacher to point out all of the mistakes they made while nearly a quarter (23.7%) felt their teacher should often point out all of their mistakes. This means that over three quarters of the students surveyed felt strongly that their teacher should provide ample and robust feedback on all of the mistakes in their written compositions. While the teacher had previously indicated that there was a potential for demotivating students by attending to all of the mistakes they had made in an assignment, these results clearly indicate that the students in this class did not share the same belief as their teacher.

Finally, when asked if they thought their teacher's feedback helped them improve their writing, the majority (73.7%) answered that it always helped. A further 23.7% of the students felt that the feedback they received often helped them improve their writing. This means that nearly all students (97.4%) found a positive connection between the feedback their teacher was providing and the improvement of their writing skills.

After exploring the students' experiences and preferences regarding the feedback they receive from their teachers in general, a separate survey was conducted to see how closely their teacher's feedback matched the students' expectations in this specific course. In order to evaluate how closely the teacher's feedback matched the students' expectations the students responded to seven questions by choosing an answer that most closely matched their opinion. The following tables (6–9) show the questions asked and the distribution of the students' answers. These questions were adopted from Lee (2008).

Table 6: What kind of feedback style would you prefer your teacher write? (In a statement)

| Feedback Style Preferences | |
|--|-------|
| Written comments (in English), error corrections and grades (scores) | 63.2% |
| Written comments (in English) and error corrections | 5.3% |
| Written comments (in English) and grades (scores) | 21% |
| Error corrections and grades (scores) | 2.6% |
| Only written comments (in English) | 0% |
| Only error corrections | 7.9% |
| Only grades (scores) | 0% |
| None of the above | 0% |
| Total | 100% |

The results from these questions show that students prefer their teacher to use a range of feedback methods. Although 7.9% of the students had a preference for only one form of feedback (error corrections), the remaining 92.1% had a desire for at least two forms of feedback. Of the 92.1%, the vast majority of students (89.5%) wanted the teacher to include written comments in English when feedback was provided. These results indicate that the teacher's feedback practices closely matched the needs and preferences of the students in this class.

Table 7: In the future, which feedback method do you want your teacher to do more of? (In a statement)

| Future Feedback Method Preferences | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Provide error corrections | 68.4% |
| Give more scores and grades | 0% |

| Future Feedback Method Preferences | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Write comments in English | 2.6% |
| Current feedback methods are adequate | 23.7% |
| Other (Please specify) | 5.3% |
| Total | 100% |

When asked what they wanted to see more of in future compositions, students clearly had a desire to see more error correction. The students may have felt that too many of their mistakes were going uncorrected by the teacher. This high rate of response calls into question the teacher's decision to let 33% of the mistakes the students made go unattended.

The students who chose “other” wrote that they wanted the teacher to more clearly indicate what makes a good essay and to better explain the coding used when indicating the type of mistakes that the students had made.

Table 8: What are the most important types of errors you want your teacher to focus on? (In a statement)

| Error Type Focus Preferences | |
|---|-------|
| Sentence structure and style (structural mistakes) | 2.6% |
| Vocabulary and expressions (lexical mistakes) | 47.4% |
| Grammar and sentence pattern (grammatical mistakes) | 36.8% |
| Content and ideas | 13.2% |
| Other (Please specify) | 0% |
| Total | 100% |

When asked about the type of error correction feedback that students wanted their teacher to focus on, 47.4% answered that lexical mistakes were the most important followed by 36.8% who felt grammatical corrections were most important. Very few students (13.2%) felt their teacher should focus on content and ideas and even fewer (2.6%) felt that structural mistakes were most important.

As shown in Table 4, lexical mistakes received the most focus from the teacher with 90.3% of all of the student errors corrected. Conversely, structural mistakes were only corrected 35.1% of the time indicating this category received less focus than each of the other categories. It can therefore be said that the focus of the teacher's feedback matches the desired focus of the students.

Finally, the students were asked how they would like their teacher to respond to the types of errors they were making; whether they preferred direct or indirect feedback. Table 9 shows how the students responded.

Table 9: Direct vs. Indirect Feedback.

| How would you like your teacher to respond to the mistakes you make? | | |
|--|--|-------|
| Direct Feedback (47.4%) | Strike out the mistake and correct my errors for me (He flied to Japan) flew | 47.4% |
| Indirect Feedback (15.8%) | Underline my mistake and I correct the mistake (He <u>flied</u> to Japan) | 10.5% |
| | Use a symbol to indicate a mistake in the sentence that I must find and correct (He <u>flied</u> to Japan.*) | 5.3% |
| Categorized Indirect Feedback (36.8%) | Underline my mistake, use code to identify the type of mistake and I correct it (He <u>flied</u> to Japan [V]) | 36.8% |
| Total | | 100% |

These tables show that students were basically split on the type of feedback they preferred to receive from their teachers. With slightly more students preferring indirect feedback from the teacher (52.6%) it is difficult to draw a link between the types of feedback the students' desired compared to the type of feedback the teacher provided. As Table 3 showed, 35.6% of the teacher feedback was direct while the remaining 64.4% of the feedback was indirect.

Students' Reactions to Feedback Conferences

The teacher in this study indicated that in order to ascertain the level to which students were understanding the written feedback that was being provided, individual feedback conferences were conducted. These conferences were held after the second assignment was returned and students had been given a chance to read what the teacher had written on their papers. These conferences were held in the back of the classroom (a large lecture style room) and generally lasted anywhere from one to five minutes. During the conferences the teacher explained to the student some of the errors they had made. The teacher generally focused on mistakes that were a recurring problem in the text (mistakes that had been made more than once). The students were also given time to ask the teacher any questions they had about their assignments and the feedback that the teacher had written. On the day of the feedback conferences three students were absent so data was collected from the remaining 35 students. The conferences were conducted entirely in English.

Table 10: Questions from the writing conference and a brief breakdown of the responses.

| Writing Conference Questions | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. How do you feel about writing in English? | Very Confident 5.7% | Confident 22.9% | Not Confident 71.4% |
| 2. How much effort did you make on this assignment? | Significant Effort 8.6% | Appropriate Effort 34.3% | Inadequate Effort 57.1% |

| Writing Conference Questions | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 3. How well do you understand the feedback on the assignment? | Mostly Understand 20% | Somewhat Understand 37.1% | Inadequately Understand 42.9% |
| 4. How well do you understand the teacher's comments on the assignment? | Mostly Understand 17.1% | Somewhat Understand 42.9% | Inadequately Understand 40% |
| 5. Can you correct your mistakes using the feedback from your teacher? | Yes 40% | Maybe 57.1% | No 2.9% |

When the teacher asked students about their confidence level with regards to English composition, the vast majority (71.4%) indicated that they did not feel confident about their writing skills. While the teacher expressed some surprise at the high number of students who did not feel confident, research has shown that Japanese students tend to assess their own writing skills at a level much lower than their teachers' assessments (Matsuno, 2009; Heine, Kitayama & Lehman, 2016). Similarly, the majority of students (57.1%) did not feel they had made enough effort on the assignment.

Student responses to questions three and four about the degree to which they could understand the teacher's feedback and comments were quite similar. Fifteen students (42.9%) answered that they understood only 50% or less of the feedback the teacher provided while fourteen students (40%) indicated that they understood 50% or less of the teacher's comments. While these numbers seem high, it is important to note that the second assignment was the first time for students to receive coded feedback from their teacher since all of the feedback on assignment one (the in-class writing assignment) was direct and not coded. In fact, by the end of the course 100% of students responded that they understood the feedback at least 50% of the time, as indicated in Table 5.

Finally, only one student answered that they could not correct their mistakes by using the feedback provided by the teacher, possibly owing to a lack of understanding regarding the code the teacher used.

Discussion

The small sample size of data used for this research means that generalizations about the impact and effectiveness of written corrective feedback across a variety of ESL or EFL contexts are difficult to make. That being said, the smaller scale case study approach better situates the students' and teacher's attitudes and practices in relation to written corrective feedback. As Yin (2009) states, case studies are "an empirical enquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 14).

The results of this study at times paint a somewhat conflicting picture. For example, during the writing conferences, only one-fifth of students indicated that they mostly understood the feedback provided by the teacher while on the survey at the end of the course, nearly three-quarters answered that they usually or always understood it.

There are several possible explanations for such a range in results. First, it is possible that by the end of the course the students' language proficiency had drastically risen. However, given the short time frame between the writing conferences and the end of the term, this explanation seems unlikely. Conversely, the teacher may have adjusted the level of language used in the feedback to better match the students' level of understanding.

A final explanation for these conflicting results also remains possible. The students may not have understood the feedback on their first assignment because they may have simply lacked an understanding of the process oriented approach to academic writing that the teacher had incorporated into the curriculum. Since this was the first time that these students had been offered an academic writing course at university, their previous L2 essay writing experiences would have occurred in high school, most likely in preparation for their university entrance exams. The nature of this type of entrance exam preparation in Japan is notoriously product driven. Therefore, the students may have misunderstood the purpose of the draft-revision cycle that the teacher was trying to initiate which would have led to difficulty in understanding the purpose of corrective feedback.

In fact, several other results of this study point to the students' possible desire for a more product oriented approach. For example, not only did half of the students in this class want the teacher to attend to all of their mistakes, they also had a preference for having the teacher directly correct the mistakes for them. Furthermore, rather than have the teacher try to help the students improve the content of their assignments, the majority of students wanted the corrective feedback to focus on lexical and grammatical mistakes.

Without having a thorough understanding of the benefits of the process approach to writing, the entire endeavor may have seemed quite tedious to the students. This all points to the need for the teacher to better explain or justify to the students the pedagogic choice for making the writing course process oriented rather than product oriented.

The Role of Indirect Feedback

The issue of the type of feedback a teacher should provide is very complex and requires careful consideration. The type of assignment, what constitutes an error, which errors should be addressed, student proficiency, and classroom goals are among several factors that must be taken into account. Chief among these considerations is whether or not to provide direct or indirect feedback in error correction (Ferris & Hedgcock 2005).

Although several researchers describe studies in which students realize the inherent value that indirect feedback has on their learning (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Komura, 1999), the students' opinions in the survey described previously were split between a preference for direct and indirect feedback. While students may have various reasons for preferring one type of feedback over another, "indirect feedback clearly has the most potential for helping students to continue developing their L2 proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 269). Furthermore, teachers can avoid appropriating their students' texts by opting to use indirect over direct feedback.

Individual Feedback Conferences

While feedback conferences in writing classes are sometimes viewed as a means for teachers to save time and energy that might be used marking papers (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), the

teacher in this study used them in addition to providing written feedback on the students' assignments. Instead of replacing written feedback, these conferences were used as a means to interact with the students individually and to help clarify any potential problems they may have had with the indirect feedback the teacher was providing. This notion closely followed Conrad and Goldstein's (1999) idea that writing feedback conferences can provide immediate clarification of difficult issues. Reid (1995) also points out that since some students are auditory learners these face-to-face conferences more closely match their learning styles.

Moreover, while it is often remarked that Japanese students tend to be reticent to speak out or ask questions in language classes (Lucas, 1984; Brown, Robson & Kosenkjar, 2001; Yashima, 2002), these individual conferences allowed students who were otherwise inhibited to interact freely with the teacher.

Although it may not always be possible for teachers to conduct individual writing feedback conferences because of time issues, class size or room space, these types of conferences allow students the opportunity to not only interact directly with the teacher but also allow for any problems to be addressed immediately. Even though, it is tempting to see these conferences as a replacement for more traditional types of time consuming written feedback, Arndt (1993) showed that students preferred individual feedback conferences in addition to written feedback, rather than in lieu of written feedback.

Diversity of Feedback Styles and Promoting Active Student Roles

While the teacher in this study included both written feedback and feedback conferences, students were passive recipients, rather than active participants, in the feedback process. A more comprehensive approach that included peer feedback practices may have prompted students to take a more active role in addressing problems in their compositions.

As peer feedback promotes collaborative learning and can be done at any stage of the writing process, it offers numerous practical benefits for language learners. Not only can students receive feedback from someone other than their teacher, they can transition from passive recipients to active participants in improving their writing skills (Hirvela, 1999). Furthermore, this type of collaboration can serve as a team building exercise to strengthen ties between students within the classroom (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

By modeling the feedback process, structuring the tasks and progressively building feedback skills throughout a course, peer feedback not only has the potential to motivate students to take a more active role in their learning, it also has the potential to reduce a teacher's corrective feedback workload (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004, Kamimura, 2006). In this study, 28% of the student errors in the texts were left unattended. Leaving more than a quarter of the students' mistakes unattended may have the undesirable effect of reinforcing bad writing habits. Had peer feedback strategies been incorporated at an earlier stage in the writing process, the students may have been able to correct some of the easier lexical and grammatical mistakes before the teacher received the essays. This would have allowed the teacher to have more time to focus on providing feedback on errors that would otherwise have been left unattended due to time constraints.

Even though researchers such as Leki (1990) and Carson and Nelson (1994) have pointed to validity and cultural issues concerning peer feedback, Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) describe students' reactions to peer feedback as having "uniformly positive results" (p. 232).

This is not to say that peer feedback should replace other types of teacher-centered feedback. In fact, Ferris (2003) and Zhang (1999) explicitly warn about the exclusive use of peer feedback. Rather, by incorporating a pedagogical approach that combines peer and teacher feedback, the diversity of these styles will enrich students' learning experiences.

Conclusion

Unlike many other studies into written corrective feedback, the scope and focus of this case study was not to determine whether teacher feedback had a significant effect on the reduction of student composition errors. Rather, this study contextually situated the interaction between one teacher's feedback practices and a group of students' preferences and expectations.

To address the first research question of this study regarding students' feedback expectations, it is evident that students prefer that their teachers provide direct lexical and grammatical error corrections and to attend to all of their mistakes. Indirect feedback that simply pointed out that a mistake had been made did not seem particularly beneficial to this group. This preference resulted in a divergence between the students' expectations and teacher practice which relates to the second research question. In some situations, such as the case when students requested that all composition errors be directly corrected by the teacher, it can be argued that the teacher's pedagogical beliefs rightly superseded students' desires.

While teachers may feel that their students' desires and expectations place a heavy burden on them, they should be heartened by one finding of this study. The vast majority of students felt that the feedback they received from their teacher helped them improve their writing skills.

One avenue of future study into written corrective feedback could be comparing the roles that direct and indirect feedback have on student perceptions in both product and process oriented writing classes.

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Appendix A: Student Survey (adapted from Lee, 2008)

How often have your previous English teachers provided feedback on your compositions or essays?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

To what degree do you want your teacher to provide written feedback on your assignments?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

To what degree do you read the written feedback your teacher provides?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

Is your teacher's feedback legible?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

When your teacher provides feedback in English, to what degree do you understand it?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

To what degree do you prefer feedback in English?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

To what degree do you want your teacher to correct every mistake you have made?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

Does your teacher's feedback help to improve your writing?

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Always | | Sometimes | | Never |

In the future, what kind of feedback would you prefer your teacher write?

| | |
|--|--|
| Written comments (in English), error corrections and grades (scores) | |
| Written comments (in English) and error corrections | |
| Written comments (in English) and grades (scores) | |
| Error corrections and grades (scores) | |
| Only written comments (in English) | |
| Only error corrections | |
| Only grades (scores) | |
| None of the above | |

In the future, which feedback method do you want your teacher to do more of?

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Provide error corrections | |
| Give more scores and grades | |
| Write comments in English | |
| Current feedback methods are adequate | |
| Other (Please specify) | |

What are the most important types of errors you want your teacher to focus on?

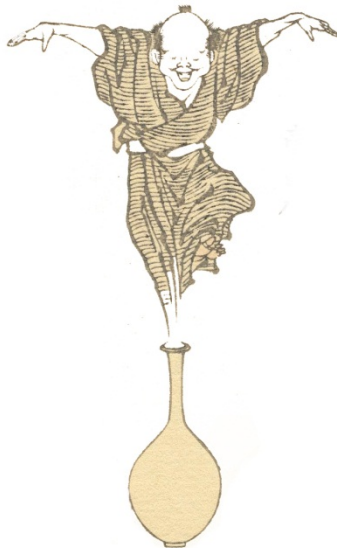
| | |
|---|--|
| Sentence structure and style (structural mistakes) | |
| Vocabulary and expressions (lexical mistakes) | |
| Grammar and sentence pattern (grammatical mistakes) | |
| Content and ideas | |
| Other (Please specify) | |

In the future, how would you like your teacher to respond to your errors?

| | |
|---|--|
| Strike out the mistake and correct my errors for me (He flied to Japan) flew | |
| Underline my mistake and I correct the mistake (He <u>flied</u> to Japan) | |
| Underline my mistake, use code to identify the type of mistake and I correct it (He <u>flied</u> to Japan [V]) | |
| Use a symbol to indicate a mistake in the sentence that I must find and correct (He flied to Japan.*) | |
| None of the above methods | |
| Other (Please specify) _____ | |

Appendix B: Writing Conference Questionnaire

| |
|---|
| 1. How do you feel about writing in English? |
| 2. How much effort did you make on this assignment? |
| 3. How well do you understand the feedback on the assignment? |
| 4. How well do you understand the teacher's comments on the assignment? |
| 5. Can you correct your mistakes using the feedback from your teacher? |



The Importance of CoP in Transforming New Learning Communities into Experienced Ones in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Since the Communities of Practice (CoP) concept has been adopted in various learning environments, visualizing its development in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms is complicated. Thus, based on the CoP concept, this study investigates the changes in learners' degrees of participation and CoP elements in EFL writing/reading classes when the systemic functional linguistics genre-based approach to language learning is introduced over a 15-week period. The participants included 58 undergraduate students at various proficiency levels from three different classrooms. Developmental changes in the students and their communities were examined by conducting pre-, mid-, and post-quantitative analyses of 10 CoP elements, including three key modules: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Three elements showed no similar developmental patterns, whereas two CoP components (mutual engagement and shared repertoire) indicated similar patterns in one classroom where their activities began with moderate awareness, gradually increasing toward the end of the semester. Among the three classrooms, only one CoP component (i.e., shared repertoire) showed a similar developmental pattern. The results imply that the features involving human relationship expansion, including the frequency of contact and the ease in asking for help from other members, called "Mutual Engagement," grow during the early or middle stages. Features such as "Joint Enterprise" and "Shared Repertoire"– dealing with understanding other members' knowledge and understanding jargon – start developing in the latter stages. This study implies that understanding the concept of CoP can help teachers clarify learners' behaviors in classroom communities, which can lead to major developments in learning.

Keywords: Communities of Practice; genre-based approach to language learning; systemic functional linguistics; five stages of CoP development

Introduction

In recent years, the Communities of Practice (CoPs) concept has been extensively researched, and it has proven to be worthwhile, thus motivating investments in the business world. According to Ribeiro (2011, p. 28), “communities of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) are models of the creation and distribution of knowledge based on practice.” When CoPs are successfully established, they can increase members’ satisfaction with their working arrangements and promote a strong, passionate working community (Ribeiro, 2011). Wenger’s (1991) concept of CoPs can be summarized as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002). However, Haneda (2006) claimed that Lave and Wenger (1991) did not closely examine the concept. Lave and Wenger (1999) created this concept wherein novices become experienced in CoPs through their interaction with other members. This has been examined only on an informal basis in the EFL writing classroom-based communities (Haneda, 2006). Therefore, one of the challenges faced by the investigator was to elaborate on the application of the concept of CoPs in the context of the EFL classroom.

Since the 1990s, studies have also been conducted on the activity patterns and structures of CoPs across various fields, particularly in different arenas (Koga, Furuya & Miyo, 2015; Kanamitsu, 2009; Lippman & Elliot, 2004; Ribeiro, 2011). However, it is difficult to clarify the overall picture of CoPs in language learning classrooms since limited studies have focused on the components and activity patterns in such communities (Ribeiro, 2011). In other words, although the Community of Practice (CoP) concept is essential for establishing successful institutions, CoP potential and function in English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms have yet to be clarified. Thus, it is necessary to explore the appropriate features of CoPs in classrooms to expand the concept from the original one proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). In addition, from a CoP perspective, identifying their features can help determine how learners visualize the process of collaborative learning and create new knowledge in such communities (Cambridge, Kaplan, & Suter, 2005).

In the present study, the research question focuses on what temporal nurturing features of CoPs are embedded in classroom contexts and how these features develop and function. For this purpose, this study examined the nature of engagement in three different Japanese EFL classrooms using questionnaires based on Wenger’s (1998) observations and by performing case studies at the beginning, middle, and end of a 15-week course. The responses to the questionnaires were analyzed to learn more about CoP activity patterns and functions as well as learners’ behaviors in classroom communities. As a result, three CoP features were identified (i.e., expansion of human relationships, distributed cognition, and understanding of technical knowledge), and the transformation from new to experienced classroom communities was demonstrated. In addition, the five stages of CoP development, as defined by Wenger et al. (2002), served as the criteria for the three classrooms. Overall, this study demonstrated how EFL classrooms can be mediated by genre learning within the CoP framework. The implication of this study is that understanding CoPs can help teachers clarify learners’ behaviors in classroom communities, which can lead to major developments in learning. The following section presents a literature review regarding the relationship between CoPs and conceptual challenges for learners.

Theoretical Framework: Review of Related Research

Defining Community

In general, a community helps create social bonds among individuals and influences internal personal factors (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Rovai & Ponton, 2005). Lave and Wenger (1991) defined a “community” as a group in which learners, as participants and community members, can acquire skills and knowledge from one another while participating in activities together. Such situations are also referred to as a CoP. During the past two decades, second-language researchers and researchers studying the practice of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) have focused an increasing amount of attention on the role of the sense of community in classrooms. Although some features of classroom communities have been identified, such as participants’ commitments to goals, cooperation among members, and attitudes toward learning (Rovai & Ponton, 2005), an understanding of how a sense of community can be created and applied in classroom settings has yet to be determined.

Defining a CoP

A CoP includes environments and conditions that allow participants to acquire skills and knowledge through their involvement in the community’s activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Overall, there are three characteristics of CoP domain, community, and practice. In this regard, domain refers to the participants’ commitment to the community based on common goals and mutual interests (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Moreover, there are three key components of CoP mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. The first component, mutual engagement, represents interactions between individuals (Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte, & Graham, 2009), which are important since such interactions help the participants understand the expectations in the community (Li et al., 2009). With regard to the second component, although the participants have their own purposes and goals, they compromise in order to participate in the cooperative activities. This collective process is referred to as a joint enterprise (Li et al., 2009). Regarding the third component, shared repertoire, the common resources of meaning-making are established through the participants’ mutual engagement with other members in the community. Such resources, which are created and accepted by the participants, include routines, used languages, non-verbal communication, genres, actions, and related concepts (Li et al., 2009).

The necessity of cooperative participation in every type of organization has increased, and in this regard, Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter (2005) identified eight features of a CoP: (1) understanding how participants connect; (2) sharing individual information and stories; (3) interacting with peers to resolve issues and find new possibilities; (4) stimulating participants’ learning; (5) allowing participants to gain and share knowledge; (6) visualizing the process of collaborative learning; (7) clarifying the schematization of people’s behaviors in the community; and (8) creating new knowledge. Thus, understanding the features and activity patterns of CoPs can provide insights into how the participants and the communities themselves develop. However, although this understanding of the sense of CoPs has been adopted in various communities and studies, Lave (1991) and Ribeiro (2013) stated that visualizing the CoP concept in classrooms and identifying its activity patterns can be difficult.

Wenger et al. (2002) stated that there are five sections in the development of CoPs: (1) potential; (2) coalescing; (3) maturing; (4) stewardship; and (5) transformation. The first

stage, potential, occurs when community participants cultivate a social network and identify their enthusiasm for the same topic or goal, the tools for carrying out the objective, and common values (Wenger et al., 2002). The second stage, coalescing, occurs when the existing and aimed-for knowledge about the community is combined (Wenger et al., 2002). The third stage, maturing, occurs when the participants attempt to understand the common goals, objectives, roles, and boundaries of the community after building their relationships and identifying the values (Wenger et al., 2002). The fourth stage, stewardship, occurs when the participants accelerate their levels of mastery by facing challenges related to the practices, personnel, technology, and relationships in the organization (Wenger et al., 2002). The fifth and final stage, transformation, occurs when the participants in the community lose their sense of ownership regarding common goals, practices, and participation (Wenger et al., 2002).

Previous Research and CoP Indicators

Wenger (1998) listed 14 CoP elements as indicators (Wenger, 1998b, pp. 125–126), after which Murillo (2011) divided the elements into the three dimensions stated earlier (i.e., mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire). Subsequently, Ribeiro (2012) examined how the employees of one company formed a CoP by applying Wenger's 14 elements (Wenger, 1998) (see Appendix) and conducting three semi-structured interviews with seven participants.

The CoP concept has also been widely used in academic pedagogical contexts. For example, Kapucu (2012, p. 586) created a single CoP consisting of graduate students and found that learning occurred when they participated in activities and interacted with other members. In addition, Tapp (2013, p. 347) applied the CoP concept as the theoretical framework in higher education to observe the transformations of novice learners, their activities in classroom communities, and their understanding of academic literacy and identity. The findings indicated that learners with clear goals generally have a positive outlook regarding literary tasks and activities (Tapp, 2013, p. 350), which is one of the features of a CoP. However, although previous CoP research focused on English as a second language (ESL), EFL, and TESOL classes, and classroom communities in higher education, the majority only examined situated learning, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, academic (discourse) socialization, and learner independence (Guo & Lin, 2016; Keuk, 2015; Van Benthuyzen, 2007; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). In addition, limited studies have focused on CoP activity patterns and how these features are transformed, with few studies examining the particular EFL classroom environments in Korea, China, and Japan (Koga, Furuya, & Miyo, 2014).

In sum, CoPs gathers people with diverse interests and a common understanding of the meanings, goals, and roles of certain activities, after which the participants collaborate to implement them (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sugihara, 2006). Moreover, identifying the features of CoPs can provide an understanding of how participants connect with one another and how their behaviors affect a particular community (Cambridge, Kaplan, & Suter, 2005). Although the concepts of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) may be applicable to any type of community (Wenger et al., 2002), clarifying the overall picture can be difficult since few studies have focused on the process of creation and development, the components of CoPs and their activity patterns in pedagogical communities (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 3). With reference to the aforementioned literature review, the following research questions are addressed:

- (1) How do the three dimensions of mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise change over time in a single EFL classroom?
- (2) What are common CoP activity patterns among the three different classrooms?
- (3) How do these EFL classrooms develop from new learning communities into experienced ones?

Teaching Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) genre-based pedagogy as the teaching framework

In light of the teaching framework and in reference to Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Martin's (2001, 2009) genre-based approach to language learning, the present study developed a 15-week EFL course for undergraduates in business administration and international studies at two different Japanese universities. With regard to SFL, "systemic" means that speakers and writers make meaningful choices in language without thinking about a particular structure, while "functional" refers to viewing texts as a whole to implement certain social functions, such as establishing social relations and conveying information (O'Donnell, 2011, pp. 4–5).

Overall, the concepts of SFL and CoPs share some similar features. First, the SFL approach determines how language is used in social contexts to accomplish particular goals (O'Donnell, 2011, p. 2). This concept, which is similar to that of CoPs, is that language and social contexts have a strong relationship, and language users should focus on meaning when they speak and write texts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Second, the genre-based approach to language learning focuses on the purpose of participating in social activities (Wu & Dong, 2009) and understanding cultural contexts (Wu & Dong, 2009, pp. 77–78). This is similar to the concept of CoPs in which participants generally have the common goal of sharing and solving problems to become more experienced (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In the present study, genre is defined as the events in participants' communities that have particular purposes, settings, structures, and communicative functions (Flowerdew, 2013). In other words, the participants in these events share similar social purposes (Chaisiri, 2010). With regard to SFL, its main focus is on the social and cultural roles of language (Coffin, 2001, p. 41, p. 94) and how it can empower users to learn a language proficiently and convey different meanings in different social situations (Wu & Dong, 2009, p. 77). Furthermore, the SFL genre-based approach of language learning has become an effective analytical tool that allows learners to increase their awareness of two particular aspects: schematic structures and inner structures (Wu & Dong, 2009, p. 78). According to Humphrey (1996, p. 9), "When students learn to write using a functional model, they learn about the range of language resources available and the effects that can be created by using different resources. They will, therefore, be much more able to create texts which are effective in different situations."

In this study, a 15-week course was created based on the Teaching and Learning Cycle by Feez (1998) and Rothery (1996), which is a systematic approach that allows learners to engage with and create texts. The scaffolding approach is also embedded into this teaching and learning process (Chaisiri, 2010), which has five stages: (1) building the context; (2) modeling the target genre texts; (3) joint construction of the text; (4) independent construction of the text; and (5) linking related texts. This learning cycle, including the

various stages, was presented three times during the 15-week course. For example, during the first week, the second stage (i.e., modeling the target genre texts) was explained during the first 30 minutes, after which the learners participated in the fourth stage (i.e., independent construction of the text) in the remaining 60 minutes.

During the 15-week course, group and classroom discussions were conducted, and the learners performed a significant number of peer and group tasks as well as genre analyses. At the end of the course, the learners were asked to write self-reflection essays regarding their participation. Overall, using Feez's (1998) Teaching and Learning Cycle allowed the learners to gradually understand the structures of particular genre texts and the uses of their language features. This process also supported the interactions between the learners, which reinforced their shared experiences (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 58). Finally, this particular cycle allowed the teachers to systematically present the texts, after which the learners could gradually increase their meaning-making capacity (Humphrey, Chen, & Macnaught, 2015).

Method

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 58 first-year students ($N = 58$) in the first semester of the 2014 or 2016 academic year in Japan. Classroom G at University A (CoP G [$n = 27$]) was comprised of business administration majors in the lower language-proficiency level, whereas Classrooms I (CoP I [$n = 17$]) and J (CoP J [$n = 14$]) at University B consisted of international studies majors in a higher language-proficiency level. The participants' placement into either the higher or lower language-proficiency level was based on their scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which served as the school placement examination. In this study, the higher language-proficiency group's average TOEFL score was between 480 and 511, while the lower language-proficiency group's average score was 443.

To determine the learners' prior writing and genre experiences, a background survey was administered at the beginning of the first semester (see Table 1). The survey items were based on previous genre writing studies. The results indicated that five percent of the learners in CoP G had performed genre analyses of peer essays in the past. However, none of them had experienced the genre-based approach in their high school writing and reading classes. In CoP I, five percent of the learners had previously performed peer essay analyses, while three percent had experience in genre-based language learning in high school. In CoP J, seven percent of the learners had performed peer essay analyses in the past, while 14 percent had experience in genre-based language learning in high school. Thus, since the majority of the learners had similar EFL writing experiences (with limited exposure to genre-based language learning), the participants were considered novice learners in genre-based language learning. In addition, according to the background survey, one or two learners in each classroom had previously performed peer essay analyses. However, their reviews only focused on grammatical errors instead of understanding genre structure. Hence, the participants were also considered novice learners with regard to this aspect.

Table 1: Learners' Background Information.

| | Communities of Practices | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | G | I | J |
| N | 27 | 17 | 14 |
| F | 9 | 12 | 9 |
| M | 18 | 3 | 5 |
| Faculties | Business Administration | International Studies | International Studies |
| TOEFL score (M) | 443 | 511 | 480 |
| Experience of study abroad in the past | 70 | 67 | 7 |
| Study abroad in the future | 80 | 95 | 90 |
| Say they like to study English | 75 | 100 | 93 |
| Lesson numbers | 5 | 8 | 8 |
| Translation | 45 | 31 | 93 |
| Paragraph writing | 17 | 15 | 7 |
| Peer essay analysis | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Genre approach-based language learning | 0 | 3 | 14 |

Note: In questions (1) to (4) the numbers are in percentages. Questions (5) to (8) are related to the EFL learners' prior learning and writing experiences in their classrooms at their high schools and the numbers are in percentages.

Finally, at the beginning of the 15-week course, all the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, after which their written consent was obtained on the information sheet (written in both Japanese and English). They were also informed that the collected data was anonymous, that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, and that their answers would not have any effect on their grades.

Data Source

Surveys

To obtain in-depth qualitative insight into the transformations of the CoP elements in each EFL classroom, pre-, mid-, and post-quantitative analyses were conducted. In the present study, 11 question items were adopted from Ribeiro's (2011) interview items, which were based on Wenger's 14 components. The responses to the questionnaire (based on a five-point Likert scale) were collected online at three different times (i.e., beginning, middle, and end) during the 15-week course (see Table 2), after which comparisons regarding the highest frequency of the items were made. All the participants took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to answer the questions. Overall, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were as follows: CoP G: first time $\alpha = 0.82$, second time $\alpha = 0.77$, and third time $\alpha = 0.75$; CoP I: first time $\alpha = 0.83$, second time $\alpha = 0.82$, and third time $\alpha = 0.72$; and CoP J: first time $\alpha = 0.75$, second time $\alpha = 0.73$, and third time $\alpha = 0.84$.

Table 2: Data collection.

| | 1st time | 2nd time | 3rd time |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Classroom G | 5/12/2014 (Week 4) | 6/2/2014 (Week 7) | 7/15/2014 (Week15) |
| Classroom I | 4/11/2016 (Week 1) | 5/30/2016 (Week 7) | 7/11/2016 (Week15) |
| Classroom J | 4/15/2016 (Week 1) | 6/3/2016 (Week 7) | 7/15/2016 (Week15) |

Data Analysis

Six (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q8, Q10, and Q6) of the 11 questions were chosen for this particular study. The remaining items were not used since they were not applicable to the research questions. The survey data collected in Week 1 (or Week 4), Week 7, and Week 15 were compared. To analyze the learners' awareness and understanding of CoP features longitudinally, the highest frequency for each item was analyzed (see Tables 4 and 6). In these tables, the label "Low" means the learners chose "5 – Never" the most, while "Middle" means the learners selected "3 – Sometimes" the most, and "High" indicates that "1 – Always" was the most frequent answer.

Results and Discussion

Phase 1

To investigate research question (1) (i.e., How do the three dimensions of mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise change over time in a single EFL classroom?), similar patterns of activity development within one classroom community (CoP I) were examined during this phase. For an in-depth understanding of the activity patterns and the transformation of CoP elements, CoP I was the subject of focus (see Tables 3 and Table 4). Overall, the various features of this classroom developed at different times during the research period. More specifically, the elements of mutual engagement and shared repertoire demonstrated similar developmental patterns. In addition, the responses to Q1 (i.e., "Do you frequently get in contact with classmates?") showed that at the midpoint, a plurality of the students selected "3: I get in contact with particular people" (33%, $n = 5$). However, by the final stage, a plurality of the students selected "1: I get in contact very frequently" (33%, $n = 5$). This question represented the CoP feature of mutual engagement.

Both Q3 and Q8 were related to the CoP element of shared repertoire. The results of Q3 ("Do you share information with classmates?") showed a similar developmental pattern to that of Q1. For CoP I, in Week 1, a plurality (40%, $n = 6$) of the students selected "3: I share information occasionally," which was similar to Week 7 (33%, $n = 5$). In Weeks 1 and 7, the least-selected items were "1: I share information quickly" and "5: I never share information." However, the response patterns in Week 15 diverged since the majority of the students selected "2: I share information somewhat quickly" (60%, $n = 9$), while the second-most selected response was Item 1 (33%, $n = 5$). Moreover, the percentage of the students who selected "5: I never share information" was 13% ($n = 2$) in Week 1, whereas it was 0% in Week 7. Regarding Q8 ("Do you remember any shared goals or tools that you used with the members of your class?"), there was a similar developmental pattern. Overall, the results suggest that early in the research period, many of the learners either chose "3: I can recall several semiotic resources" (47%, $n = 7$) or had no understanding of semiotic resources (27 %, $n = 4$), and this trend persisted until the middle stage of the research period. Thus, the

understanding among the students about shared goals and tools apparently developed from the middle to the latter stages of the research period.

Table 3: CoP I: Frequency of response (in %), means, standard deviations, and learners' understanding of CoP features (n = 17).

| Dimensions | Questions | M | SD | Week | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------|---|------|------|------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | | | | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| Mutual Engagement | 1. Do you have a constant relationship with your classmates? | 3.47 | 1.17 | 1 | 7% (1) | 13 % (2) | 33% (5) | 20 % (3) | 25% (4) |
| | | 2.84 | 1.06 | 7 | 7 % (1) | 20% (3) | 46 % (7) | 27% (4) | 0% (0) |
| | | 2.20 | 1.08 | 15 | 33% (5) | 20 % (3) | 27 % (4) | 20% (3) | 0 % (0) |
| Shared Repertoire | 2. When you have a problem, do you ask a classmate for help? | 1.58 | 1.17 | 1 | 67 % (10) | 20 % (3) | 0% (0) | 6.5 % (1) | 6.5% (1) |
| | | 1.76 | 1.01 | 7 | 53% (8) | 27% (4) | 13 % (2) | 7 % (1) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.13 | 0.35 | 15 | 87% (13) | 13% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| | 3. Is information propagated quickly? | 2.94 | 1.14 | 1 | 14% (2) | 20% (3) | 40% (6) | 13% (2) | 13 % (2) |
| | | 2.15 | 1.14 | 7 | 27 % (4) | 27% (4) | 33% (5) | 13% (2) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.66 | 0.61 | 15 | 33 % (5) | 60% (9) | 7% (1) | 0 % (0) | 0% (0) |
| | 8. Do you remember any shared goals or tools that you used with the members of your class? | 3.41 | 1.06 | 1 | 0% (0) | 13 % (2) | 47% (7) | 13% (2) | 27 % (4) |
| | | 2.30 | 0.72 | 7 | 7 % (1) | 33% (5) | 53% (8) | 7 % (1) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.86 | 0.74 | 15 | 40% (6) | 40 % (6) | 20 % (3) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| | 10. Do you know any jargon or shortcut shared with your classmates? | 4.17 | 0.88 | 1 | 0 % (0) | 7% (1) | 7 % (1) | 46 % (7) | 40% (6) |
| | | 2.61 | 0.75 | 7 | 7 % (1) | 13% (2) | 67 % (10) | 13 (2) | 0% (0) |
| | | 2.46 | 0.74 | 15 | 13% (2) | 34 % (5) | 53% (8) | 0 % (0) | 0 % (0) |
| Joint Enterprise | 6. Do you know your classmates' skills and how can these be used to achieve a common goal/task? | 4.23 | 1.14 | 1 | 0 % (0) | 13% (2) | 20% (3) | 0% (0) | 67 % (10) |
| | | 2.53 | 0.48 | 7 | 0 % (0) | 67% (10) | 27% (4) | 0 % (0) | 6 % (1) |
| | | 1.93 | 0.73 | 15 | 20 % (3) | 73% (11) | 0 % (0) | 7 % (1) | 0% (0) |

Finally, as shown in Table 4, the CoP features of mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise showed different developmental patterns. Although these three features did not simultaneously develop in CoP I through the research period, the features of mutual engagement and shared repertoire indicated similar developmental patterns (i.e., middle → middle → high). However, the transformation of the CoP element of joint enterprise displayed a different developmental pattern from that of CoP I (i.e., low → high → high).

Table 4: CoP I: Results of the highest frequency of CoP activity patterns and their transformation.

| Features of CoP | | | Beginning | Middle | End |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Group A: Mutual Engagement | Q1 | Human relationship expansion (frequently getting in contact) | Middle (closer to high) | Middle | High (closer to middle) |
| | Q2 | Human relationship expansion (asking for help from other members) | High | High | High |
| Group B: Shared Repertoire | Q3 | Human relationship expansion (sharing the same information) | Middle | Middle (closer to high) | High |
| | Q8 | Understanding of semiotic resources and using them in CoPs | Middle (lower) | Middle (high) | High |
| | Q10 | Understanding of jargons | Low | Middle | Middle (closer to high) |
| Group C: Joint Enterprise | Q6 | Understanding members' knowledge and distributing knowledge | Low | High (closer to middle) | High (closer to middle) |

Phase 2

To investigate research question (2) (i.e., what are the common CoP activity patterns among the three different classrooms?), similar developmental patterns among CoP G, CoP I, and CoP J were examined during this phase. The EFL learners in these three classrooms were taught the genre-based approach of reading and writing by the same instructor using the same teaching methodology. However, data collection occurred at a different point. The results for Q10 (“Do you know any jargon or shortcut shared with your classmates?”) showed a similar developmental pattern in all three classrooms (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

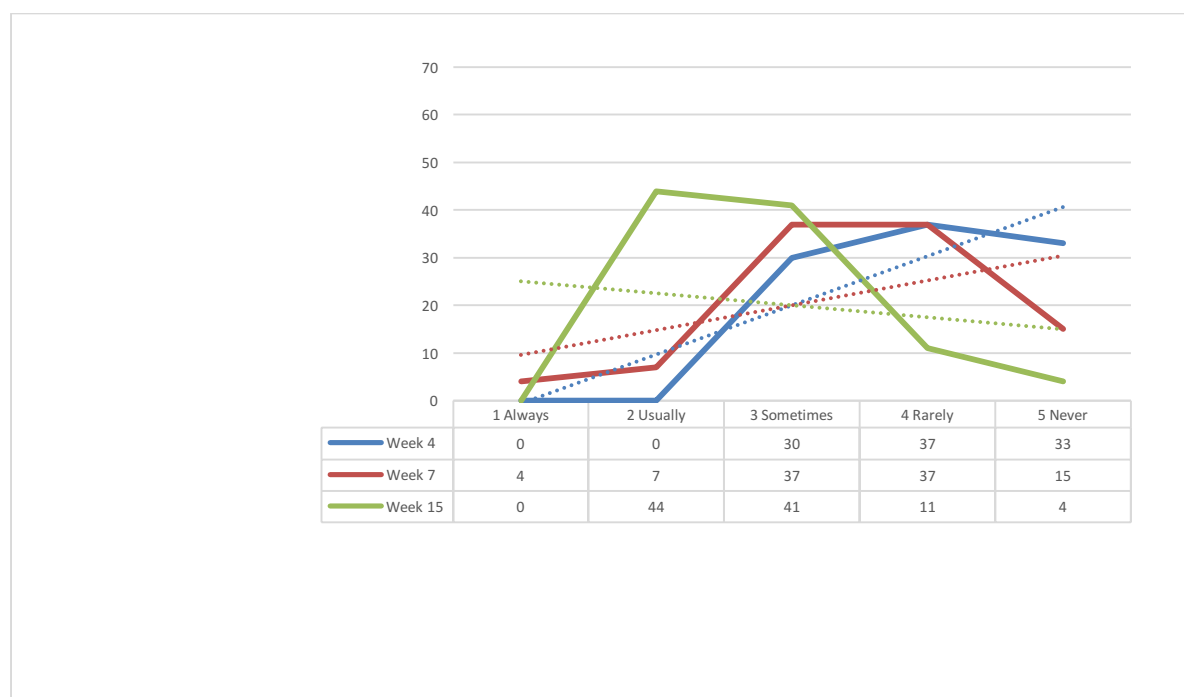


Figure 1: CoP G: The approximate curves result for this question “What are the common CoP activity patterns among the three different classrooms?” at Week 4, Week 7, and Week 15.

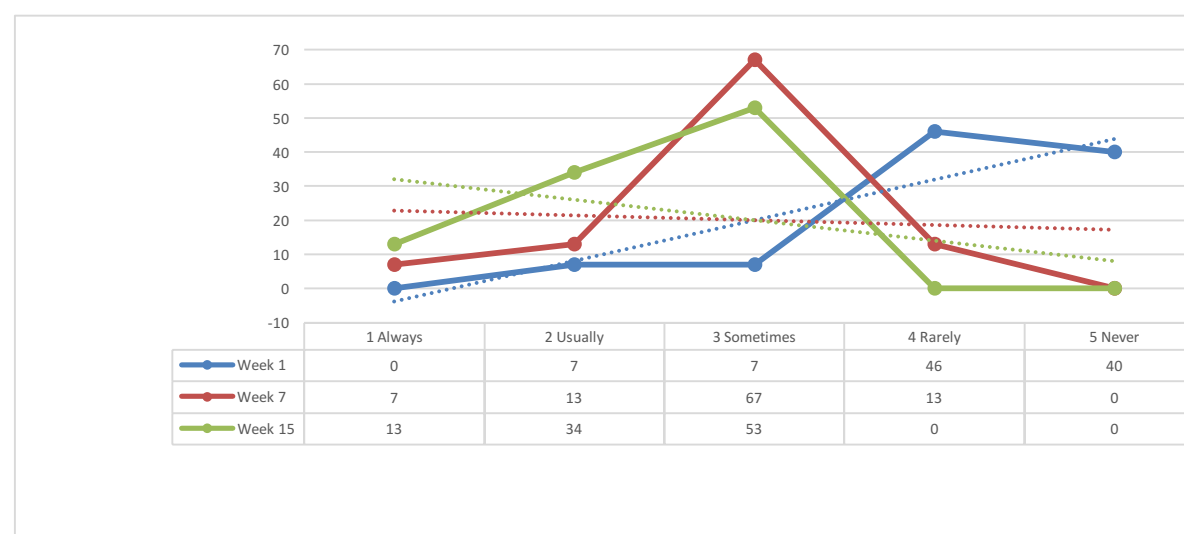


Figure 2: CoP I: The approximate curves result for this question “What are the common CoP activity patterns among the three different classrooms?” at Week 4, Week 7, and Week 15.

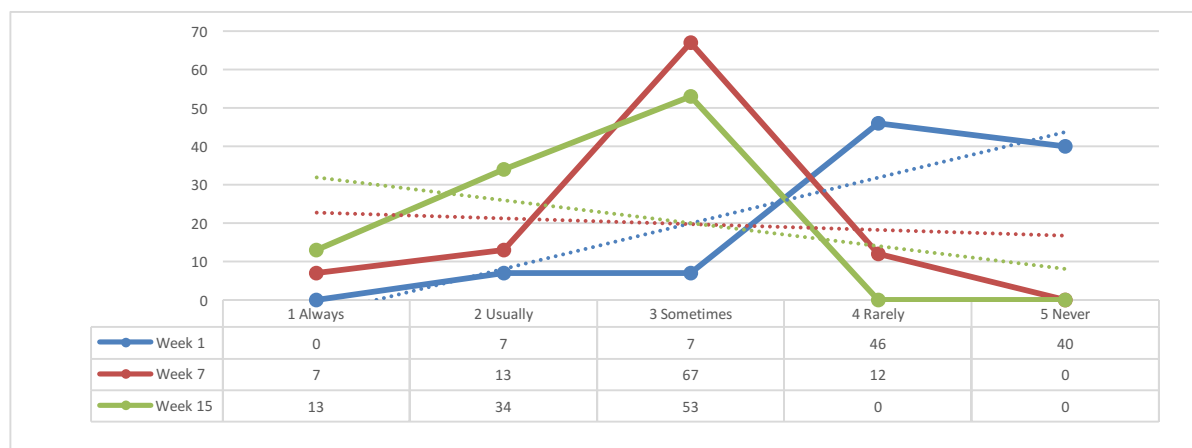


Figure 3: CoP J: The approximate curves result for this question “What are the common CoP activity patterns among the three different classrooms?” at Week 4, Week 7, and Week 15

Among all three CoPs the understanding of the jargon used in the respective classroom generally increased over the course of the research period. In CoP G, this understanding dramatically increased from the middle to the latter stages of the research period (low → low/medium → high), while in CoP I, the understanding of the jargon sharply increased from the early to middle stages of the research period and then slightly increased from the middle to the latter stages (low → medium → medium/high). As for CoP J, the understanding of the jargon remained at a medium level from the early to middle stages of the research period but dramatically increased from the middle to the latter stages (medium → medium → medium/high) (See Table 6). Finally, Q10 was categorized as a shared repertoire, according to Murillo’s (2011) interpretation of CoP indicators.

Phase 3

With regard to research question (3) (i.e., how do these EFL classrooms develop from new learning communities into experienced ones?), this section describes how these EFL classrooms developed during the research period. In addition, the five stages of CoP development were applied to the results of Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6, to discuss the development of CoP I and CoP J. It is important to note that the members of these communities had similar backgrounds and that the time of the data collection was the same.

CoP I

The results in Table 3 show that during the period immediately following the formation of CoP I, the comprehension of “understanding and behavior related to expansion of interpersonal relationships” by the students was moderate. In other words, they expanded their interpersonal relationships by sharing the acquired information and making an effort to contact other members on a regular basis. However, regarding Q2, CoP I showed a high level of “being able to seek assistance from members” immediately after its formation. This tendency continued from the early to the middle periods of the study.

Summarizing these analytical results, the understanding of “expansion of interpersonal relationships” did not start from a low level but from a moderate level. This suggests that the activities concerning the expansion of interpersonal relationships occurred within CoP I

immediately after its formation. Moreover, in the latter period of the study, the degree of expansion of interpersonal relationships was high. Based on these changes in CoP I, the state of Stage 1, that is, potential, created a high possibility of reaching Stage 2, that is, coalescing, prior to the early and middle periods of the study. In Stage 2, the connections to others deepened as trust and commonalities were discovered among the participants. Perhaps future studies should analyze self-reports of students to obtain a deeper understanding of their participation in certain activities.

Overall, the CoPs in this study showed four different developmental patterns: (1) an understanding of distributed cognition; (2) an understanding of English ability; (3) an understanding of semiotic resources; and (4) an understanding of terminology. In the early period of the study, the learners' understanding of these abilities was relatively low. More specifically, the distributed cognition for Q6 was low in the early period of the study, but it remained relatively high from the middle period on. The activity patterns for Q6, unlike those for the other items, achieved a high level of development in the early period. In this regard, a connection between interpersonal relationships and distributed cognition was considered in a question item about "understanding the abilities of the other members and solving problems by distributing them among group members." In other words, such results were expected from this item since the elements of interpersonal relationship expansion in Group A were largely shared.

Furthermore, the students' understanding of Q8 increased from the middle period of the study on. The understanding of Q10 was low in the early period of the study, which continued until the middle period. In other words, in Stage 1 (i.e., potential), CoP I was at the stage in which the participants deepened their social networks to clarify any ambiguities among themselves. In Stage 2 (i.e., coalescing), although the participants' existing knowledge about CoPs was combined with the knowledge learned thus far (Wenger et al., 2002), it took CoP I some time to mature, which continued into the latter period of the study. In Stage 3 (i.e., maturing), the participants spent more time building their relationships and gaining an understanding of their common goals, objectives, roles, and boundaries within the community (Wenger et al., 2002). Although the understanding of common goals and objectives (Q8) was already moderate in the early period of the study, the results showed that this understanding was high during the latter period.

CoP J

As shown in Tables 5 and Table 6, during the period immediately following the formation of CoP J, the lower-proficiency group and its understanding of Q1 and Q3 was moderate. The learners in CoP J were already maintaining frequent contact with moderate intensity in the early period of the study, which continued during the middle period and further developed in the latter period. In addition, there was already a mild degree of favorable responses to Q3 in the early period and a moderate sharing of information by the learners. When transitioning from the middle period to increasing information sharing and diffusion, a high degree of transition occurred, this continued in the latter period. There was also a relatively high degree of responses to Q2 early in the study since interpersonal relationships were already being formed to the extent that mutual peer-to-peer assistance was possible. This tendency strengthened later in the study.

The activity patterns for Q6, Q8, and Q10 suggested limited development compared to those for Q1, Q2, and Q3. In addition, compared to CoP J, CoP I showed no development with

regard to the understanding of members' knowledge, semiotic resources, and jargon, that is, Q6, Q8, and Q10, respectively. The group did not show any growth from the early to middle periods of the study regarding features related to Q6 (i.e., spread of distributed cognition) or Q10 (i.e., understanding of terminology). In the latter period, the understanding of other members' English abilities and of one's own terminology was high. Furthermore, the developing activity patterns related to Q9 (i.e., understanding common objectives and common tools) already showed moderate understanding in the early period of the study. In the middle period of the study, there was also a slight increase in understanding this feature. Thus, the degree of understanding among the EFL learners in CoP J with regard to sharing common goals and tools, understanding jargon, and understanding classmates' abilities was similar from the middle to latter periods of the study. In sum, the activity patterns regarding the understanding of members' knowledge, semiotic resources, and jargon (i.e., Q6, Q8, and Q10, respectively) showed growth from the early to the latter periods of the study. However, this growth was not large compared to the growth of other elements.

Table 5: CoP J: Frequency of response (in %), means, standard deviations, and learners' understanding of CoP features (n = 17).

| Dimensions | Questions | M | SD | Week | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------|---|------|------|------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| | | | | | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| Mutual Engagement | 1. Do you have a constant relationship with your classmates? | 2.64 | 0.84 | 1 | 7% (1) | 36 % (5) | 43 % (6) | 14 % (2) | 0% (0) |
| | | 2.86 | 0.86 | 7 | 7% (1) | 22% (3) | 50% (7) | 21% (3) | 0 % (0) |
| | | 2.29 | 1.20 | 15 | 43% (6) | 0 % (0) | 43% (6) | 14 % (2) | 0 % (0) |
| Shared Repertoire | 2. When you have a problem, do you ask a classmate for help? | 1.93 | 0.62 | 1 | 22%(3) | 64% (9) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| | | 2.21 | 1.12 | 7 | 36% (5) | 21% (3) | 29% (4) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.79 | 1.19 | 15 | 65% (9) | 7% (1) | 14% (2) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) |
| | 3. Is information propagated quickly? | 2.43 | 0.85 | 1 | 14% (2) | 36% (5) | 46 % (6) | 7% (1) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.93 | 1.07 | 7 | 43% (6) | 36% (5) | 7% (1) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.86 | 1.10 | 15 | 50 % (7) | 29% (4) | 7 % (1) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) |
| | 8. Do you remember any shared goals or tools that you used with the members of your class? | 2.79 | 1.19 | 1 | 7%(1) | 43% (6) | 29% (4) | 7% (1) | 14% (2) |
| | | 2.71 | 0.47 | 7 | 0% (0) | 29% (4) | 71% (10) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| | | 2.00 | 0.55 | 15 | 14% (2) | 72%(10) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| | 10. Do you know any jargon or shortcut shared with your classmates? | 3.36 | 0.93 | 1 | 0% (0) | 14% (2) | 50% (7) | 22% (3) | 14% (2) |
| | | 3.00 | 0.78 | 7 | 7% (1) | 7% (1) | 64% (9) | 22% (3) | 0% (0) |
| | | 2.50 | 0.76 | 15 | 7% (1) | 43% (6) | 43% (6) | 7% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Joint Enterprise | 6. Do you know your classmates' skills and how these can be used to achieve a common goal/task? | 2.86 | 0.66 | 1 | 0% (0) | 29% (4) | 57%(8) | 14%(12) | 0%(0) |
| | | 2.50 | 0.52 | 7 | 0% (0) | 50% (7) | 50% (7) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| | | 1.79 | 0.70 | 15 | 36% (0) | 50% (7) | 14% (2) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |

Table 6: CoP J: Results of the highest frequency of CoP activity patterns and their transformation.

| Dimensions | | Features of CoPs | Beginning | Middle | End |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Group A: Mutual Engagement | Q1 | Human relationship expansion (frequency of contacts) | Middle | Middle | Middle and high |
| | Q2 | Human relationship expansion (asking help from other members) | Middle (closer to high) | Middle (closer to high) | High |
| | Q3 | Human relationship expansion (sharing the same information) | Middle | High | High |
| | Q8 | Understanding of semiotic resources and using them in CoPs | Middle | Middle (closer to high) | Middle (closer to high) |
| Group B: Shared Repertoire | Q10 | Understanding of jargon | Middle | Middle | Middle (closer to high) |
| | Q6 | Understanding of members' knowledge and distribution of knowledge | Middle | Middle | Middle (closer to high) |
| | Q8 | Understanding of semiotic resources and using them in CoPs | Middle | Middle (closer to high) | Middle (closer to high) |
| | Q10 | Understanding of jargon | Middle | Middle | Middle (closer to high) |
| Group C: Joint Enterprise | Q6 | Understanding of members' knowledge and distribution of knowledge | Middle | Middle | Middle (closer to high) |
| | Q8 | Understanding of semiotic resources and using them in CoPs | Middle | Middle (closer to high) | Middle (closer to high) |
| | Q10 | Understanding of jargon | Middle | Middle | Middle (closer to high) |
| | Q1 | Human relationship expansion (frequency of contacts) | Middle | Middle | Middle and high |

Applying the Results of CoP J to Wenger et al.'s (2002) Stages of CoP Development

The results regarding the expansion of interpersonal relationships between learners in CoP J suggests that it was at the stage when the participants deepened their social networks. It was also confirmed that Stage 1 (i.e., potential) is when learners in newly formed CoPs use shared information to search for other members with common objectives and values, after which they transition to the next stage. Stage 2 (i.e., coalescing) is when the participants combine their previous knowledge with the knowledge previously learned (Wenger et al., 2002). However, considering that the activity patterns of Group B did not grow much over the 15-week course and that the growth rate was not large compared to CoP I (even though CoP J reached Stage 1 of development, according to Wenger et al., 2002), there were signs that it had not reached Stage 2.

Finally, the common developmental patterns of CoP features were apparent in CoP I and CoP J. The highest frequency results for the question items are summarized in Table 6. The learners' awareness regarding the CoP feature of joint enterprise (Q6) started at the low-middle level, where it continued until Week 7. Eventually, their awareness improved to the middle-high level in Week 15. This pattern also appeared in the feature of shared repertoire (Q8, i.e., the understanding of semiotic resources), whereas the other element of shared repertoire (Q10, i.e., the understanding of jargon) showed a different developmental pattern. In addition, the understanding of jargon in CoP I and CoP J was extremely low at the beginning of the study. This CoP feature took some time to develop to the middle-high level, while the CoP element concerned with human relationship expansion, such as asking for help from other members and sharing information, showed a completely different activity pattern. Finally, the learners' awareness of these elements was relatively higher than the other elements at the beginning of the study, which was maintained until its conclusion.

Conclusion

Using the CoP concept as a basis, this study investigated the changes in learners' degrees of participation and the CoP elements in EFL writing/reading classes when the SFL genre-based approach to language learning was introduced over a 15-week course. The results revealed two major features. First, similar developmental activity patterns were found among the three CoPs. For instance, human relationship expansion (Q1) showed similar developmental patterns between CoP I and CoP J which are relatively higher English proficiency groups, that is, it was at the moderate level during the beginning and middle stages, after which it increased at the end of the research period. In addition, the activity patterns of the human relationship expansion (Q2) was the same among CoP G, CoP I, and CoP J, while the learners' development patterns in asking for help (Q2) changed from the near-high level at the beginning of the study to the medium level at the middle and then to the high level by the end of the course. As for the feature of sharing the same goals and tools, CoP I and CoP J had the same developmental patterns (higher English proficiency groups), that is, at the beginning and middle stages, the learners' understanding was at the moderate level. Although this feature took some time to improve, it eventually developed by the end of the study. Furthermore, the CoP feature of understanding jargon and special terminologies showed different developmental patterns. For instance, in CoP G and CoP I, only a few learners understood this feature at the beginning and middle of the course. However, they eventually understood it by the end of the 15-week course.

The results imply that the features involving human relationship expansion, including frequency of contacts, asking for help from other members, and sharing the same information, will expand during the early or middle stages of a 15-week course. Moreover, the EFL learners in this study had higher attention spans at the beginning of the research period, which they maintained during the entire course. On the other hand, the features of understanding other members' knowledge, distributing knowledge, and understanding semiotic resources and jargon started to develop in the latter stages of the course. Overall, it is important to note that teachers' understanding of their own classrooms is essential since the transformations in CoPs can greatly differ, that is, some learners improve in the early stages, whereas others improve in the latter stages.

Although the present study yielded a number of significant findings concerning the link between the CoP concept and EFL classrooms, there are several limitations. First, the number of participants in this study was relatively small, even though the data was collected over different years and some similarities in the CoP activity patterns were found. Thus, future studies should focus on a larger sample of participants. Second, only one strategy was used to identify the classroom communities' improvements due to the word length. Hence, future studies should consider multiple strategies to identify CoP transformations. Third, similar patterns and developmental timings for the three classrooms in this study were found. However, it is unclear how the three dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire were influenced to develop the communities. In this regard, it would be informative if additional studies focus on learners' self-reflections of their classroom participation to better understand these dimensions and how EFL classroom developments and learners' participation reciprocally influence one another. Finally, this study could not generalize changes in CoP activity patterns over time for multiple communities in educational contexts. Therefore, future studies should focus on different types of EFL communities to help the CoP concept become more generalized.

Despite these limitations, the present study provides significant implications for classroom research and EFL pedagogy, especially with regard to EFL classrooms with similar backgrounds. More importantly, the theoretical and pedagogical potential of the CoP concept can offer an important interface between TESOL and classroom research.

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Appendix

CoP indicators and their relationships to the questions used by Ribeiro (2011)

| | Indications of CoP (Wenger, 1998) | Dimensions (Murillo, 2011) | Questions for this research |
|----|--|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Sustained mutual relationship—harmonious or conflictual | Mutual Engagement | Do you have a constant relationship with your classmates? |
| 2 | Shared ways of engaging in doing things together | | When you have a work problem, do you ask a classmate for help? |
| 3 | Rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation | | Is information propagated quickly? |
| 4 | Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process | | Do you need to explain your task activities before engaging in a conversation with a classmate? |
| 5 | Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed | | Is it easy to introduce a problem that requires a discussion among your classmates? |
| 6 | Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs | Joint Enterprise | -- |
| 7 | Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise | | Do you know your classmates' skills and how these can be used to achieve a common enterprise? |
| 8 | Mutually defining identities | | -- |
| 9 | The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products | | Can you assess the appropriateness of an action or product for the classroom? |
| 10 | Specific tools, representations, and others artifacts | | Do you remember any shared goals or tools that you used with the members of your class? |
| 11 | Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter | Shared Repertoire | Do you know any story, case, or joke shared with your classmates? |
| 12 | Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones | | Do you know any jargon or shortcut shared with your classmates? |
| 13 | Certain styles recognized as displaying membership | | Can you define a characteristic of your roles shared with your classmates? |
| 14 | A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world | | --- |



Investigating the Effectiveness of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Using Google Documents in Enhancing Writing – A study on Senior 1 Students in a Chinese Independent High School

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Abstract

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has evolved through various stages in both technology as well as the pedagogical use of technology (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Studies show that the CALL trend has facilitated students in their English language writing with useful tools such as computer based activities and word processing. Students are able to produce higher quality essays in a student-centered nature and less-intimidating manner (Braine, 1997). It is also noted that this has indirectly allowed students to engage in exploratory learning with a large amount of language data. This study investigated the effectiveness of computer-based writing in the computer lab and in-class pen and paper writing. Participants included 114 Senior One students in a writing class at a Chinese Independent High School in Klang, Selangor, West Malaysia. The 114 participants individually engaged in the in-class writing task (pen and paper) and one computer-based writing task using Google Docs in the computer lab. Both writing tasks were on similar descriptive writings. A pre-writing questionnaire was given to see how students perceive using Google Docs in writing lessons and a post-writing questionnaire to check if Google Docs inspires them to write more. In order to investigate further, student interviews were conducted. The findings revealed that majority of the students have a positive attitude towards the use of Google Docs as one of the tools in learning writing as they found it very reliable. The analysis of writing samples showed that 74 students out of 109 (5 absentees) have shown improvement in their writing with the use of Google Docs. The findings revealed that students are aware of the importance of computers as one of the important tools in education for the 21st century. Nevertheless, some students felt it should be done in moderation as too much of technology can sometimes make the teaching and learning process mundane.

Keywords: Computer assisted Language Learning (CALL); Google Docs; Chinese Independent High School; Pre-writing; Post-writing

Introduction

As outlined in the requirements of the Malaysian Ministry of Education, besides listening, speaking and reading, writing skill is one of the important skills incorporated in the English Language Curriculum. Students must be able to demonstrate this productive skill using correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary and coherent ideas. This would enable them to communicate well in written language. Besides, students who sit for public exams are exposed to different types of texts such as descriptive, narrative, factual, and recount type essays as part of their assessment requirement. They are also expected to be able to differentiate the types of text taught, to arrange text using their own words and create new ones. Leki (2003, 324) states that writing plays “a major gatekeeping role in professional advancement” in academics. Additionally, writing in English plays fundamental, intercultural and transnational roles in business, work places, and governmental activities across the world’s geography (Parks, 2000; Thatcher, 2000). Given this, it is of utmost importance to enhance students’ writing skills in any way to ensure they are able to write appropriately.

Teachers have sought many ways to enhance students’ writing ability and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) does have the potential to be used as a teaching/learning tool in improving language skills. As stated by Simic (1994); Bush & Terry (1997); Warshauer & Healey (1998); Warshauer & Kern (2000), CALL offers an innovative and effective alternative for language educators. Burke (1982) argues that computers allow students to progress at their own pace and work individually to solve problems. Computer-assisted writing (CAW) is one of the CALL implicational methods that enhance writing. It is devised as a complete system for writing, checking, editing, and text completion. It can accelerate the writing process and the most commonly used software for this purpose is Microsoft Word. Due to the advancement in technology we are now in the era of Cloud and the main program in this zone is Google Drive. One of the important components in Google Drive is Google Docs which has many similarities to Microsoft Word. Google Docs has an interface like Microsoft Word with pull-down menus and a toolbar with buttons for common formatting functions. However, Google Docs offers unique features such as Document Sharing, Real-time Collaboration, Research Tools and Cloud Computing where we can access our files anywhere and anytime compared to Microsoft Word. Students can easily invite teachers to view their writing in real time to edit and at the same the teacher can view the revision history to check what and how students revised their writing. Nevertheless, it is still questionable if this program will really enhance the students’ writing skill.

Statement of the Problem

Despite having been taught descriptive writing year after year, many students do not seem to develop their writing skills. They tend to use the same words, same content, same sentence structure, and make similar grammatical errors. Through our observation during writing lessons, we identified that students have difficulties in expressing and developing ideas, cohesiveness and coherence. Students often make mistakes in their choice of words due to limited vocabulary, spell some words incorrectly, make grammatical errors (wrong sentence structure) and ignore capitalization and other punctuation. From the classroom climate, students spend a lot of time on writing essays as they have difficulties in exploring and developing ideas, discussing what to write with other students and eventually lose their focus as the class gets too noisy.

Even though teachers always ensure that students do their corrections appropriately, students only seem to do it for the sake of doing the correction instead of learning from their mistakes. Furthermore, computer labs are often overbooked as many teachers at Hin Hua High School are convinced that computers are beneficial and interesting for students' learning process whether or not students feel the same way.

Aim of Research

The purpose of this study is to find out if Google Docs can improve writing skills of students from four (4) Senior One classes at Hin Hua High School. It is also to discover students' perceptions about using Google Docs to write and to identify if Google Docs is able to inspire students to write.

Literature Review

Harmer (1998, p. 73) states that there are four reasons for teaching writing to English as a Second Language (ESL) students or learners, and they are reinforcement, language development, learning style and writing as a skill. Furthermore, Enre (1988, p. 13) defines writing as a process of thinking systematically and that it can be easily understood. According to Byrne (1999), writing is producing a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. Whereas Celce-Murcia (2001) states that writing is an act of communication that requires an interaction process which takes place between the writer and the reader via text. Thus, writing is important to help students to communicate and express ideas, feelings, information and opinion.

CALL / Constructivism

In teacher-centered learning, students place all the focus on the teacher and the teacher becomes the only source of information. Constructivism is a psychological theory of knowledge which concludes that humans construct knowledge from their experiences (Bowers et al., 2010). Constructivist-based instruction often includes providing learners with skills or support such as modeling, coaching, scaffolding and the teacher's role is to aid the learner in this construction rather than simply providing the information to her or him (Bowers et al., 2010). Scholars believe that electronic media has become the paradigm to promote student-centered learning where teachers function as facilitators and guides.

Many researchers have recently discovered the link between constructivism and technology used. Resnick (1998) argued that computers could become a dynamic part of a constructivist learning environment for learning new ideas and information. In other words, the students would be in control, so he or she can determine what he or she would learn. Murphy (1997) stated that in such teaching and learning environments, the student plays a central role in mediating and controlling learning and teachers serve as guides, monitors, coaches, tutors and facilitators. In order to be effective and current, teachers as facilitators should change their teaching strategies according to student's need and encourage them to read, analyze, interpret, predict and organize the information they get.

The process of writing via computer has an advantage over writing by hand. Studies by Gayle, Davidson-Shivers, Nowlin & Lanouette (2002); Cunningham (2000); Stevens (1999); Hegelmeyer, Mills, Salzman, & Shetzer (1996) list some important benefits of using Computer Assisted Writing (CAW) in writing instructions. They mentioned that CAW could

help students improve their writing in some areas such as spelling, grammar, formatting, and organization. Bangert-Drowns (1993, pp. 69–93) reported in his “meta-analysis” that two-thirds of 32 studies on computer writing indicate improved quality for text produced on the computer.

Google Documents

According to Kennedy, Mighel, Kennedy in Couillard (2011, p. 1) Google Drive is an application that allows users to create documents (Google Docs), spreadsheets (google sheets) and Google Presentations and share them with other online users. Google Docs – an online program for creating and editing texts – is one of the popular tools in Web 2.0 applications which enables any user to share opinions on the same content to edit or remix an existing text (Thompson, 2008, p. 19). Broin and Raftery (2011, p. 3) state that Google Docs can easily be shared with anyone who has a Google Docs account. Oxnevad (2012) describes Smart Spell Checker with Grammar Support and integrated reference tools as powerful Google Doc features in writing. The research tool allows you to do research while you are writing and you can use different Google services such as images, quotes, dictionary, spell checker and Google Scholar from your document.

Suwantarathip & Wichadee (2014) compared those who completed a writing assignment with the support of Google Docs with those who did not in face-to-face classroom. The findings suggested that students in the experimental group gained higher mean score than the ones in the control group. Likewise, Edwards (2011) carried out a case study to investigate the effectiveness of using Google Documents in improving the undergraduate students’ writing skill. Fourteen out of fifteen students had a positive attitude in using Google Docs in terms of accessibility, being easy to collaborate in a writing group and therefore preferred using it. However, Brodahl (2011) could not draw any positive conclusion that student’s writing ability can be enhanced through Google Docs since the results only showed that more than 70% of the students had a positive attitude to commenting and editing others’ contributions to group work.

In conclusion, Computer-based learning platforms can be manipulated to provide students with an environment to learn and practice language. One of these comparatively new environments is Google Docs.

Research Questions

All the studies above show that Google Docs is indeed a useful tool in teaching writing. Moreover, the population for these studies (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Edwards, 2011) and others were tertiary level students. Conversely, integrating computer in teaching and learning is something relatively new among teachers in Malaysia as some schools do not have the facilities at all. Yet there is a need to incorporate technology as we need to produce students that have the 21st Century skills. Moreover, there is increasing concern over students’ learning experiences in this high school where this platform is used. Much less is known about whether using computer (Google Document) may be able to replace the traditional English writing classroom especially in Malaysia as there were not many studies were done on it. Thus, this paper attempts to investigate in particular, high school students’ perceptions in using Google Docs as well as how effective Google Docs is for enhancing the quality of writing.

This paper specifically examines three research questions:

- a. What are students' perceptions in using Google Documents to learn writing?
- b. Does Google Docs inspire students to write?
- c. Does Google Docs really improve students' writing skill?

Methodology

The data collection method involved three parts. All the parts were targeted at a group of students from four different classes from the same school. The school is a Chinese Independent High School located in an urban area and the students are mainly Chinese by ethnicity. The rationale for selecting this school is based on the target group of learners where they are non-native speakers of English and use English as either the second or third language. Moreover, this school is a preferred choice for the researcher as they have professional links with the school which could facilitate access to the research site.

Research Design

For this research we have selected the mixed method research design. We used questionnaires as the main instrument for data collection to obtain information from the group of selected students especially on their perception and inspiration. We also collected pen and paper writing samples as well as writing samples using Google Docs and marked them based on a rubric. We would then further analyze the positive and the negative results and make inferences supported by face-to-face interviews data.

Population and Sample

The target population was students from the selected secondary school whose mother tongue or first language was not English. The students are mainly of Chinese ethnicity and are proficient in their mother tongue or another language (not including English). Most of the students use Chinese as their first language. For the purpose of this research we implemented purposive sampling for the interview session by selecting two students that showed improvement and another two who did not show improvement from each class. Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood (2015) stated that purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest.

Procedure

Data were collected using three main instruments which are questionnaires, writing samples and structured interviews. The instrument for data collection to answer research questions 1 and 2 are questionnaires. The structured questionnaires were designed systematically using a Likert rating scale. The closed ended items placed on a four point Likert scale gives participants a choice, 1 representing "to strongly agree", 2 representing "agree, 3 representing "to disagree" and 4 "to strongly disagree" (Appendix 2). These responses were elicited to gain insights into the nature of the study.

The participants in this questionnaire are a total of 114 students from a Chinese Independent High School. The students are 17-year-old non-native learners who have learnt English for at least 3 years in the High School level prior to this study. As the participants of the study, they

would provide answers for the research. The research instrument consisted of pre and post responses (Appendix 2 and 3).

Writing samples were collected in the form of pen and paper as well as Google Documents. A descriptive essay topic was given to students to write on both pen and paper and in Google Documents. The topic given for the in-class pen and paper writing was “Describe yourself to someone you have never met” whereas, the topic given to students to write in Google Documents was “Describe your best friend”. Students completed their writing within an hour (double period). The writing samples were given grade points based on grading rubrics (Appendix 4). Each sample was marked individually and the grade points were recorded in a standardized template (Appendix 5).

As for the interviews, we used the unstructured interview strategy for individual face-to-face sessions (Appendix 6). A total of 8 students (2 from each class) were interviewed. Students were selected based on the data which showed students with the most improvement and the least improvement from each class. Each was interviewed for about 15 to 20 minutes. This would enable participants to express ideas spontaneously without restrictions. When the need arose, we would develop our questions to probe in order to clarify a response by asking more detailed follow-up questions.

Results and Discussion

The results are sorted into three sections; each section addresses one of the research questions. The first section answers the first research question: What are students’ perceptions about using Google Documents to learn writing? The second section covers the second research question which investigated if Google Documents inspire students to write. As for the third and final section, it answers the third research question: Does Google Documents really improve students’ writing?

For Part 1, (pre-writing questionnaires) a total of 114 completed structured questionnaires out of 114 questionnaires were obtained (yielding a response rate of 100%). This number is deemed sufficient and complete for the use of the research. Participants were given a time limit of one lesson period (35 minutes) to return the completed questionnaires. All the 114 participants returned the completed questionnaires on the same day.

For Part 2, (post-writing questionnaires) a total of 114 structured questionnaires were distributed to the population but only 109 completed questionnaires were obtained due to 5 absentees (yielding a response rate of 96%). Participants were given a time limit of 35 minutes to return the completed questionnaires due to time constraint. All students present completed the questionnaires and returned the questionnaires within the given time.

Part 1 (Pre-Writing Questionnaires for students)

The first part of the analysis (Part A) looks at students’ perception on using Google Documents in English Writing. The table below shows the percentage of respondents who selected each option from a total of 114 respondents.

Table 1: Students' perception on using Google Documents and computer in learning English.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 | I enjoy using Google Drive during English Lesson. | 33.3% (38) | 51% (58) | 14% (16) | 1.7% (2) |
| 2 | I would like my teacher to use Google Documents more often in our writing classes. | 35.1% (40) | 51.7% (59) | 11.4% (13) | 1.8% (2) |
| 3 | I like to use the computer to learn English. | 36% (41) | 44.7% (51) | 12.3% (14) | 7 % (8) |
| 4 | I spend more time learning English when I use the computer than when I use books. | 22.8% (26) | 35.1% (40) | 33.3% (38) | 8.8% (10) |

The results show that students have a very positive attitude towards the use of Google Documents in English lessons especially writing lessons as more than 80% of them (96) agree that they enjoy using google drive and would like their teachers to use Google Documents more in writing classes. 80.7% students agree that they like to use computer to learn English while 57.9% of students will spend more time learning English when they use computer. Astoundingly, 19.3% of the students disagree that they like to use computer to learn English and 42.1% will not spend more time learning English when they use computer. They still prefer to use books to learn English.

Table 2: Students' perception of using the features of Google Documents in writing.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 5 | Using Google Documents in writing can help me with my grammar | 15.8% (18) | 51.7% (59) | 28.1% (32) | 4.4% (5) |
| 6 | Using Google Documents in writing can help me with my spelling | 28.9% (33) | 51.8% (59) | 15.8% (18) | 3.5% (4) |
| 7 | Using Google Documents in writing classes can help me brainstorm the topic I would be writing about. | 14.9% (17) | 60.5% (69) | 22.8% (26) | 1.8% (2) |
| 8 | Using Google Documents in writing classes can help me research the topic I will be writing about. | 56.1% (64) | 37.7% (43) | 5.3% (6) | 0.9% (1) |
| 9 | I don't like it when I don't know what to write when I am trying to write my essays using paper and pen. | 21.9% (25) | 47.4% (54) | 22.8% (26) | 7.9 % (9) |

Survey Questions 5 to 8 focused on using Google Documents in writing. The results showed that 67.5 % (77) of the students believe that the features in Google Documents help them to improve their grammar. 80.7% believe that it can help them to improve their spelling. 93.8 %

of the students feel that Google Documents helps them to research about the topic given to them. 69.3 % of the students' state that they do not like it when they don't know what to write when they try using paper and pen. However, it was unexpected that 30.7 % students disagree with the statement. It shows that they do not mind going through the process of brainstorming and forcing themselves to think and write rather than seeking help from Google Search.

Table 3: Students' perception of using Google Documents and computer to edit and to publish their writing.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 10 | Using google drive can give me confidence to publish my written work. | 20.2% (23) | 46.5% (53) | 28.9% (33) | 4.4% (5) |
| 11 | Using Google Documents in the writing class can help me become an independent learner | 63.2% (72) | 14.9% (17) | 20.2% (23) | 1.8% (2) |
| 12 | Using Google Documents can help me to better edit my written work | 41.2% (47) | 47.4% (54) | 11.4% (13) | 0% (0) |
| 13 | Using google Documents can help me better revise my written work | 13.2% (15) | 51.7% (59) | 33.6% (38) | 1.8% (2) |

Survey questions 10 to 13 looks at students' perception of using Google Documents to edit and publish their work. Results of the analysis in this part clearly showed that 89 students (78.1 %) have a high level of confidence that Google Documents can help them to become an independent learner. More than 80% of the students consider it easier to edit and only 64.6% consider it helpful to revise using Google Documents compared to pen and paper. However, there were still a small number of students (35.1%) who still prefer pen and paper. This is quite surprising in this 21st century where all youngsters should be comfortable and feel at ease with technologies.

Table 4: Students' perception of the reliability of Google Documents.

| | Statement | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 14 | I tend to write more when I am writing on Google Documents | 22.8% (26) | 48.2% (55) | 24.6% (28) | 4.4% (5) |
| 15 | I tend to be more relaxed when I am writing on Google Documents | 29.8% (34) | 51.8% (59) | 16.7% (19) | 1.8% (2) |
| 16 | Google Documents cannot be relied on | 5.2% (6) | 35.1% (40) | 43.9% (50) | 15.8% (18) |
| 17 | Using Google Documents/ drive in the writing class can distract me from staying on task. | 13.2% (15) | 56.1% (64) | 24.6% (28) | 6.1% (7) |

This final part of the analysis looks at the reliability of Google Docs. Interestingly, 93 students (81.6%) stated that they would be more relaxed when they are writing on Google Docs while 21 (18.5%) students didn't feel the same. The results indicate that 81 students

tend to write more when they use Google Docs meanwhile 79 students stated that using Google Docs distracts them from staying on the task. From the survey, we can see that 46 out of 114 students feel that Google Docs is unreliable.

Part 2 (Post-Writing Questionnaires for students)

A post questionnaire was administered after the students completed their pen and paper writing and a writing using Google Docs. This questionnaire aimed to find out if Google Docs inspired them to write after getting the experience of writing using both methods.

The first part of the analysis (Part A) looks at students' perceptions of the target language which is English to determine students' attitudes towards the learning of English as a second language. The table below shows the percentage of respondents from a total of 109 respondents who selected each option.

Table 5: Students' perception on the use of computer and Google Documents in a writing class.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Using the computer in writing class is interesting | 43.1% (47) | 48.7% (53) | 8.2% (9) | 0% (0) |
| 2 | I feel I've learned more about writing in English from this class than I have from other English classes in which the computer (Google Documents) was not used. | 21.1% (23) | 58.7% (64) | 20.2% (22) | 0% (0) |
| 3 | I feel I get more individual attention from the teacher in the computer writing class than I do in other, non-computer writing classes. | 17.4% (19) | 57.8% (63) | 20.2% (22) | 4.6% (5) |
| 4 | I like to use Google Documents better than other ways to write. | 33.9% (37) | 57.8 % (63) | 8.3% (9) | 0% (0) |

The result clearly shows that 100 students (91.8%) feel very positive towards the learning of writing using computer and feel that using computer in writing class is interesting and very inspiring. The remaining 9 students didn't like using the computer in writing class. 87 students (79.8%) think that they have learned a lot more in this writing class compared to what they learned in a normal classroom.

Furthermore 82 students out of 109 students feel that they are getting more individual attention from the teacher than in non-computer writing classes. 91.7% students (100 students) like to use Google Documents better than other ways to write. Only 9 students do not like to use Google Documents for their writing.

Table 6: Students' perceptions on the reliability of Google Docs.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 5 | I can think of more ideas for my writing when I use Google Documents | 36.7% (40) | 52.3% (57) | 10.1% (11) | 0.9% (1) |
| 6 | When I use Google Documents I pay more attention to what I'm writing about. | 32.1% (35) | 51.4% (56) | 15.6% (17) | 0.9% (1) |
| 7 | Using Google Documents makes me less worried about writing because I know I can make changes easily. | 40.3% (44) | 54.2% (59) | 4.6% (5) | 0.9% (1) |
| 8 | The tools in Google Documents helped me a lot in writing essays. | 35.8% (39) | 56.9% (62) | 7.3% (8) | 0% (0) |

However, surprisingly 97 out of the 109 students claimed that they can think of more ideas to write when they use Google Documents but 12 students did not agree to this. 103 students (94.5%) said that they are less worried about writing because they know they can make changes easily if they make any mistakes. Additionally, 83.5% of the students feel that they can pay more attention to what they are writing about when they use Google Documents. 101 students used the tools in Google Documents when they wrote their essay and feel that these tools had helped them in writing their essays.

Table 7: Students' perceptions on the features (apps) in Google Docs.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 9 | When I use Google Documents to write my essay, I am more careful about grammar. | 31.2% (34) | 52.3% (57) | 16.5% (18) | 0% (0) |
| 10 | I pay more attention in choosing the right word when I use Google Documents. | 37.6% (41) | 53.2% (58) | 8.3% (9) | 0.9% (1) |
| 11 | I pay more attention to spelling when I use the computer. | 33.9% (37) | 54.2% (59) | 11% (12) | 0.9% (1) |
| 12 | I pay more attention to organization when I use the computer. | 26.6% (29) | 65.2% (71) | 7.3% (8) | 0.9% (1) |
| 13 | I write longer essays using Google Documents. | 21.1% (23) | 56.9% (62) | 19.2% (21) | 2.8% (3) |

The result from the survey questions 9 to 13 shows the majority of students were careful with the grammar, word choice, spelling and the organization of the essay when they wrote using Google Docs. Additionally, 83.5% (91 students) said they would be more careful with the grammar they use and more than 90.8 % said that they pay attention in choosing the right words. 88% of the students stated that they pay more attention to spellings when using the computer. In fact, 85 students (78%) were able to write longer essays while 100 students (91.8%) paid attention to the organization of the essay.

Table 8: Student's perception on using Google Documents in future.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 14 | Using Google Documents has helped me to become better at writing in English. | 31.2% (34) | 59.6% (65) | 9.2% (10) | 0% (0) |
| 15 | I would recommend that other students learn to use google drive (Google Documents) to write their papers in English. | 35.8% (39) | 48.6% (53) | 15.6% (17) | 0% (0) |
| 16 | I plan to continue using Google Documents to write my essays after this class is finished. | 33.9% (37) | 49.6% (54) | 15.6% (17) | 0.9% (1) |
| 17 | I would like to do another essay if I could use Google Documents. | 22% (24) | 55% (60) | 18.4% (20) | 4.6% (5) |

The Survey questions 14 to 17 show the majority of students will use Google Docs in future to do their writing. Furthermore, 91 students (84.4%) would recommend Google Documents to other students and encourage them to use it to write. 92 students plan to continue to use Google Documents to write their essays and 84 students would do another essay if they could use Google documents. 90.8% students (99) stated that Google Documents has helped them to become a better writer. However, 17 students stated that they would not recommend using Google Documents to other students to write their papers in English.

Results of Writing 1 and 2

The graphs below (Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4) show the difference of the grade point given for Writing 1 and Writing 2. The names (S1 Birmingham, S1 Berlin, S1 Manchester and S1 Canberra) stands for the names of the 4 classes used as samples for this research.

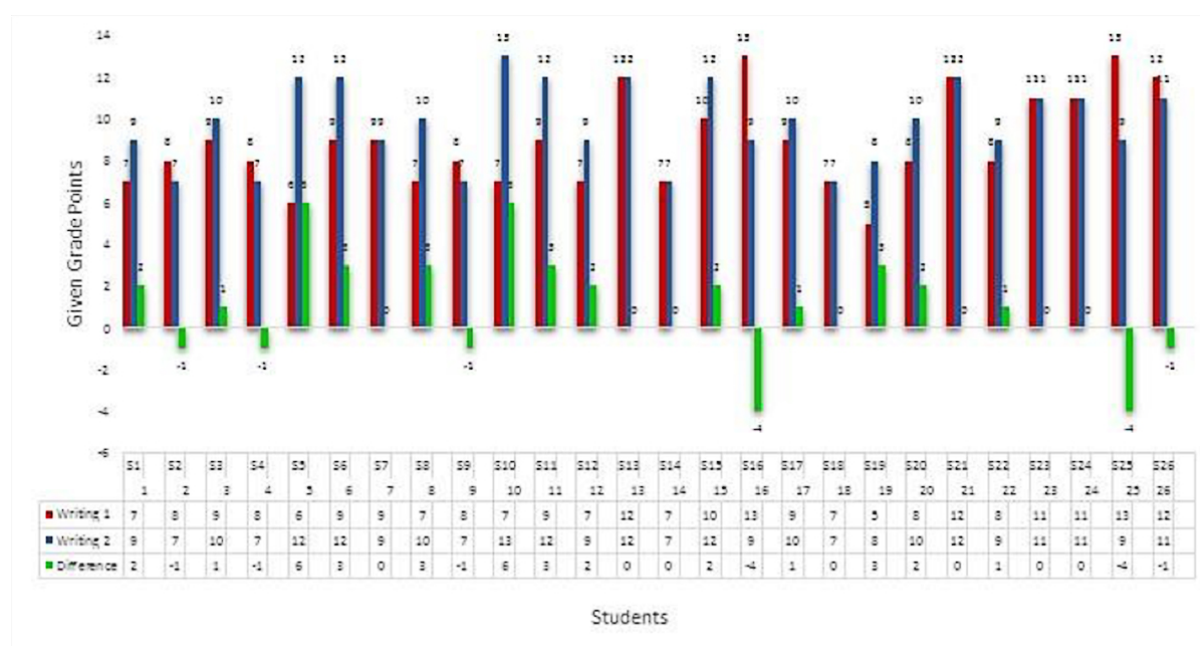


Figure 1: S1 Birmingham-Given Grade Points Difference in Writing 1 and Writing 2.

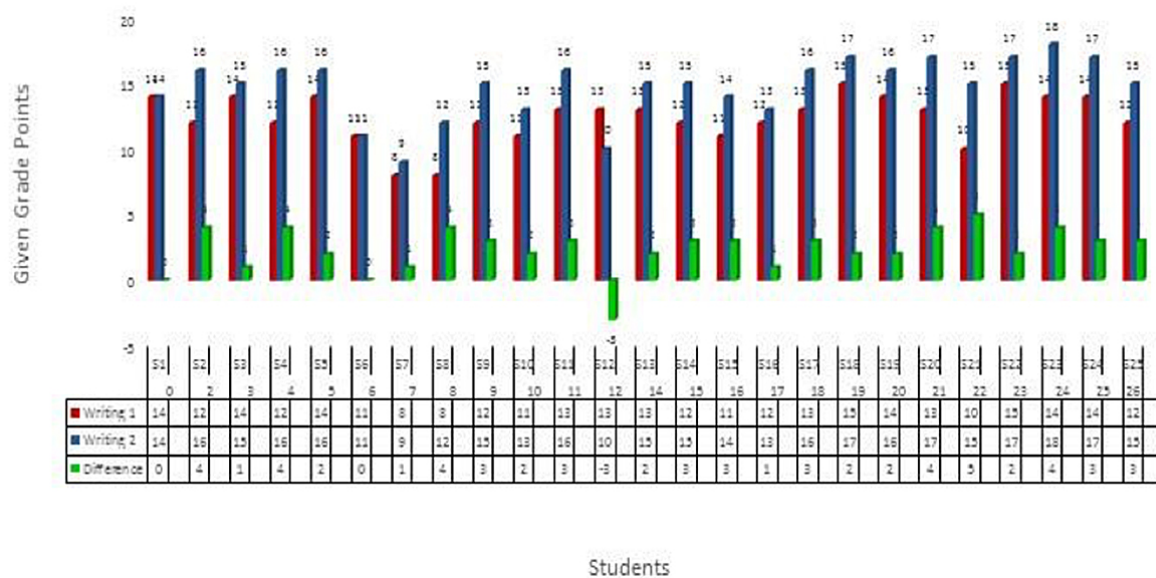


Figure 2: S1 Berlin-Given Grade Points Difference in Writing 1 and Writing 2.

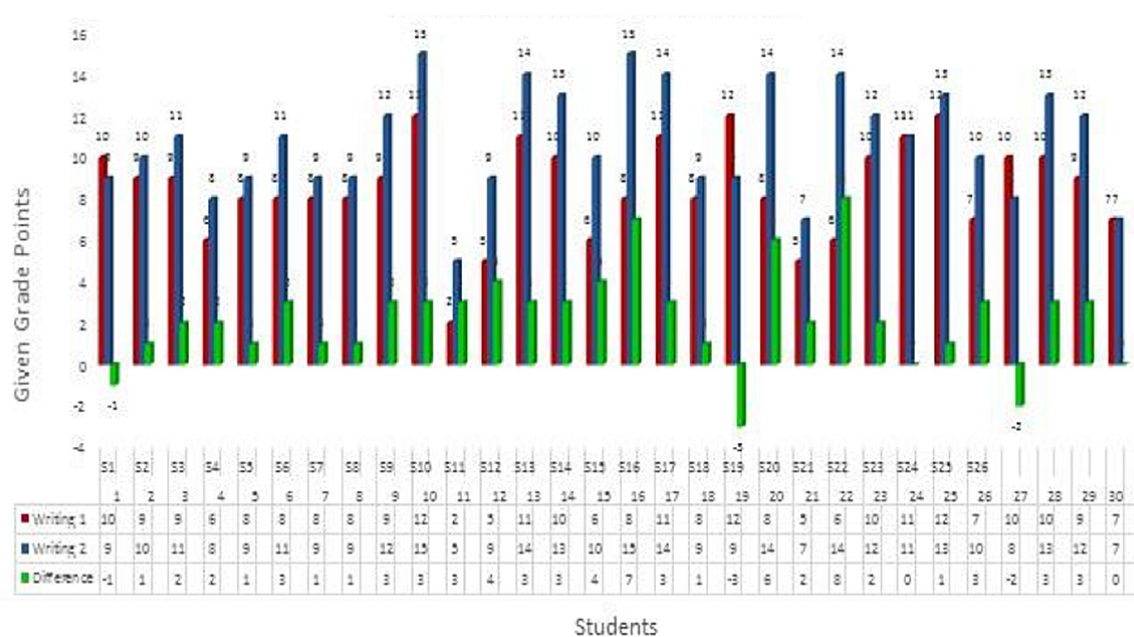


Figure 3: S1 Manchester-Given Grade Points Difference in Writing 1 and Writing 2.

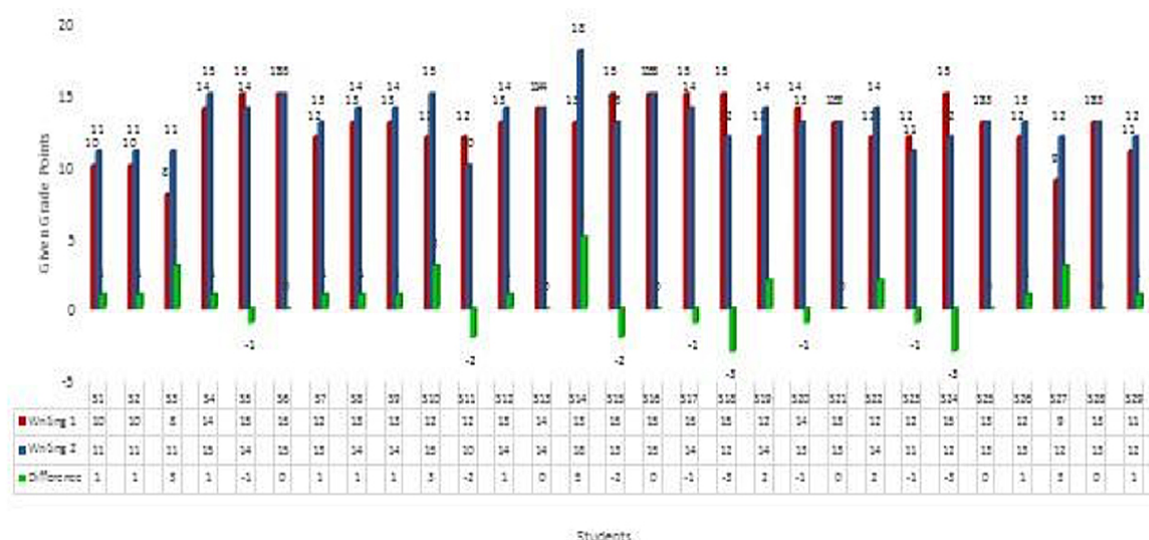


Figure 4: S1 Canberra-Given Grade Points Difference in Writing 1 and Writing 2.

From the research findings, it can be concluded that Google Docs can improve the students' writing skill in writing a descriptive text. This can be seen clearly from their given grade points for Writing 1 and Writing 2. Results show that 74 students showed improvement and enhancement in their writing. They could easily generate ideas and develop their writing. They also improved their sentence structure, organized the text structure properly, chose appropriate vocabulary and used correct capitalization and punctuation.

Questionnaire: Pre-Writing and Post-Writing

Table 9 below shows students' perception on the use of Google Docs and its features. Results elicited from the post questionnaire demonstrated that students' perceptions changed after their writing assignment using Google Docs. From the graph (Figure 5) we can see that the number of students that strongly disagree with using Google Docs had decreased from 6 to 1 student after their writing assignment. Even the students who did not think the features in Google Docs would be helpful to them in their writing tasks had reduced to only 1 student.

One female student specified in the interview that it is a must to use computer technologies in order to be on par with the current world. She thinks using computer technologies helps students because they are already typically computer savvy, so it appeals to their learning interests. However, there is this one student who did not agree with the idea of using computer in learning English. According to him, using computer is very distracting and some students may simply copy and paste their work and they may not learn from it. One male student commented that there must be a balance between using computer technologies and paper-pen writing activities. He asked us to never replace pen-and-paper writing activities.

Table 9: Students' perception on the features in Google Documents in learning English.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Students' perception before the writing assignment. | 36 | 52 | 20 | 6 |
| 2 | Students' perception after the writing assignment | 31 | 61 | 16 | 1 |
| 3 | Students' perception on the features in Google Docs before writing assignment | 31 | 57 | 22 | 4 |
| 4 | Students' perception on the features in Google Docs after writing assignment | 33 | 61 | 14 | 1 |

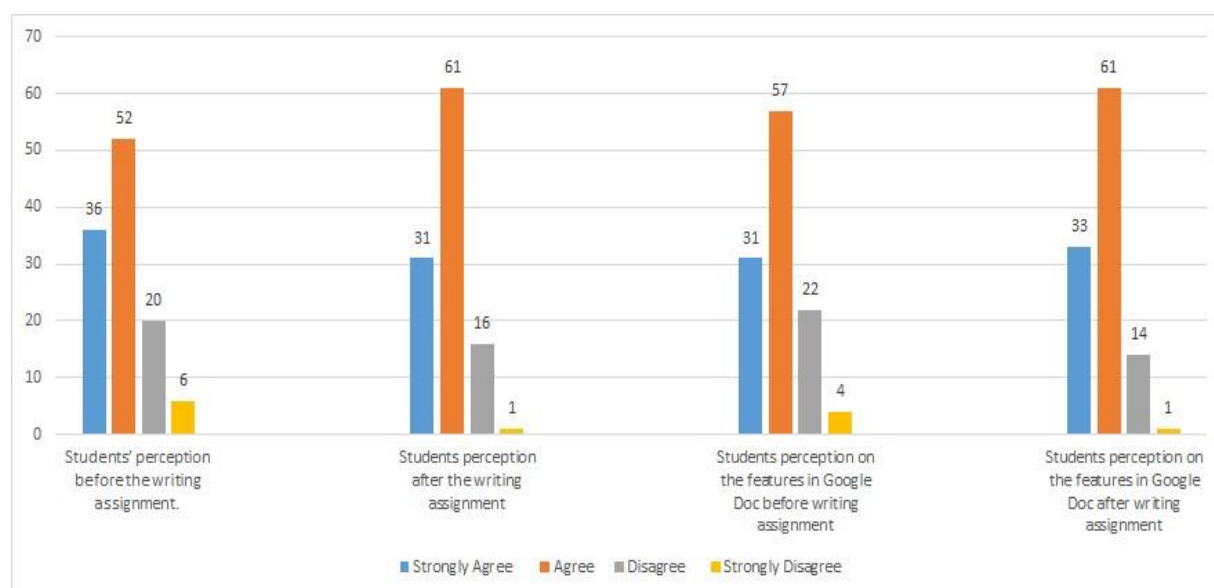


Figure 5: Students' perception on the Google Documents and its features.

Table 10 below shows students' perceptions on the reliability of Google Documents and if they would use it in future for writing tasks. For this part, we found that before the writing assignment 75 students strongly agreed that it is reliable to use Google Documents as their writing tool while an increase of 23 students were found to agree and strongly agree after the writing task using Google Documents (98 students).

In contrast, there were 11 students who still perceived that Google Documents is unreliable even after the writing task using Google Documents. From the interview, we realized that one of the ineffective qualities of Google Documents is the unreliability of the Internet connection and their lagging time.

Table 10: Students' perception on reliability of Google Documents and if they would use it in future for writing tasks.

| | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 5 | Reliability of Google Documents before the writing assignment. | 20 | 55 | 31 | 8 |
| 6 | Reliability of Google Documents after the writing assignment. | 39 | 59 | 10 | 1 |
| 7 | Students' perception on the editing and publishing their work using Google Documents. | 39 | 46 | 27 | 2 |
| 8 | Students' perception on using Google Documents for writing in future. | 34 | 58 | 16 | 1 |

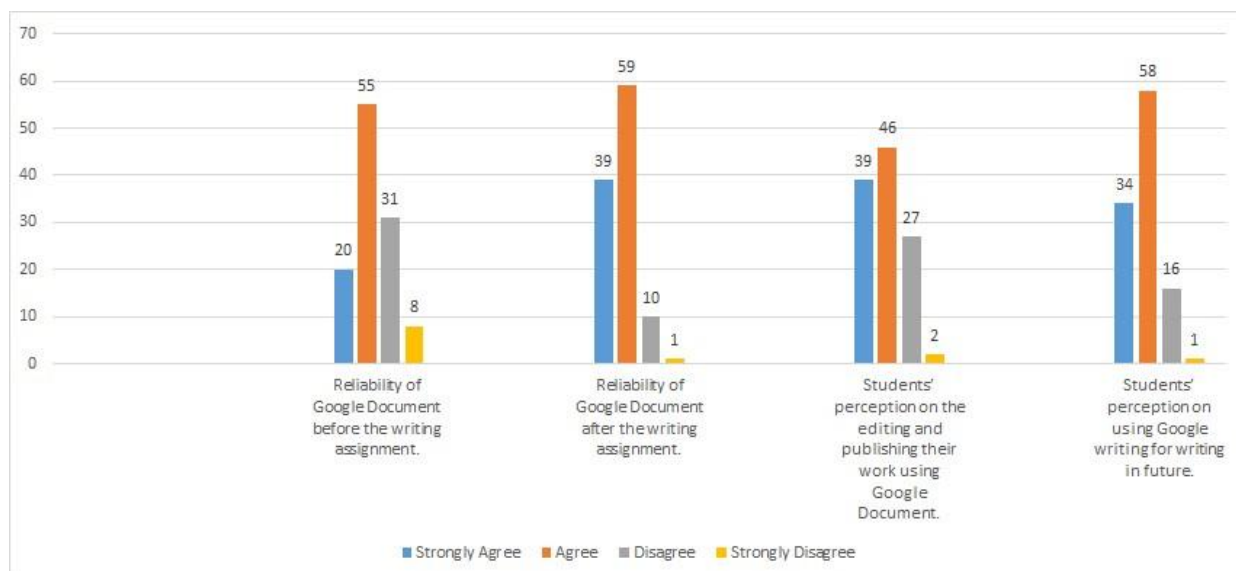


Figure 6: Student's Perception on reliability of Google Documents and if they would use it in future.

Writing 1 and 2

The table below shows the compilation of results of all 4 classes with a total of 109 students. This part of the analysis looks at the given grade point differences between Writing 1 (using pen and paper) and Writing 2 (using Google Documents). There were 5 absentees during the writing 2 session.

Table 11: Grade Points Difference of Writing 1 and Writing 2.

| W1 and W2 difference | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|----------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nb. of students | 2 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 17 | 20 | 16 | 24 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

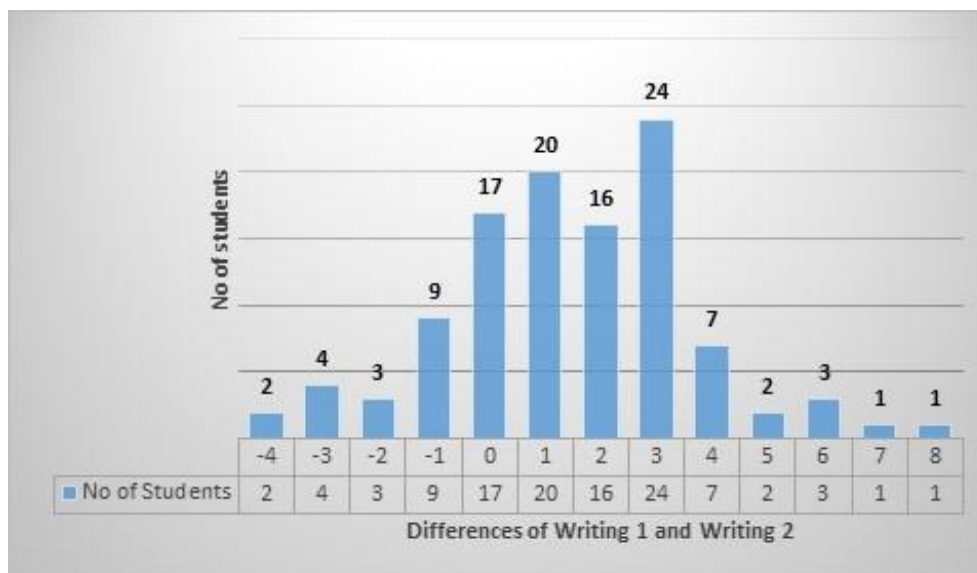


Figure 7: Differences in Writing 1 and Writing 2 Grade Points (109 students).

The bar chart above is used to show a clearer picture of the number of the given grade point differences obtained by students which ranges from negative 4 (-4) to positive 8 (+8). The results show the majority of students have shown improvement in Writing 2, as a total of 74 students scored between 1 to 8 points. From the remaining 35 students, a total of 17 students did not show any improvement or deterioration as they scored 0 points. This situation occurred as students showed progress in some of the writing elements in Writing 1 but did not do as well in Writing 2 and vice versa which produced the result as “0” points. Nevertheless, this does not mean that students in this category did not show any improvement in their writing. For example, Student 7 from S1 Birmingham scored “0” points in “grammar and sentence structure” and 1 point in “spelling” in Writing 1, but scored the maximum points of 3 in spelling and scored 2 points in “grammar and sentence structure” in Writing 2. This shows that the use of Google Docs improved the spelling and grammar usage of this student. However, this student scored only 1 point each in “Ideas” and “Organization” when using Google Docs but scored 3 and 2 points respectively when using “pen and paper”. This shows that some students do not bother to come up with their own ideas as they depend too much on the computers to think for them.

The other 18 students out of 35 students showed deterioration by scoring between -1 to -4 grade points. This was mostly due to poor word choice, missing information and unnecessary usage of the punctuation “comma” (.). For example, in the case of student 12 from S1 Berlin who scored the maximum of 3 points each in “Ideas” and “punctuation” in Writing 1, only scored 1 point each for both these components in Writing 2. This shows that not all students actually perform better when using Google Documents as some students actually write better using pen and paper without any help from computer technology. Furthermore, some students rely on the computer’s intelligence or rather ability to check spelling and grammatical errors

that they fail to check before submission.

The findings also showed that a total of 14 students performed very well in their Writing 2 using Google Documents with a difference of 4 to 8 grade points. This is about 12.85% of students who actually showed a positive impact from the writing activity which was very encouraging. Students were able to use the tools such as spell check, grammar check and facilities like research tools provided in the Google Documents apps to enhance the quality of their writing compared to having to write in the classroom using pen and paper. For instance, students used words like cheerful, optimistic instead of happy and positive to describe their friends' personality. Besides that, there were no spelling errors at all in their writing as they have checked all the spelling errors that were prompted by the Google Documents by underlining them. Teachers also spotted quotes in the conclusion. Students used quotes to conclude their descriptive essay which were not done in paper and pen essay.

More than half of the students fell under the category of 1 to 4 grade point difference, which makes up a total of 60 students (55%), 20 students with 1 point, 16 students with 2 points and 24 students with 3 points. Students in this category have used very good word choice and checked their spelling as well as punctuation using Google Documents before submitting their work. The use of Google Documents via computers has most definitely benefited these students in enhancing the quality of their writing work.

Student Interviews

For further justification and understanding of student's perception, inspiration and attitude towards the use of Google Docs in a writing lesson, interviews with 8 students (selected according to those who scored the highest grade points and the lowest grade points, 2 from each class) were conducted. All 8 students were quite honest and had a positive attitude towards the use of Google Docs as a tool to write better essays. Five students expressed their satisfaction with the Google Docs ability to check errors in their essays (Grammar and Spelling) while one student did show some uncertainty and doubt. Two students were not aware that such tools existed and did not know how to use them. However, the majority of them preferred the use of Google Docs done in moderation of not more than two classes per week as too much would make students too lazy and lose the ability to think for themselves and the writing lesson could become monotonous and boring. Students also expressed their worry of developing the habit of "cut and paste" without control if this issue is not controlled.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research is aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in enhancing students writing. The findings revealed the majority of the participating students favor computer technology in their writing class specifically using Google Docs. It is clear that Google Documents plays an important role in student learning. It is the tool that supports students in learning without being confined to a particular time and place. Students can increase their knowledge by comparing two types of a document thus, increasing understandings of how sentences should be corrected. This was evident in the questionnaires answered by the students. There was even a vast difference in the way they perceived the usefulness of the Google Documents as compared to doing writing in class. Also, there was a significant improvement in the computer based writing task as compared to the in-class paper-pen writing. However, students commented that the infusion of Google Documents writing should be a blend with the classroom writing tasks, in order to create

variation and interest in their learning process.

The most evident limitation of this study is that the data was collected from a group of students studying in a Chinese Independent High School where English is learnt as third language. In Chinese Independent Schools, the main language used for learning is Mandarin and it is compulsory for them to learn Bahasa Malaysia as it is their national language. Due to this, students' proficiency level, syllabus and method of teaching are different from the other educational contexts. So, the same research conducted among students in government schools and other private institutions would probably generate a different finding and conclusion as they learn English as a second language and use more traditional method of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, students were told to use the features of Google Docs for the second writing without any specific measurement on how each student actually used the features of Google Docs. They were monitored randomly as the number of teachers was small compared to the number of participating students. It was 1 teacher for 30 students. Besides, there were also some computer glitches that delayed the students' writing process. Moreover, the participants selected in this study are known to the researcher who happens to teach at the same school which could have affected the interview data which is qualitative. The students involved in this research are of the same age and level, which is Senior One, average students. The same research conducted on different age groups or levels would probably generate a different finding and conclusion.

The implications from the findings support that Google Docs is a useful tool that enables online learning. Nevertheless, the small sample size used might not allow us to generalize across other settings. Hence, the findings should be inferred with care as it may only imply to this population. Furthermore, students were also exposed to other skills such as reading besides writing. Besides, the time constraints could have also triggered different effects on the findings. These issues should be taken into account.

For future studies, further research can be conducted on the effectiveness of classroom writing and collaborative writing via Google Docs in motivating students. Since the majority of the students in this study felt that learning through technology has improved their quality of writing, then getting them to work together beyond the classroom environment would be much easier, time-saving and facilitate students' learning. Other educational technologies can also be used to compare with Google Docs to investigate students' motivation level. Students can acquire lots of support when technology is used more in language classrooms. However, teachers must also remember that students still prefer a balance between the use of technology and classroom teaching so blended learning would be another teaching method that can be explored further to enhance language teaching and learning

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Appendices

1. Students responses to interview questions

Question 1: How do you feel about using Google Documents/computer in learning English?

1. "I think that using Google Documents to do our homework is more better because it can let us more easier to found the . . . to find the things that we don't know by googling. . .".
2. "I like because easy to find information, can use dictionary, other website/ other essays. . . can also checks spelling and grammar. . .".
3. "It is more convenient to look for info . . . , vocabulary to describe someone. . . using new words.
4. "I like it. . . easy to write.
5. "I know how to use computer. So I like to use them to learn. . . I am good in computer. . .".
6. "Internet connection not good. . . always very slow. . . and got problem".

From interview question 1, students had a positive attitude and perception of the use and ability of Google Documents to enhance their writing quality and reduce their time used to look for information.

Question 2: Do you think that learning is taking place when students 'copy and paste' from the internet resources/essays/texts?

1. "Yes, because we can read the text again and again before we 'copy and paste'".
2. "Yes, got some. Can't remember all but helps me to learn how to write an essay. . . in future if I see same essay topic I can write better".
3. "Not so good because not own essay. But I can apply some info into future essays".
4. "Yes, I can learn something and remember the main idea. . .".

From question 2, majority of the students felt that the 'copy and paste' itself is quite helpful as students are exposed to many new words useful in future writings.

Question 3: How often do you want your teachers to incorporate computer technologies in the writing classroom?

1. "We can go to the computer lab sometimes because if we always go and 'copy and paste' always we might learn nothing . . . 1 week can go 2 times".
2. "1 week 1 time is enough. . . I don't like writing. . .".
3. "Once a week. . .".

From interview question 3, students felt that the use of Google Documents should be balanced with in-class writing using pen and paper to avoid boredom.

Question 4: Besides Google Documents can you think of other technologies /programs /software that we can use to learn English?

1. "Facebook. . . we can discuss with friends in English. Read articles or messages sent by friends".

Question 5: What is the positive impact of using Google Documents in writing?

1. “Can learn more vocabulary. . . can use google translate to look for meaning, . . . exam can do better’.
2. “We can share information with friends. We can get information easily, which we can’t get in a classroom learning. If I spell wrongly the computer help me to check. . . also can use the tools like spell checker and research tool. I also refer to other reference and essays”.
3. “Be more creative and faster. . .”.

From interview question 5, students are aware that Google Documents help them with checking spelling and grammar. Students also like the idea having the computer to check for meaning of new words.

Question 6: What are the negative impacts of using Google Documents in writing?

1. “When students ‘copy and paste’ all the time. . .”.
2. “Some students play games when teacher not watching. . . some do homework or watch video from YouTube. I also write slower . . .”.
3. “We will depend on internet too much. . .”.
4. “Cutting and pasting too much is not good. . .”.

From interview question 6, students expressed their concern over the habit of ‘cutting and pasting’ which might become serious if left unchecked. Students also felt that the use of computers and Google Documents could be a source of distraction from the main task of writing such as video from you tube and so on.

2. Pre Writing Questionnaire

| | Pre Writing Questionnaires | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | I enjoy using google drive during English Lesson. | | | | |
| 2 | I would like my teacher to use Google Documents more often in our writing classes. | | | | |
| 3 | I like to use computer to learn English. | | | | |
| 4 | I spend more time learning English when I use computer then when I use books. | | | | |
| 5 | Using Google Documents in writing can help me with my grammar. | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|
| 6 | Using Google Documents in writing can help me with my spelling. | | | | |
| 7 | Using Google Documents in writing classes can help me brainstorm the topic I would be writing about. | | | | |
| 8 | Using Google Documents in writing classes can help me research the topic I will write about. | | | | |
| 9 | I don't like it when I don't know what to write when I am trying to write my essays using paper and pen. | | | | |
| 10 | Using Google drive can give me confidence to publish my written work. | | | | |
| 11 | Using Google Documents in the writing class can help me become an independent learner. | | | | |
| 12 | Using Google Documents can help me to better edit my written work. | | | | |
| 13 | Using Google Documents can help me better revise my written work. | | | | |
| 14 | I tend to write more when I am writing on the google documents. | | | | |
| 15 | I tend to be more relaxed when I am writing on the Google Documents. | | | | |
| 16 | Google Documents cannot be relied on. | | | | |
| 17 | Using Google Documents / drive in the writing class can distract me from staying on task. | | | | |

3. Post Writing Questionnaire

| | Post Writing Questionnaires | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Using the computer in writing class is interesting. | | | | |
| 2 | I feel I've learned more about writing in English from this class than I have from other English classes I've taken in which the computer (Google Documents) was not used. | | | | |
| 3 | I feel I get more individual attention from the teacher in the computer writing class than I do in other, non-computer writing classes. | | | | |
| 4 | I like to use Google Documents better than other ways to write | | | | |
| 5 | I can think of more ideas for my writing when I use Google Documents | | | | |
| 6 | When I use Google Documents on the computer, I pay more attention to what I'm writing about. | | | | |
| 7 | Using Google Documents makes me less worried about writing because I know I can make changes easily. | | | | |
| 8 | The tools in Google Documents helped me a lot in writing essays. | | | | |
| 9 | When I use Google Documents to write my essay, I am more careful about grammar. | | | | |
| 10 | I pay more attention in choosing the right word when I use Google Documents. | | | | |
| 11 | I pay more attention to spelling when I use the computer. | | | | |
| 12 | I pay more attention to organization when I use the computer. | | | | |

| | Post Writing Questionnaires | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 13 | I write longer essays using Google Documents. | | | | |
| 14 | Using Google Documents has helped me to become better at writing in English. | | | | |
| 15 | I would recommend that other students learn to use google drive (Google Documents) to write their papers in English. | | | | |
| 16 | I plan to continue using Google Documents to write my essays after this class is finished. | | | | |
| 17 | I would like to do another essay if I could use Google Documents. | | | | |

4. Grading Rubrics (Grade Points given for writing 1 and 2)

| Marks | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Content/Ideas (I) | Writing and ideas are clear, focused and easy to follow. Has all the important information for a descriptive writing (Physical appearance, characteristics etc.) | Writing and ideas are adequate and can be followed. Has some missing information (1 or 2) | Writing and ideas are difficult to identify and follow. Lacks many important information for a descriptive writing (more than 2) | Writing and ideas are unclear and unfocused |
| Organization/Structure (O) | Sentences and paragraphs are clear, well-structured and well-organized (Intro, Body, Conclusion) Clear transition | Structure is present but order and transition in sentences and paragraphs are unclear | Lacks sufficient structure or transitions in sentences and paragraphs. (Missing Intro/Body/Conclusion) | Little to no structure and transitions are apparent |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Word Choice (W) | Accurate, specific and appropriate words are used (More than 5) | Adequate use of appropriate word choice (3 to 5) | Inadequate use of word choice (1 or 2) | Little attempt to choose words wisely or carefully |
| Spelling (S) | No spelling errors | One or two spelling errors | Three or four spelling errors | Numerous spelling errors |
| Grammar/ Sentence structure (G/S) | No grammar or sentence structure errors | One or two grammar or sentence structure errors | Three or four grammar or sentence structure errors | Numerous grammar or sentence structure errors |
| Punctuation/ Capitalization (P/C) | No errors | One or two errors | Three or four errors | Numerous errors |

5. Marking/Grading Template

| | Name: Class : S1 Berlin | | Idea | Organization/ structure | Word Choice | Spelling | Grammar/ Sentence structure | Punctuation/ capitalization | Total | Diff |
|---|-------------------------------|----|------|----------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|------|
| 1 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 6 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | W1 | | | | | | | | |
| | | W2 | | | | | | | | |

Note: W1: Writing 1 using pen and paper Documents

W2: Writing 2 using Google

6. Interview Questions

Question 1: How do you feel about using Google Documents/computer in learning English?

Question 2: Do you think that learning is taking place when students' copy and paste' from the Internet resources/essays/texts?

Question 3: How often do you want your teachers to incorporate computer technologies in the writing classroom?

Question 4: Besides Google Documents can you think of other technologies/programs /software that we can use to learn or improve? English?

Question 5: What is the positive impact of using Google Documents in writing?

Question 6: What are the negative impacts of using Google Documents in writing?



How Effective is Interactive Learning? Investigating Japanese University Students' Language Patterns in a Collaborative Writing Task

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Abstract

According to Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman (2011), we use a language with others as a form of shared cognition, and in the process we scaffold each other. This action research investigates how students' online written output affects each other's writing. One thousand twenty online entries written by 21 Japanese university sophomore English majors were collected and analysed, specifically focusing on changes in two linguistic features: subject-verb agreement, L1 use and variant L1 spelling in L2 writing. First, all 21 students accessed a specific Social Network Service (SNS). For two months, each student took turns offering a discussion topic with a minimum of 150 words, and the rest of the class members commented online with a minimum of 20 words. The task resulted in 54 topic strands. Each student was tracked to see if his/her language use reflected the output of others. Then the linguistic developmental patterns were further investigated in a post-treatment interview. It was discovered that students lacking confidence in English learning are less likely to imitate and internalize from others. The study suggests that, in addition to scaffolding provided by peers, positively affecting the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is closely related to affective domains that give rise to particular identity formation. This paper therefore argues that the extent of languaging is significantly influenced by affective factors.

Keywords: Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); English as a Foreign Language (EFL); writing; Japanese students, returnees/non-returnees; Social Network Service (SNS)

Introduction

In order to see how an interactive interface affects foreign language learners, this study examined the impact of Social Networking Systems (SNS) (in this case MySpace) on EFL writing from a socio-cultural perspective. The following two areas of difficulties that Japanese learners have in acquiring certain English features are examined:

1. Subject-verb agreement with the pronoun “everyone/everybody” which indicates a plural construct while it is singular.
2. Particular vocabularies which do not readily translate into English and their orthographic form.

The scope of this paper will be restricted to the discussions on morpho-syntactic development and lexical use in L2 among Japanese returnees and non-returnees.

The distinction between returnees and non-returnees is important, as it is often noted how returnees, who have experience living abroad, display L2 fluency whereas non-returnees' strengths are accuracy and grammatical knowledge in L2 (Sakamoto & Honda, 2008). It was hoped that this online exercise would positively affect students, as both the returnees and non-returnees will be able to scaffold each other using their strengths. In addition, SNS provides a forum for teachers to display appropriate and desirable interactive patterns and language use in the hope that students adopt and use the new patterns and forms themselves.

However, it is hypothesized that, while most would benefit from an online writing task (cf. Braine, 1997; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), not all would. By tracing learners' changes in daily online writing, how the linguistic features in (i) and (ii) remain persistent or are corrected due to particular interaction(s) afforded by the SNS is investigated. The present study focuses in particular on two students who display insightful characteristics of “good language learners” (i.e., those who are responsive to others' writing and successfully acquire/change their vocabulary and writing style), and two students whose writing qualities do not improve from interactive online exchanges. It is hypothesized that learning is not always guaranteed in all interactions, as learner's emotional state influences the possibilities afforded by the ZPD (Swain, 2013). In this case an imagined, perceived-self that the learner has co-constructed for him/herself through interactions with others affects acquisition of linguistic features.

Literature Review

Social interaction can be described in different ways, and this paper explores social interaction from three perspectives: technological, sociocultural, and affective.

Social Media and the Evolution of Online Interaction

Through computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC; Warschauer et al., 1996), exemplified in the wide popularity of social networking and social media, the interactive patterns of language learners have altered (Thorne & Smith, 2011). These communication technologies afford interactions outside of class (Sakamoto & Honda, 2008; Sakamoto & Honda, 2009; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). This affordance (i.e., “an opportunity for use or interaction presented by some object or state of affairs to an agent” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 22) has fundamentally transformed human interaction (Warschauer, 2005; Thorne & Smith, 2011), and thus the way languages are learned. Online informal peer

feedback is suggested to foster affective dimensions in language learning by providing a collaborative, unobtrusive forum for students to explore language use (Villamil & Guerrero, 1996; Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a; Hyland & Hyland, 2006b), and thus positively impacting the quality of writing amongst language learners. With a “real” audience as a community, CMC provides a forum for purposeful, meaning-focused writing. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) state:

Learning is not the taking in of linguistic forms by learners, but the constant adaptation of their linguistic resources in the service of meaning-making in response to the affordances that emerge in the communicative situation, which is, in turn, affected by learner’s adaptability (p. 135).

It was hoped that CMC in this study would provide a forum for a communicative situation that demanded this meaning-making process that fostered language growth.

In addition, a CMC forum can further help to create a safe environment by prohibiting non-members of the group to have access to the forum. CMC not only enhances language learning (Warschauer, 2005), but it also brings people together. Each learner is not a mere passive consumer of information but an active and autonomous agent who seeks to link and negotiate with others (Warschauer, 2005). The teacher’s traditional role as an authoritative figure is changed and his/her role becomes that of being a facilitator, one of the collaborators (Dippold, 2009, p. 34) participating in the meaning-making task online.

In Asian classrooms, students tend to be quiet and shy (Hammond, 2007). By introducing a CMC platform, the social climate of language learning may be enhanced (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b), leading to a sense of community in the classroom (Warschauer, 2005). The fear of losing face is also a grave issue in the process of language learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b), especially for Asian students (Hammond, 2007). In order to sustain a particular self-image in a semi-public forum, it is crucial that the students remain confident of their written work. For example, Sotillo (2000) found that ESL students write more syntactically complex sentences when they are engaged in asynchronous discussions. The asynchronicity of CMC allows the writers to spend ample time composing ideas and reformulating text, having opportunities to reflect on and incorporate their and others’ ideas (Hewings & Coffin, 2006; Lea, 2001; Light et al., 1997; Wilson & Whitelock, 1998) in their new text.

Finally, once the written work is uploaded, the CMC forum provides updated and symmetrical exchanges among the participants (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). This is an important feature compared to the traditional forms of feedback provision, as it speeds up the pace of interaction among the participants, thus contributing to intensive, meaningful exchanges which in turn contribute to the faster establishment of collaborative community. As the aim of the study is to track the interactive patterns among the Japanese EFL learners in two months, active exchanges in written mode, documented via CMC, provided an ideal forum for investigation.

Language Learning and Socialization

Writing is not a solitary but a social activity; from a sociocultural theoretical perspective, our linguistic creations are the ventriloquated version of those which have been created in the past (Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, language learners are socialized to be writers, and it is hypothesized that a safe writing environment serves to enhance the quality of student writing

by affording peer feedback in spontaneous and supportive ways. How this is done is investigated by adopting a socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1981), specifically describing the social shaping of writing via online interaction, focusing on particular morpho-syntactic and lexical features. That is, language learning via an online task is appreciated and understood as action embedded in a particular sociocultural context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This particular sociocultural context lends itself to the shaping of a particular learning.

Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural development holds that higher forms of thinking appear twice, on two different "planes": first on the intermental plane –that is, between individuals or between an individual and a mediating artifact–, and the second on the intramental plane – internalization by the individual. This dynamic internalization process is reflected in the term "languaging" (Swain et al., 2011) where we *language* with others as a form of shared cognition. In more specific terms, this internalization process is a "historical" one (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 50) in which what is internalized is determined by the past experiences of the learner. That is, the learner's ontological and microgenetic development contained in particular sociocultural settings give rise to a particular learning outcome. This in turn implies that the experience of the present determines the future developmental trajectory. In essence, the quality of past interactions shapes the development of the present, and in turn the present interaction shapes the future development. Therefore, provision of abundant fruitful interaction is indispensable in learning.

Bakhtin (1981) also notes that our learning entails the incorporation of the language of others, a concept he describes as "ventriloquism":

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention (p. 293).

Similarly, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) note that they deem:

[. . .] language use as a property of the discourse and not of individuals, with individuals only having latent potential for language use until they realize this in a discourse environment (p. 21).

If this were the case, then in a semi-public forum where learners can share their writings and where the instructor can provide a native-speaker (NS) model, the potential to expand one's language repertoire is immense. Similarly, Warschauer (2005) also acknowledges that CMC can provide insights into

[. . .] how learners incorporate others' linguistics chunks (phrases, collocations, etc.) in CMC . . . and also how they refine their writing for, and with input from, an authentic audience (pp. 42–43).

Furthermore, according to socio-cultural theorists, a learner can display two levels of performance (Vygotsky, 1981, 1986). One is performance by the individual alone; the other is a higher-order performance by the same individual but assisted by another, a process known as *scaffolding*. This notion of two sets of display of knowledge is often referred to as the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). By comparing the two, it is possible to determine the capacity in which an individual can benefit from interaction and mediation provided. This degree of capacity to detect and incorporate useful information for completing tasks

represents the person's cognitive abilities (Vygotsky, 1981). It is further argued that ZPD can be easily altered by affective factors (Swain, 2013), given the inseparable relationship between cognition and affect (See also Damasio, 1999). Vygotsky (1986) contends that:

[. . .] intellect and affect. Their separation as subjects of study is a major weakness of traditional psychology, since it makes the thought process appear as an autonomous flow of “thoughts thinking themselves,” segregated from the fullness of life, from the personal needs and interests, the inclinations and impulses, of the thinker (p. 10).

This can be interpreted to mean that the ZPD is allowed to enact most fully when free from emotional inhibitions. Similarly, students under stress can exhibit difficulties in learning, as the ZPD is not fully enacted. ZPD is neither pre-determined nor static; it is a *phenomenon* and a degree in a *continuum* that is dependent on specific context and the learner. While interaction is always described to be conducive to learning in sociocultural theory, I argue here that the very visible, public nature of interaction could adversely affect the learner emotionally and thus inhibit the full enactment of ZPD. This interpretation makes sense when one thinks about defining possible “endpoints” of ZPD. ZPD is not just about what the learner could do with or without scaffolding. Even if you were to pair the same individuals to perform the same task, if the affective domain is altered, the ZPD that would emerge out of interactions would be very different. ZPD is appreciated as a combination of a set of repertoire that could be called upon when tapped accordingly, as well as an emergent ability that is co-constructed within an interaction (Swain, 2013). This tapping and emergence are facilitated by scaffolding; something that could be inhibited by affect.

Forming, Negotiating, and Assigning of Identity

While online interaction can afford positive outcomes (Villamil & Guerrero, 1996; Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a; Hyland & Hyland, 2006b), any learning involves complex mechanisms that are susceptible to affective factors. Novice learners become members of a community, more specifically a “legitimate peripheral participant” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and learning through apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1995). Through guidance provided by more capable community members, they accrue skills, knowledge and expertise that lead them to full membership in the community, and also actively construct a new identity, or rather “co-construct” their identity with fellow community members.

Specifically, Wenger (1998) explains how we form identities via three different socialization processes: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement is becoming involved in actual social activities, and as a result a particular identity is negotiated and formed. However, our identities can also be a product of our imagination; a more expanded interpretation of our sense of self that transcends time and space. This results from the accumulation of the past and present experiences that give way to a particular imagined self. Finally, alignment is a mode of belonging in which an individual attempts to tailor one's identity as to fit in with the broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises. In addition to this notion, Wenger (1998) also proposes that one's identity is not only the result of participation in communities of practice but also non-participation. The manner of a person's engagement in a community, the produced imagined self, and the particular constraints posed by the group activity cause individuals to react with participation or non-participation. Therefore, the extent of non-participation is as important as the degree of participation in communities of practice.

Moreover, Wenger (1998) notes that identity involves identification and negotiation. Identification is a process of participation and becoming, one we perform both participative and reificative process that we do to both ourselves and others. It is “relational and experiential, subjective and collective” (p. 191) and a “layering of participation and reification” (p. 193). This identification can be challenged or questioned, leading to new identification. Wenger claims that this process, negotiation, compliments the identity formation process. By negotiating, our social positions can be defined in social configurations.

Furthermore, Duff and Talmy (2011) remind us that L2 learners may willingly withdraw from participation: they may face opposition from others; may not be fully invested in learning L2; may want to retain a distinct identity; for practical reasons may be unwilling to meet community expectations and L2 demands; may feel conflicted about becoming a new L2 community member (pp. 97–98). However, in addition, my interpretation is that in many cases the learners “do” wish to become part of the L2 community, but are fearful and immobilized because they have created for themselves an imagined self-identity that hinders full community participation. This creation is the result of having participated in interactions with fellow peers.

The notions of participation/non-participation, modes of belonging as well as identification and negotiation allow us to appreciate the complexities involved in identity formation, and how these factors could impact learning. We are challenged to intervene in the construction of undesirable imagined community and imagined identity. In order to do so, socialization patterns of learners and their effects on learning need to be documented and explored. This study attempts to trace development in ESL writing and in the process identify who benefits and who does not, and explore possible ways to intervene positively in reversing negative self-perception.

Research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How do students respond to the writing of others? Specifically, are there cases of learning vocabulary or grammar having been exposed to other writings, detected via imitation?
2. Are certain morpho-syntactic and lexical items more difficult to address and rectify than others?
3. Do all students show similar pattern of development? If not, do returnees and non-returnees show distinct differences?
4. Do all students benefit from online writing tasks? If not, does it have to do with returnee/non-returnee distinction?
5. What are the reasons for negative/non-response to interactions promoted via online writing, if any?
6. Does online writing affect students’ identity formation as a writer? If so, in what ways? Specifically, does affective domain influence students’ writing performance, in turn impacting their identity formation?

Methodology

Participants

Twenty-one Japanese sophomore English-majors at a private university in Tokyo and their instructor participated in this study. The participants in this study are composed of five non-returnees (all females) and 16 returnees (five males and 11 females) from various countries. Their personal background information, including information about time spent abroad, was collected at the beginning of the term. In participating in the online journal activity, the students were asked to select a name of their choice. Some chose a pseudonym but others kept their first names. In order to assure anonymity, the first names have been replaced with a pseudonym.

Data Collection

There are two sets of data in this study: online writing and interview transcripts. First, the group engaged in a daily English journal-writing task via the online social networking service (SNS) MySpace five times a week (i.e., Monday to Friday, except holidays) for approximately two and a half months, from April 20th to July 1st. The task resulted in 54 topic strands (ranging from topics such as plans for college years, way to reduce stress, way to bounce back from a setback, how to overcome shyness, and Japanese English education), and 1,020 entries in total. Each student took turns providing a topic of his/her choice for discussion (the schedule was pre-determined by the instructor). The individual posted a topic by 5pm the day it was assigned, while the rest of the class members were to respond by 1pm the following day. In total, each participant was responsible for setting up two topics during the duration of the task. In order to guarantee a certain length to their writing, topic entries were to be a minimum of 150 words and responses a minimum of 20 words. Furthermore, in order to prohibit access from outside, the entries were made within a community designated only for the purpose of journal writing among this particular group. This created a safe writing environment for the participants. Conveniently, MySpace features documented the exact time of the entry upload, and ordered the contributions made according to the time of upload. These features were crucial to determine the flow of the interaction among the participants, and the archived nature of all entries facilitated data collection and analysis.

Upon completion of the online writing task and after the online transcripts were analyzed (i.e., October), all subjects were invited to share orally in class their reaction towards the task. Specifically, they were asked, “What did you think of online journal writing?” and the students took turns to comment. There was no time limit to respond, although most students spoke only briefly (i.e., five minutes or so). They were allowed to give comments in English or Japanese, but all chose to respond in Japanese. The interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Lastly, at the end of the semester, in a form of a course evaluation (Appendix A), a post-treatment questionnaire was also administered which asked the students to share their views on the class assignments they had completed that semester. In order to elicit honest feedback from all participants, the questionnaires were completed anonymously. In the questionnaire, no emphasis was made on the journal writing task itself; it was to see if the students would specifically mention the online task, and if so, in what capacity. As a result, 17 responses were collected. All students were also invited to comment on the task online via MySpace at

the end of the semester. Comments collected online were not anonymous. All comments were provided in English.

Method of Analysis

All journal entries were compiled into one large Microsoft Word file, and then analyzed as follows:

- 1) Grammatical/spelling errors as well as Japanese entries were identified by going through all entries;
- (2) Identified common errors made by the participants based on (1);
- (3) In order to capture every moment the error is made, the items identified in (2) above made up nodes for NVivo and were searched for all occasions where the errors were made;
- (4) Based on (3), each error was examined to see what the student did to the error (i.e., whether he/she retained it or revised it).

Results

One important finding was that in some instances a form of scaffolding was discovered in peer interaction, wherein novice learners quickly internalized the features shared by the advanced learners, including the instructor, who used the forum as an opportunity to provide model sentences. This includes corrections in spelling, word usage, and grammar.

Morpho-Syntactic and Lexical Development

The following are the results obtained from the analysis of the two items that were explored in detail. The two items were specifically selected because i) they were easy to detect and ii) the varied use was prevalent compared to other features. All instances of the words “everyone” and “everybody” was detected in the writings. As for detecting all the words for “gasshuku” (retreat), “gogatsu-byo” (May syndrome) and ‘kyoshoku’ (teacher training), the threads containing the topics on retreat, May syndrome and teacher training were checked for all occurrences and noted in the order of appearance.

1. The Use of Singular/Plural Verb with the Pronouns “Everyone” and “Everybody”

First, all entries containing the words “everyone” and “everybody” were identified (See Table 1). Then, to see if the verbs used are singular or plural, only those that are used in the present form were extracted (Many students used the word with “hello” as part of a salutation (“Hello everyone!”), and in these cases the pronoun use was dismissed). Of the 37 entries, only six contained plural verb instead of singular, and these were dispersed instead of appearing in series. In addition, two students make the error twice whereas the error is only found once with others:

Table 1. Progression of the use of the words everyone/everybody with a singular verb.



= plural form used instead of singular

| No. | Date & Time | Name (Pseudonym) | Singular verb? |
|-----|-----------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | April 23, 23:29 | Azami | Yes |
| 2 | April 24, 10:37 | Daisuke | Yes |
| 3 | April 29, 2:50 | Jun | No |
| 4 | April 30, 5:54 | Natsuko | Yes |
| 5 | May 1, 7:48 | Tomomi | Yes |
| 6 | May 1, 16:22 | Jun | No |
| 8 | May 1, 19:43 | Azami | Yes |
| 9 | May 1, 20:41 | Eriko | Yes |
| 10 | May 1, 23:09 | Tomoko | Yes |
| 11 | May 2, 6:01 | Natsuko | No |
| 12 | May 2, 15:46 | Aki | Yes |
| 13 | May 2, 4:46 | Daisuke | Yes |
| 14 | May 12, 10:04 | Tomoko | Yes |
| 15 | May 13, 15:15 | Mitzi | Yes |
| 16 | May 19, 1:21 | Yurika | Yes |
| 17 | May 19, 16:24 | Tomomi | Yes |
| 18 | May 19, 20:22 | Daisuke | Yes |
| 19 | May 20, 15:55 | Shiba | Yes |
| 20 | May 21, 12:35 | Natsuko | No |
| 21 | May 21, 23:24 | Eriko | Yes |
| 22 | May 23, 11:44 | Tomomi | Yes |
| 23 | May 25, 15:14 | Misaki | Yes |
| 24 | May 27, 14:01 | Nana | Yes |
| 25 | May 28, 18:40 | Shino | Yes |
| 26 | June 1, 22:00 | Eriko | Yes |
| 27 | June 2, 21:05 | Tomomi | Yes |
| 28 | June 9, 15:48 | Mitzi | Yes |
| 29 | June 9, 21:22 | Saori | Yes |
| 30 | June 10, 1:27 | Kaz | No |
| 31 | June 10, 10:55 | Minami | Yes |
| 32 | June 12, 11:52 | Shiba | Yes |
| 33 | June 12, 20:25 | Daisuke | No |
| 34 | June 13, 11:27 | Minami | Yes |
| 35 | June 24, 23:00 | Yurika | Yes |
| 36 | June 26, 20:55 | Kaz | Yes |
| 37 | June 29, 2:08 | Tomoko | Yes |

Despite abundant availability of the correct singular form, all entries by Jun (No. 3 and 6) and Natsuko (No. 11 and 20), who are both returnees, persist in the plural form. This might suggest that the two are focusing largely on meaning and not necessarily on form. In addition, Daisuke, who is also a returnee, displays the correct form for the first three entries (i.e., No. 2, 13, 18) and uses the incorrect form in his last entry (No. 33). Hence, the only one who manages to correct his/her form is Kaz (returnee), who first wrongly uses the plural form

(No. 30) and exercises correct use in his last entry a week later (No. 36). This suggests that noticing and incorporating correct form does not occur for all learners, and this might reflect the meaning-focused nature of the task.

2. The Japanese Words “gasshuku” (retreat), “gogatsu-byo: (May syndrome) and “kyoshoku” (teacher training) which do not readily translate into English.

The Japanese word “gasshuku” means “retreat”, as in *summer retreat*. In Japan, as part of their club activities, students often go away for a few days in order to concentrate on practice.

There were 25 entries that included the expressions for the word “retreat” (See Table 2). The one who begins the use of “gasshuku” is Tomomi (returnee), on April 22nd with a slightly deviant spelling “gasshyuku” (extra “y”). The word use is quickly picked up by Nana (non-returnee) on April 28th with Tomomi's original spelling “gasshuku”. Three students quickly follow with the same spelling. Interestingly, Tomomi re-emerges on May 1st, this time with the same spelling as others (no “y”). However, with the re-introduction of “gasshyuku” (extra “y”) led by Aki (returnee), Tomomi's spelling reverts back to her original form used on June 11th. At one point, the word even appears in Kanji, the Chinese characters used in Japanese, by two students Nana (non-returnee) and Minami (returnee) in the midst of the thread on May 18th and 19th, but it quickly reverts back to the romanized form. Unfortunately, none of the learners offers the English translation “retreat” and the use of Japanese vocabulary persists throughout the journal task.

Table 2. The use of Japanese word for retreat (The same spelling shaded with the same colour).

| No. | Date & Time | Name (Pseudonym) | Entry |
|-----|-----------------|------------------|----------|
| 1 | April 22, 23:19 | Tomomi | Gassyuku |
| 2 | April 30, 5:54 | Natsuko | Gasshuku |
| 3 | April 30, 23:28 | Che | “ |
| 4 | April 30, 23:55 | Shiba | “ |
| 5 | May 1, 0:32 | Yurika | “ |
| 6 | May 1, 7:20 | Tomomi | “ |
| 7 | May 1, 9:53 | Minami | “ |
| 8 | May 8, 6:48 | Natsuko | “ |
| 9 | May 8, 14:55 | Shiba | “ |
| 10 | May 9, 2:51 | Misaki | Gassyuku |
| 11 | May 12, 4:46 | Daisuke | Gasshuku |
| 12 | May 18, 13:45 | Nana | 合宿 |
| 13 | May 18, 14:31 | Daisuke | Gasshuku |
| 14 | May 18, 20:15 | Kozu | “ |
| 15 | May 18, 23:27 | Yuka | “ |
| 16 | May 18, 23:28 | Che | “ |
| 17 | May 19, 1:21 | Yurika | “ |
| 18 | May 19, 9:09 | Minami | 合宿 |
| 19 | May 21, 23:56 | Tomomi | Gasshuku |
| 20 | June 11, 15:40 | Aki | Gassyuku |
| 21 | June 11, 16:22 | Yurika | “ |
| 22 | June 11, 18:01 | Tomomi | “ |

| | | | |
|----|----------------|---------|----------|
| 23 | June 20, 7:49 | Tomoko | Gashuku |
| 24 | June 23, 15:12 | Tomomi | Gassyuku |
| 25 | June 23, 19:13 | Daisuke | Gasshuku |

Another difficult word to come up with an English translation was the word “gogatsu-byo”. The word “gogatsu-byo”, which literally translates as “May sickness”, refers to the depression students often encounter in May, after experiencing an exciting but turbulent beginning of the academic year in April. Since this phenomenon is unique to Japan, the learners are often at a loss as to find the best English expression for the word “gogatsu-byo”.

As for “gogatsu-byo”, there is an attempt to provide the correct English translation by some students (See Table 3). Of the four entries that include the word, Nana (non-returnee) first begins to use the word in a romanized form on April 28th. Then, it is followed by Kozu (non-returnee) who provides the expression “May disease” on May 8th, and by Azami (returnee) who uses the expression “May syndrome” on May 18th. However, the word lastly appears in the Kanji form by Yuka (non-returnee) on May 18th.

Table 3. The use of Japanese word for “May syndrome”.

| No. | Date & Time | Name (Pseudonym) | Entry |
|-----|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1 | April 28, 11:23 | Nana | Gogatsu-byo |
| 2 | May 8, 6:12 | Kozu | May disease |
| 3 | May 18, 14:54 | Azami | May syndrome |
| 4 | May 18, 23:27 | Yuka | 五月病 |

In sum, the provision of the English expression seems to be noticed and appreciated by some (e.g., Azami [returnee]) but not by all (e.g., Yuka [non-returnee]).

Finally, the word “kyoshoku” (teaching practicum) appeared in 12 entries (See Table 4). Again, as in the above, Kozu (non-returnee) offers the English translation “teaching courses” but despite her efforts, the romanized form is persistently used with slightly different spellings.

Table 4. The use of Japanese word for “teacher licensing courses” (The same spelling shaded with the same colour).

| No. | Date & Time | Name (Pseudonym) | Entry |
|-----|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 | May 26, 13:49 | Arisa | kyoshoku |
| 2 | May 26, 17:15 | Shino | kyosyoku |
| 3 | May 26, 17:46 | Kozu | Teaching courses |
| 4 | May 26, 18:53 | Daisuke | kyoshoku |
| 5 | May 26, 19:07 | Che | kyoushoku |
| 6 | May 26, 19:50 | Azami | kyoshoku |
| 7 | May 26, 21:23 | Saori | kyousyoku |
| 8 | May 26, 21:38 | Shiba | kyoshoku |
| 9 | May 26, 23:58 | Yurika | kyosyoku |
| 10 | May 27, 6:12 | Tomomi | kyoshoku |
| 11 | May 27, 7:47 | Tomoko | kyo-shoku |
| 12 | May 27, 9:29 | Misaki | kyousyoku |

Arisa (returnee) begins by using “kyoshoku” on May 26th, immediately followed by Shino (non-returnee) with the same spelling. Kozu (non-returnee) makes an attempt to offer an English expression, but the romanized version reappears immediately after. The spelling deviates to “kyoushoku” (extra “u”) which is ignored by Azami (returnee) but picked up by one student, then reverting quickly back to “kyoshoku” (no “u”) for four consecutive entries. However, the use ends with “kyoushoku” (with “u”).

In sum, despite correct English interventions, the learners seem to adhere to the Japanese word spelled idiosyncratically. This might imply that Japanese concepts once represented by Japanese words are difficult to alter with a mere one-time exposure to the target form.

Establishment of a Sense of Collegial Community

In addition to perfecting one’s English language knowledge, the writing task created an amicable atmosphere amongst the group. The exercise not only allowed the instructor to monitor and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the students’ writing skills but simultaneously provided a forum from which the instructor established a rapport with each student on a personal level.

The post-treatment questionnaire revealed that 13 students found the activity to be valuable, some citing that it did help their L2 to improve.

Post-Treatment Interview

A post-treatment group interview was conducted in October of the same year. In class, the students were asked to share reactions about the online writing assignment (i.e., “What did you think of MySpace journal writing?”). Each student took approximately five minutes to comment. The entire session was audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The entire session was in Japanese, and the following English translations are that of the researcher's.

Reluctance to Imitate

The most prevalent notion that was shared among the participants was their reluctance to copy others. For example, Shino (non-returnee) states:

Since I don’t have a positive image towards imitating, I hesitated to use the vocabulary and idioms that others used immediately, like the next day, and didn’t use them because I felt intimidated to do so.

Azami (returnee) similarly commented:

If I write after reading everybody’s comments, I unconsciously use vocabulary that was used [in the comments], and when I was writing before uploading [onto the computer] I realized how it looked similar to somebody else’s, and I rewrote what I’d written.

Other participants such as Natsuko (returnee) and Tomomi (returnee) also expressed their resistance toward imitating, expressing their discomfort in using the expressions as is.

Imitation, according to Vygotsky, is “the process through which socioculturally constructed forms of mediation are internalized” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 166), an integral part of learning and development. However, for the participants, imitation is a mere “copying” of what the others have written, perhaps a deeply ingrained social perception common not just in Japan in various cultures that ascribes imitation an undesirable, negative connotation as in plagiarism.

Identifying Oneself as a Non-Returnee

However, the sentiments of the students are not so simplistic. Misaki (non-returnee) expressed her reluctance to learn from others because she does not necessarily feel on a par with her fellow classmates, such as with Eriko, an American-born student who has experienced a prolonged stay abroad: Misaki discloses:

For example, I admire someone like Eriko who can use expressions that are characteristic of a returnee, but if I were to use it, it would be creepy (laugh) . . . I would certainly like to learn from others, but I feel a little [uncomfortable] to simply display [my copying] as is.

Here, we discover a complex array of emotions that ties belief and self-perception to language performance. Misaki expresses her admiration towards Eriko’s language use, but she discredits herself for displaying similar language pattern, as indicated by her use of the term “creepy”. She has created an imagined self that inhibits her from fully participating in the activity: non-participation according to Wenger (1998). Similarly, Nana (non-returnee) shared:

But I already think about, think that I can’t beat the returnees, or those who are more competent. I mean, I’m already aware of my own position, the hierarchy. So I think, like, I can stay here, in this position, and don’t feel the need to improve any further, kind of . . .

Like Misaki, Nana has already completed her identification process, creating an imagined community in which she does not excel. By observing others’ performances and comparing them to her own, she does not even engage in active negotiation (Wenger, 1998) to improve her imagined social positioning. Self-perception and self-stigmatization seem to work to reduce the level of performance on the part of some learners.

Two students in particular displayed interesting effects: Yurika and Aki. Yurika quickly internalized expressions used by others, and Aki, who had expressed negative feelings towards the online writing task, managed to improve in terms of her quality and quantity of writing. The following sections provide a closer analysis of their entries.

Student 1: Yurika

In the post-treatment questionnaire Yurika wrote:

I did learn various things not only from what I wrote but also from what the other members wrote. It can be “common errors” or expressions I’ve never come across before which I want to try using for myself too.

For example, she recreates a sentence using the expression, “cup of tea” which the class instructor first introduces to the group on June 2. Later on, in responding to Kozu who asks about favourite sports, Yurika responds, “. . . sport is somehow not my cup of tea, probably because I’m not good at it! lol”. (Yurika, June 8)

Similarly, Yurika is ready to use other expressions such as “heartwarming” (original in Kaz April 24, used by Yurika May 12th), “in the last-minute” (original in Che May 15 at 0:04, used by Yurika May 15 at 0:32), “apparel” (original in Shino, June 2; Yurika June 4 in response to Shino), “derived from” (original in Yurika, May 19; used by Yurika June 6). These are important to mention as no other participants display similar tendency. That is, the expressions listed above are not used by others but reused only by Yurika.

Yurika also incorporates not only the expressions learned via CMC but also those learned in class. For example, the expression “drink till you feel no pain” (learned on April 27; used by Yurika on May 1st) is internalized by Yurika.

What is interesting about Yurika is not only her adaptability in learning from others. In the post-treatment interview, Yurika notes how she felt “exposed” for imitating:

I do not enjoy reading books, so I do have a tendency to imitate and learn from others . . . so I feel that my imitation was exposed.

Her use of the word “exposed” (“bareru” in Japanese) reveals how she, much like others in class, also perceives imitation as something negative and undesirable, although this negative perception did not deter her from imitating others, perhaps thinking that her imitations were left unnoticed.

Student 2: Aki

Aki is one student who expressed her discomfort with the assignment. While she acknowledged the importance of the task, in her last entry she shared her reluctance to participate:

Aki:

Well, this MySpace journal was a bit tough for me to tell the truth as I learnt with Mixi (Japanese SNS) and so on that I’m not really good at writing journals (even without anyone reading), much less commenting on others’ journals.

She repeated her resentment and anxiety during the group interview:

It's not so much a reflection but I want to take this opportunity to explain my situation. First, about me having a negative attitude. Like I wrote (in the journal), I feel uncomfortable (about journal writing). That's because there are many things I want to take up but can't. I was resentful of the fact that the things I wanted to express needed to be limited because everyone is reading my comments, and I could only offer things that are benign. To begin with, I felt very uncomfortable writing journals with such restrictions.

This feedback by Aki is particularly significant. First, she had the courage to disclose her true feelings towards the assignment. Secondly, while she is the only one among the participants

to offer negative feedback with respect to the online journal writing, she is one student who has displayed the most gain in terms of her writing skills. That is, while her entries are short and cumbersome at the beginning of the task, she begins to show a tremendous leap in terms of her writing quality.

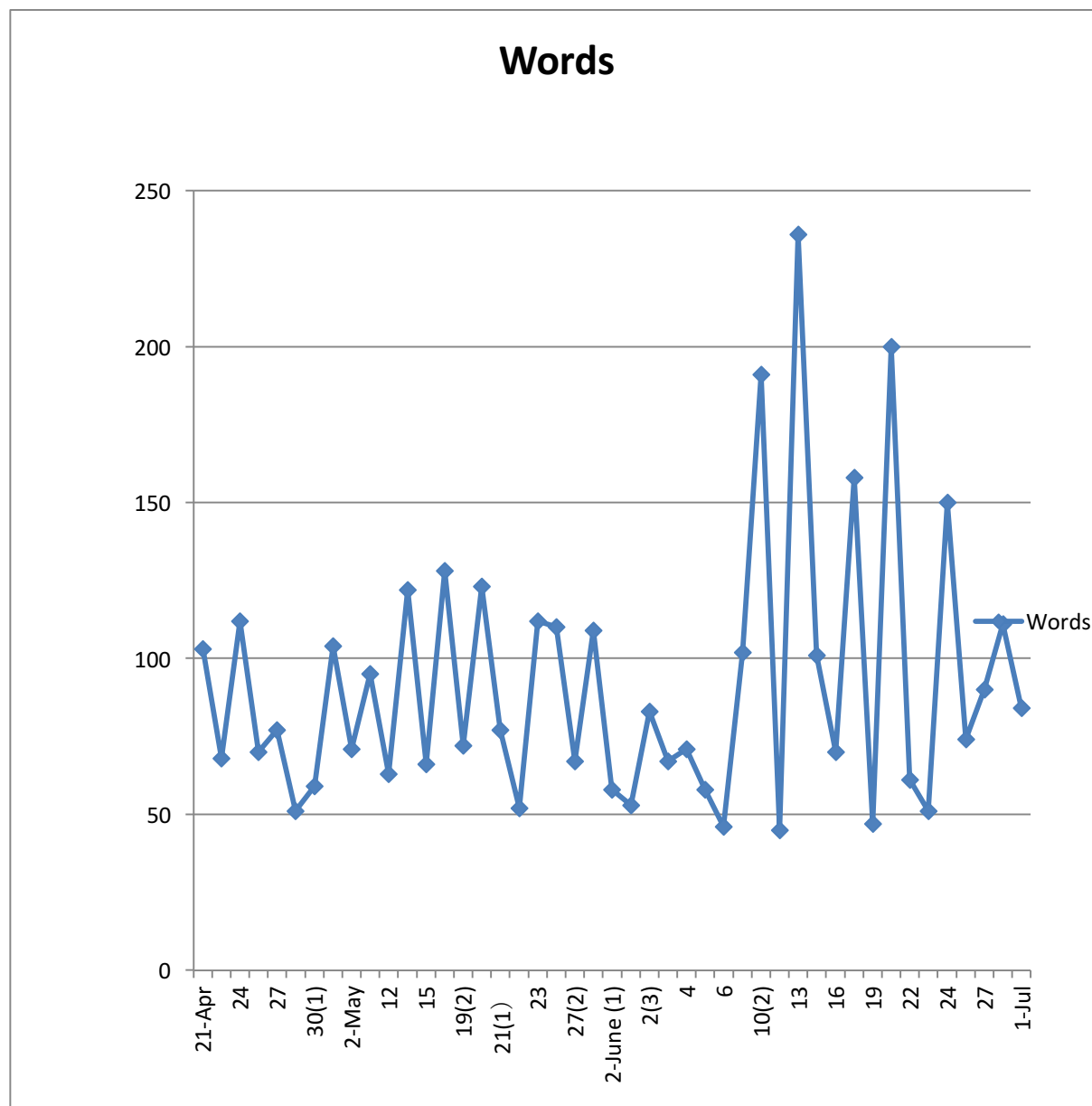


Figure 1. The amount of words in Aki's journal comments.

It should be noted here that the days Aki was in charge of leading the journal discussion were May 13th and June 11th, when she was responsible to make a longer contribution (i.e., minimum 150 words) than usual. These are removed from Figure 1. The abrupt change in the amount of writing becomes most apparent on June 10th in responding to Yurika's entry. Her entry on this day contains 192 words with seven errors.

The errors are all trivial errors, mostly simple typos, reflecting her casual attitude towards commenting. She knows that her readers will not judge her negatively by these small errors.

In contrast, her very first entry, while it is much more error-free, is much shorter (103 words) and rigid.

In order to investigate not only grammatical accuracy but also her vocabulary use, Nation's (2005) Vocabulary Range Programme was used. Table 5 describes her vocabulary use in her first entry, made on April 21.

Table 5: Vocabulary used in Aki's writing 1 (April 21).

| Word List | Tokens (%) | Types (%) | Families |
|-----------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Base word 1 | 96 (88.07) | 52 (83.87) | 45 |
| Base word 2 | 7 (6.42) | 5 (8.06) | 5 |
| Base word 3 | 2 (1.83) | 2 (3.23) | 2 |
| Not in the list | 4 (3.67) | 3 (4.84) | ? |
| Total | 109 | 62 | 52 |

The first vocabulary group, BASEWRD1.txt, includes the most frequent 1,000 words of English. The second (BASEWRD2.txt) includes the second 1,000 most frequent words, and the third (BASEWRD3.txt) includes words not in the first 2,000 words of English but which are frequent in upper secondary school and university texts from a wide range of subjects. Words that are not contained in Base word 1 through 3 are categorized in the "Not in the List" category. In Table 5 and 6, the symbol "?" appears in the last "Not in the List" category. This is due to some Japanese words that are incorporated in Aki's text.

Below is the vocabulary analysis for her later journal entry made on June 10:

Table 6: Vocabulary used in Aki's writing 2 (June 10).

| Word List | Tokens (%) | Types (%) | Families |
|-----------------|-------------|------------|----------|
| Base word 1 | 170 (86.73) | 90 (84.91) | 75 |
| Base word 2 | 10 (5.10) | 5 (4.72) | 4 |
| Base word 3 | 9 (4.59) | 4 (3.77) | 4 |
| Not in the list | 7 (3.57) | 7 (6.60) | ? |
| Total | 196 | 106 | 83 |

By comparing the two, both improvements and deteriorations are observed. The most obvious is the increase in all three categories (i.e., tokens, types, and word families) in Aki's writing. This reflects that she has managed to increase her vocabulary variety considerably, making her writing more sophisticated than the first one. However, this could be explained largely by the increase in length of her two entries, where the first contained 103 words while the second contained 192 words. By closely examining the percentage of the word types in each entry, while her use of words in Base word 1 remains largely the same (i.e., 83.87% to 84.91%), she dramatically decreases the use of words in Base word 2 (8.06% to 4.72%). However, what is encouraging is that there is a slight improvement in the use of academic words, represented by Base word 3 category, increasing from 3.23% to 3.77%. A similar trend was found on her two longer pieces (i.e., topic posting on May 13 and June 11) that she was responsible for (See Appendix B).

The change in the quality in Aki's writing is also noticed by others in the group. In response to Aki's entry on May 13, Eriko writes:

hi Aki!!
wow, every time you talk or write something in English,
you're getting better and better!!!:)
I'm really ashamed of myself, since my english [sic] is getting poor:(

A recognition and celebration of other learners' writing performances can be a source of motivation. In fact, in the post-treatment interview, Aki does mention Eriko's comment:

I remember Eriko's comment, and chances are that got me going (laugh), no that did really influence me.

Writing skills, as opposed to speaking skills, are silent skills, not readily observable by fellow classmates (McKinley & Sakamoto, 2007; Sakamoto & Honda, 2009). However, by opening a forum for a collaborative and interactive venue, learners can have opportunities to praise the performances of others. This is particularly important for non-returnees who might suffer from accented speech but may have a stronger foundation in writing skills compared to the returnees.

Discussions

Language learning has come to be increasingly appreciated not as a rigid, isolated phenomenon but rather as a fluid, temporal, contextualized, complex constellation of numerous factors. By adopting this perspective, we come to realize that language learners are not passive recipients of knowledge and instruction, but rather a "dynamic subsystem within a social system" (de Bot, Lowrie, & Verspoor, 2007, p. 14). The aim of this paper was to explore the interactions among such a subsystem within a given ecology from a socio-cultural point of view.

The findings revealed how some learners quickly adopted the new language forms introduced via an online task, and someone like Aki, who was initially reluctant to participate, nevertheless managed to increase her output significantly during the course of the semester. This could possibly be explained by the collegial, encouraging atmosphere among the writing community that ensued, which may have motivated Aki to take risks and explore her writing abilities.

However, a closer look revealed that social learning does not benefit all learners equally. Students like Nana and Misaki (both non-returnees) on the surface appear to accommodate the journal task, but their learning potential was not fully realized. Unlike Yurika who thrived by actively internalizing others' output, Nana and Misaki were reluctant to imitate others. While sociocultural theory suggests that internalization would occur via scaffolded interactions and that the learners engage in shared cognition via languaging (Swain et al., 2011), affective factors play an important role in nurturing as well as inhibiting the benefits that one can accrue from interaction (Swain, 2013). Specifically, a social learning environment such as this online writing task, given its public nature, can have unintended effects of displaying learner performance in partial and particular ways that would lead to certain identity formation, which could be conducive or detrimental to learning. Swain et al. (2011) describe ZPD as an enactment, an activity that affects cognition. If that is the case, the enactment is contingent on affective domains (Swain, 2013). In a class that is comprised of returnees and non-returnees, there is a need to be particularly sensitive to students' self-perception and social positioning that they ascribe to themselves.

In order to intervene, the instructor should realize the historicity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) behind socialization on which cognition is built, and the layering of experiences accrued from participation, with which learners construct their identities (Wenger, 1998). Students should be given ample opportunities to experience successes, and any successes from outside the classroom should also be capitalized on in class. Elimination of negative imagined identity and its replacement with a more desirable self-image should lead to better performance. This is particularly important in a class that contains non-returnees as well as returnees, as writing, which is often the strength of non-returnees, is a silent mode that often goes unnoticed by others in a language classroom.

Conclusion

The online journal writing task received overall positive appraisals from the participants, but a close examination of the data revealed that students are not always affected by others' input – in fact, there might be signs of resistance (Canagarajah, 1999). This might suggest that an overly optimistic enthusiasm and reliance on technology, as well as on interaction, is to be avoided. Rather, they must be coordinated with in-class instructions, as well as curriculum that is sensitive to the affective domains of the learners.

In sum, the study sheds light on the usefulness of SNS in an EFL classroom, but a further investigation is called for to examine the extent of its effectiveness in terms of improvements in EFL writing. Furthermore, while sociocultural theorists praise interactions and internalization that are afforded from them, the visible nature of peer-peer interactions can negatively impact identity formation and social positioning of a learner, leading to a non-participatory (Wenger, 1998), discouraged self whose ZPD cannot be fully realized and actualized. Vygotsky (1986) envisioned intellect and affect as an inseparable unit (See also Damasio, 1999). ZPD must be appreciated as an enactment that goes hand in hand with the affective domain.

Limitations and Implications

There are several limitations to this study. First, the small number of participants makes it difficult to reach a conclusive statement; this study can only suggest possible explanations that could be further researched in future studies. The varying backgrounds of the students, whether they are returnees or not, the length of their time abroad, their gender, their onset age to study English and so on are just few of numerous factors that could have impacted the way the participants behaved.

Second, some strings of exchanges were too short to gain insights into the complex pattern of interaction that the participants were experiencing. For example, a longer exchange pertaining to the Japanese expression “May disease” might have shed a different light, and more discoveries were to be found. With only four exchanges that contain expressions referring to “May disease”, only a tentative interpretation could be reached.

Third, the duration of journal writing might have imposed limitations on the productions of newly learned items. In this study the participants engaged in journal writing for two months, but a longer duration, and longer writings, might have afforded more opportunities for the participants to encounter different writings of others thus explore different language use.

Fourth, while student input was solicited on a number of occasions, including a post-task questionnaire and an invitation to share their views on the task itself on the very last day of journal writing, the design of data collection was still very much limited. Individual, longitudinal interviews and in-class observations are some things to consider in improving research design. Given this limitation, we are left with more questions than answers. For example, why did Jun and Natsuko persist in using the wrong form despite the fact that others were recasting the correct form? A direct, one-to-one follow-up interview with Jun and Natsuko would have been insightful to answer this.

Fifth, with the teacher participating in the task along with the students, the interaction pattern among the participants might have been shaped in a particular way, giving rise to a pattern that is not commonly observed among student-only interactions (See Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008 for discussions on the context-specificity of language learning).

Lastly, as it is an action research, there is no comparison group in this study. What if online interactions were entirely eliminated and the students only had individual writing assignments to do? How the language use might have developed in such a case is not investigated.

While these limitations are important to note, a detailed documentation of the interactive patterns of one particular ELL group in Japan over a two-month span affords the readers a glimpse in unveiling the nature of online interactions among Japanese learners. While writing is often naively deemed as an individual activity, it is important to emphasize that social affective effects cannot be ignored for effective teaching. Moreover, while interaction is deemed to be crucial in learning, there can be unintentional repercussions which teachers should be aware of. Nevertheless, this study showed how learning afforded by scaffolding in forms of imitation, a notion often denounced in ESL/EFL writing, can actually be something that ought to be encouraged for enhanced learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A Interim Course Evaluation

Please take a moment to answer the following. Please indicate the course name, but do not write your name to assure anonymity. The information will be confidential, and it will only be used for the purpose of improving the course design and delivery. Thank you for your input!

1. Please list the things which you have found to be fun/interesting/useful in this course:

2.a. Please list the things which you have found to be useless/not interesting:

2.b. Please suggest ways to change and improve what you have listed in (2a):

3. Does this course meet your expectation? That is, what do you think of the content of the course? Please circle one of the following:

Easier than expected / Just right / Harder than expected / Don't know

4. Other comments (Please use the back for more space):

Appendix B

Table A1

Vocabulary used in Aki's writing 1 (May 13)

| Word List | Tokens (%) | Types (%) | Families |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|----------|
| Base word 1 | 335/87.70 (86.73) | 147 (78.61) | 124 |
| Base word 2 | 17 (4.45) | 13 (6.95) | 13 |
| Base word 3 | 6 (1.57) | 6 (3.21) | 5 |

Table A2

Vocabulary used in Aki's writing 2 (June 11)

| Word List | Tokens (%) | Types (%) | Families |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Base word 1 | 475 (88.79) | 169 (77.17) | 139 |
| Base word 2 | 18 (5.10) | 17 (7.76) | 16 |
| Base word 3 | 8 (1.50) | 8 (3.65) | 7 |



Exploring Challenges Encountered by EFL Libyan Learners in Research Teaching and Writing

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Abstract

Research is conducted all over the world to solve problems or to answer questions of significance to humanity. Academic writing or writing to report research is not easy because it requires adequate background knowledge, interest, motivation and hard work. This study investigates the major challenges in research writing faced by Libyan EFL learners at Sebha University and also explores Libyan teachers' attitudes towards their students' work. A total of 42 students and 4 teachers formed the sample of this study. The present study used a mixed method approach. The findings of the study revealed that Libyan EFL learners have difficulty developing a research project and reporting the findings. The former requires them to identify the area of interest, choose a topic and formulate a researchable problem while the latter typically involves writing a literature review, the methodology, results and discussion sections. Between the two tasks, the students found academic writing the most challenging. It was also found that Libyan teachers had negative attitudes towards their students' research due to the following reasons: lack of motivation, insufficient background knowledge about research, lack of library resources, inadequate number of courses related to research, and the unavailability of Internet in the college.

Keywords: Libyan university; research challenges; research production; EFL learners

Introduction

This article illuminates some problems regarding research writing within an undergraduate degree program. Aitchison and Leeb (2006) have pointed out that within degree programs in universities, writing significantly remains under-theorized. As a result, research writing has come onto the agenda with possibilities for pedagogical development and challenge.

In general, research seeks to answer certain questions which so far have not been answered. Singh (2006) defines research as Re and Search: where “Re” implies “again and again” and “Search” implies “to come up with something”. Research is conducted to investigate and address a certain issue. This can be done in a systematic and precise manner to seek new knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values, or to re-interpret existing knowledge. The task of researchers is to collect, analyze and interpret data, and assess whether their findings apply to their environments (Bocar, 2013).

In degree programs, writing a term paper that reports on a research project involves not only writing per se, but requires extensive learning and reading (during and prior to the writing process). This also applies to undergraduates’ dissertation writing where understanding and learning of the topic will improve in the dissertation writing process (Rita, 1999).

Research Problem

As stated by Street (1984), writing, either deliberately or not, is generally seen to be “autonomous” or separate from knowledge production work and by extension, research practices, being understood instead in terms of deficits or individualized skills. Some Libyan EFL learners find it difficult to write a fruitful piece of research. Their difficulties range from identifying and thinking of the area of investigation to the process of analyzing the collected data and reporting the findings. This paper seeks to address the problem students encounter when reporting their research in writing.

Engaging students in research is a complex undertaking. Researchers must be cautious in conducting research and plenty of time must be allocated for the completion of each stage of the activity. They must be careful and specify a number of hours each week to work in the library. Before the scheduled deadline, they need to spend additional hours or weeks dealing with issues that arise in the project. In short, there are unexpected problems and difficulties that student researchers and researchers encounter when engaging in research (Trimmer, 1992).

Todd, Smith and Bannister (2006) have identified other key challenges that include the intellectual challenges faced by students such as problems with time management, how to choose and then narrow down a research topic. The most challenging problem that students might face is time management. Students tend to allocate everything to the last stage where they find it difficult to accomplish their research on time. Dombeck and Wells-Moran (2006) claim that time management skills boil down to organization, commitment and awareness and may be applied to a number of tasks in life one might decide to take on. In the context of student researchers, this might mean that they have to become conscious to write down everything, to stay focused especially when something more momentarily interesting occurs, and to be committed to keeping to a set schedule.

Another challenge that EFL learners face, in terms of research writing, is that they may not know their areas of interest. Furthermore, they may find it difficult to identify an appropriate scope for the topic under investigation. They often need to narrow down the topic if it is to be accomplished in the time given for the completion of the research.

In terms of research writing, students find it hard to connect and organize ideas and to write in their own words. Cooley and Lewkowicz (1995) have reported on the difficulties faced by students in structuring and arguing their research writing in a balanced and consistent manner. Moreover, Bitchener & Basturkmen (2006) looked at students' difficulties in writing research and highlighted challenges with the language, and how to express and link ideas. They also identified that these problems sometimes go beyond the stipulated time given for accomplishing the research.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges that Libyan EFL learners face in research writing?
2. Which part of research writing is more challenging?
3. What are the teachers' attitudes towards their students' work?

Research Objectives

This study attempts to achieve the following aims:

1. To find out the challenges that Libyan EFL learners face in research writing
2. To figure out the most challenging aspects of research writing
3. To identify teacher's attitudes towards their students' work

Literature Review

What is Research?

Neville (2007) states that research is a remarkable characteristic of any degree course because it provides students with an amount of control and independence on what they learn. Research also offers students a chance to approve, explain, follow and find out new features of a topic they are keen on. Pandey and Mishra (2015, p. 7) suggest that the "word "Research" is comprised of two words = Re+Search. It means to search again. So, research means a systematic investigation or activity to gain new knowledge of the already existing facts." Research can also be defined as rational and methodical search for new and beneficial information about a certain topic (Rajasekar, Philominathan, & Chinnathambi, 2013). Neville (2007, p. 1) defines research as "a process of enquiry and investigation; it is systematic, methodical and ethical; research can help solve practical problems and increase knowledge."

Importance of Conducting Research

According to Rajasekar et al. (2013) research is significant in scientific and unscientific fields. In this world, different problems, activities, and methods happen daily. Scientists carry out research to find out causes, answers and justifications. Thus, research helps us comprehend nature and normal phenomena. Research is also important because it offers

strategies and guidelines for finding solutions. In addition, social research assists us to discover solutions for social problems because it describes social phenomena and searches for answers to social problems. Research also creates a new way and style of life and makes it enjoyable. Research on current theories and notions can assist us in recognizing and finding out the applications of these theories.

Problems that Face Libyan EFL Learners in Writing Research

The task of writing research is not a simple one as it involves hard work and effort. It also needs much time and good background knowledge. When it comes to Libyan students, there are many obstacles they encounter during their research. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of resources in the library. Students spend their time searching for the books they need but most of the time they do not find what they want. Hence, this tends to delay the completion of their project and make them less encouraged to proceed in their work. According to Taskeen, Shehzadi, Khan, and Saleem (2014) the library is not organized systematically and students spend most of their valuable time searching for books and reports instead of looking for related information from these books. Some catalogues in the library are not available and researchers find the data related to their topic by looking at each item one by one which wastes the researchers' time and make it very hard for them to focus on the basic theme of the research. Baldwin (2005) argues that most students encounter some hindrances when doing research such as issues related to ethics, knowing how to invest the time required and finding resources they need.

Among the difficulties that Libyan students have is their difficulty to express themselves in their own words. So, they copy from other works and represent it as their own writing without acknowledging the sources. Furthermore, some students do not have any background in research. Taskeen et al. (2014) state that majority of novice researchers copy related studies and some advisors do not have enough experience in different methodologies. Thus, they allow their students to copy from studies which are conducted by other researchers. Moreover, most Libyan learners are hesitant in selecting a topic and they take a lot of time for that. This can be attributed to a lack of training in research, less confidence about the topic they want to write about and not reading widely. Thus, selecting a topic is not easy because the student researchers are not very aware of how to choose a topic and on what standards or basis they have to select it. Hence, choosing a topic depends on the researchers' interests in the field of study that he/ she intends to write about but because of insufficient or no experience and inadequate background about selecting their topic, the students spend most of the time selecting useless and uninteresting topics. (Taskeen et al., 2014).

In conducting research, Libyan students may face problems with their supervisor. For example, they may not know who to select and after some time they tend to change their supervisors for unknown reasons. In addition, some supervisors may not be interested in working with students who choose less interesting topics or students who are not active and not motivated to cooperate with his/ her supervisor. Some supervisors do not frequently follow up with the students because they are not available all the time in the college. Another obstacle is that when students ask for help or advice from the supervisor, the supervisor does not always offer or give any help or direction. As a result, he/ she lets the students work most of the time on his/ her own without even having a look at the student's work. And even if they give any comments some students find it difficult to understand and meet the requirements. Some students do not know how to write their project and most of the time depend on their supervisor to do the work for them. All these problems make it very hard for

learners to conduct good research and he or she will end up with a very poor piece of work. According to Nyawaranda (2005), Shumba (2004), Chabaya, Chiome and Chabaya (2009) and Pearce (2005), some learners encounter hindrances with their advisor when writing their research. Some of these obstacles include: supervisors do not see their students regularly, the supervisors are not interested in their students, they do not give so much guidance and direction to their students, they do not return the students' work on time and they do not give the students much practical help.

Concerning the gathering information from different sources, Libyan students face some difficulties. One of these challenges is that the Internet is not always accessible to some students. When the students need some sources for the research he/she usually uses the Internet, but this is not the case for Libyan students. When Libyan students search for any information they cannot find anything because of the slow and weak internet connection at home or college which delays the completion of their research. Students also encounter some challenges with regard to college such as unavailability of the Internet, students are not exposed to computers and there is a lack of materials related to research. Furthermore, some supervisors impose topics on their students which in turn influence their interest and success in writing a research paper (Mawere & Weda, 2011). Other problems related to students include: not enough time, lack of or not adequate resources in the library, little or no motivation in writing research, not meeting the supervisor every time, not having any knowledge about theory related to research (Bell, 2000; Pearce, 2005; Sidhu, 2001; Anderson, Day, & MacLaughlin, 2006; Aspland, Edwards, O'Leary, & Ryan, 1999).

Related Previous Studies

This section reviews relevant studies related to challenges and difficulties facing English learners while conducting their research. It is noteworthy that such studies are not addressed in the Libyan context that is to say, there are not any studies related to the problems of research writing in Libyan universities. Exploring such topics can help identify the major difficulties which impede students from conducting good research, provide guidance on how to deal with these difficulties and generate solutions to overcome these obstacles.

Dwihandini (2013) conducted a study to investigate the factors influencing undergraduate students in writing research at the University of Mahasaraswati in Indonesia. The result of the study revealed three main factors that influenced students' writing of research. The first factor is the psychological one that included little or no confidence in choosing a title of the research, having poor prior knowledge of the research topic and research writing. The second factor is the sociocultural factor which involves students' ability to understand and meet the demands and standards of academic communicative practices. The last factor is the linguistic one, which included problems in diminishing grammatical errors and difficulties in knowing when to delete, replace and reorder grammatical items. A study was carried out by Alshehry (2014) to examine the challenges that female undergraduate students and their teachers face at Najran University in Saudi Arabia. The researcher conducted a semi structured interview with 20 students and 4 lecturers. The result of the study revealed that students faced some difficulties including time, looking for resources and creative procedures. The findings of the study also showed that students encounter obstacles in research writing such as having no time to conduct research and issues related to ethics. Students found it hard to decide on appropriate topics with adequate references. Moreover, they had difficulty in finding libraries where they can search for books. Students in some towns had a very weak internet connection and some books that students need were not available in the library. Another problem was a

lack of experience and knowledge about research. Concerning the students' knowledge and experience about research, teachers pointed out that the majority of students had no idea of how to search for information on their own.

Mapolisa and Mafa (2012) conducted a study to explore challenges that undergraduate students encounter in conducting research at Zimbabwe Open University. Questionnaire, document analysis and focused group discussion were used in their study. The findings of the study showed that students faced three categories of challenges, namely supervisor, relationship with supervisor, and students' challenges. Supervisor's challenges included little or no interest in research, absence of supervisor from work, and not coming to work punctually. Challenges related to students comprised of unavailability of money, problems related to time, library references, and problems connected to family. Moreover, there were also challenges connected to college such as unavailability of the Internet, no library resources, no computer knowledge, no workshop, unavailability of course related to research. All these challenges influenced negatively on students' abilities to conduct research. In addition, Mahammoda (2016) examined factors that influence the quality of undergraduate research at the University of Bahir Dar in Ethiopia to find out the difficulties faced by teachers in supervising their students' research. The result of the study showed that students faced academic problems which included students' inability to the research course, advisors showing no commitment, students not having any analytical skill and low motivation in their topic of research. The finding also showed that students faced some social and personal factors which included little or no relationship between students and supervisors, no skill for time management and lack of financial support. Factors related to the institution involved lack of material and books in the library, students' incapability of conducting research, unavailability of open assessment system of research and little or no research assisted environment. All these factors were the main obstacles and challenges that supervisors faced during research supervision.

The current study emphasizes the hindrances in conducting research among Libyan learners at Sebha University. As mentioned earlier, there is a lack of such studies in the Libyan context. Even though this is a very important issue, no attention has been paid to tackle such problems so far and that is why this study was conducted. Therefore, there is a need to do more research on this issue.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study comprised of 42 Libyan EFL undergraduate students who study English at the Department of English, Sebha University. Those students are currently in their 4th year and they have been learning English for more than 7 years. There were 36 females and 6 males and their ages range between 20-23. The sample was selected using purposive sampling. In addition, 4 teachers participated in this study and 3 of them are Master holders except for one teacher who has a doctorate. There are 3 females and 1 male whose ages range between 31-39. These teachers have more than 15 years of teaching experience.

Instruments

This study used two instruments: a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire aimed to explore challenges that Libyan EFL learners face while conducting their research. The

questionnaire involved two parts. The first part included information about the students and the second part included questions which comprised of 25 items. The participants were asked to choose their answer from a four point Likert scale. In addition, a semi-structured interview was used to find out teachers' attitudes and opinions towards their students' work. The interview was conducted with 4 teachers and it consisted of two sections. The first section included demographic information about the teachers while the second section involved 12 questions which are about teachers' attitudes towards students' work. Questions 1–9 focused on teachers' perceptions about the problems related to Libyan EFL students in conducting their research whereas questions 10–12 emphasized teachers' opinions about challenges facing them during supervision and the ways in which they teach the steps of research in the class.

Data Collection Procedures

The following procedures were carried out during the data collection stage. With regard to the questionnaire, first, an appointment was made with teachers to allow researchers to administer the questionnaire to the students. Subsequently, the researchers met the students and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Then the questionnaire was distributed to them at class time and they took 10 minutes to complete it. Concerning the interview, teachers were informed of the aim of the interview and they were told that it would be recorded. The interview was conducted with each teacher face-to-face and it took 15 minutes. It was audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

Questionnaire Analysis

The data of the questionnaire was analysed and divided into the following sections:

1. Problems related to research methodology
2. Problems related to research phases
3. Problems related to the background knowledge about research
4. Problems related to the organization of references and resources.

The following figure represents participants' responses to the item "selecting the samples of my research is not an easy task."

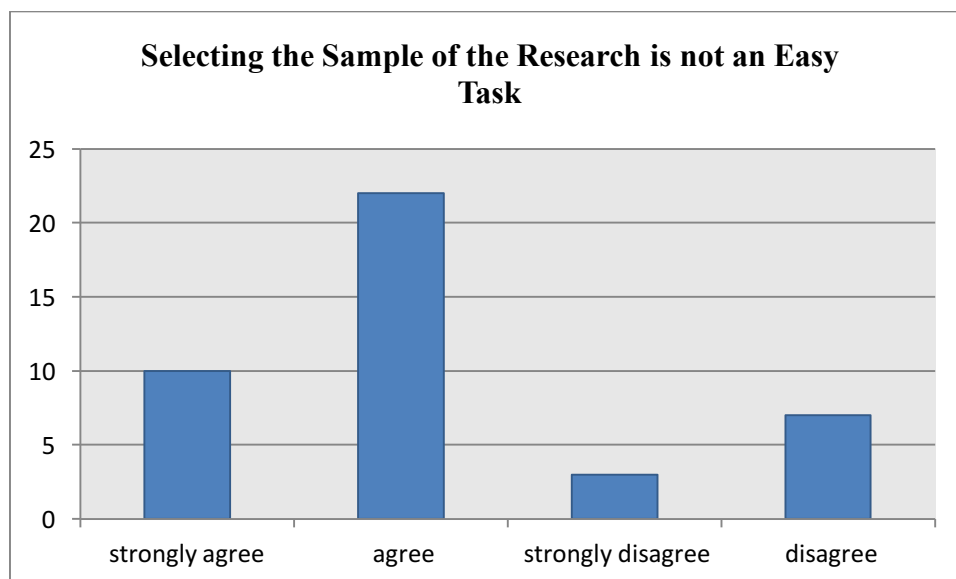


Figure 1: Problems related to research methodology.

As shown in Figure 1, one of the common problems that students encounter in terms of research methodology is how to select the sample of research. More than 20 participants agreed that it is not an easy task to select the sample either randomly or purposively. With regard to problems related to phases of conducting research, figure 2 shows the results.

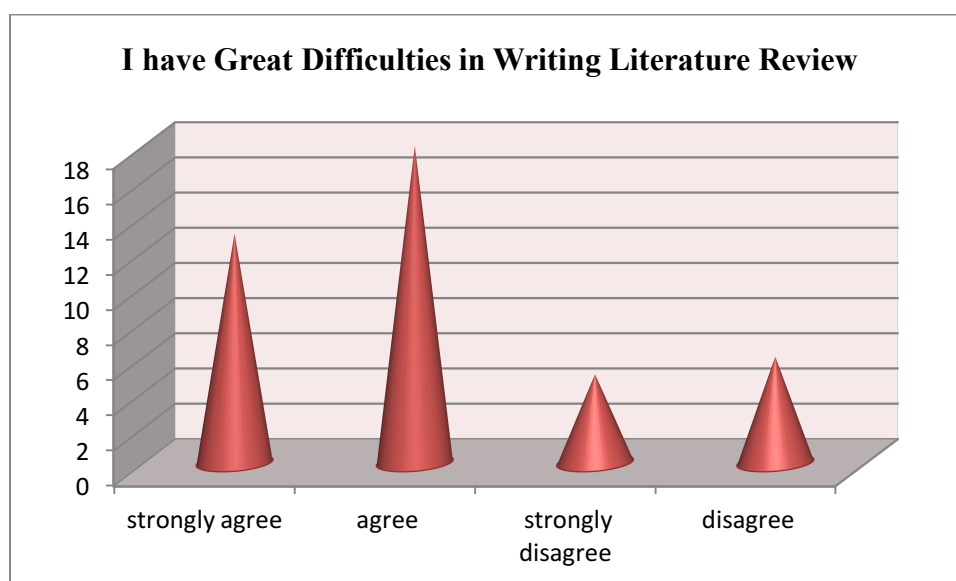


Figure 2: Problems related to phases of conducting research.

Reviewing the literature is the back bone of any study conducted and verifying past studies done by other scholars justify the research and make it fruitful. As can be seen in figure 2 writing literature review is difficult according to the vast majority of the participants. Problems related to background knowledge about research are shown in Figure 3 as follows:

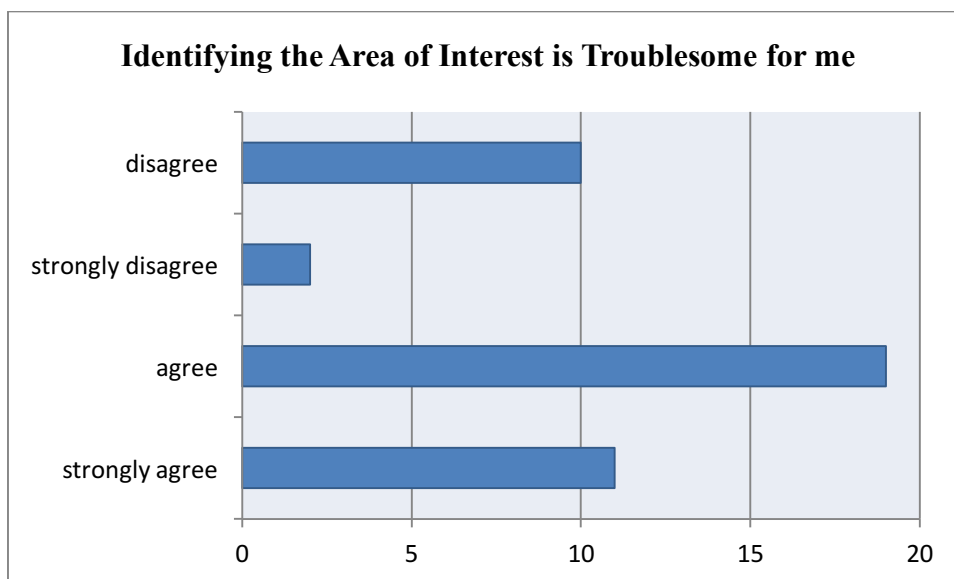


Figure 3: Problems related to background knowledge about research.

As can be seen in Figure 3, when it comes to start thinking of the research, students take a lot of time identifying the area of interest due to different factors. They undertake different subjects but they are in two minds which field to take. As a result, this can reflect negatively on the process of a research. Problems related to the organisation of references and resources are shown in Figure 4 as follows:

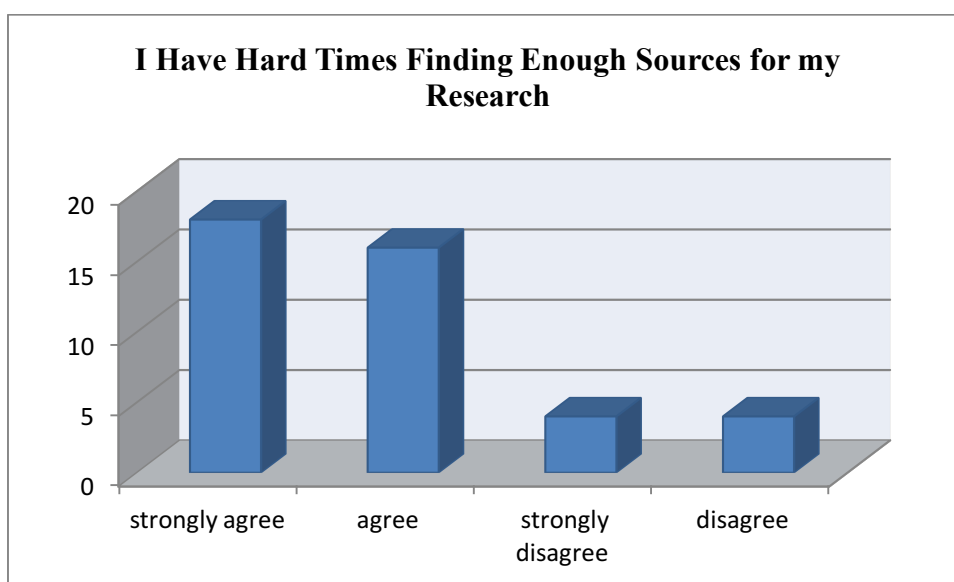


Figure 4: Problems related to the organisation of references and resources.

Relatively, Figure 4 represents the number of participants who find it difficult to find references or past studies for their study especially those who undertake an exploratory study. More narrowly, organising references vary from one school of thought to another. Therefore, it is very troublesome for them to organise references accordingly.

Interview Analysis

The aim of the interview is to find out teachers' attitudes towards students' work. The interview was analyzed qualitatively and during the analysis three themes emerged. The first theme relates to teachers' opinions towards students' performance in research. The second theme is about challenges facing teachers while supervising their students' research and the last theme pertains to the ways teachers teach the steps of research in class. When asked whether students are motivated to do research, all the teachers agreed that students are not motivated and they attributed students' lack of motivation to several reasons: first, students do not have any background knowledge about research. Secondly, they do not know what research is and how to do it and they are not able to select a topic. In addition, they consider research writing a hard task to do and they do not practice doing research. Students do not read and they just depend on the lecture notes given to them. These opinions are supported by the result of a study carried out by Mahammoda (2016) which showed that Ethiopian university students do not have any motivation in the topic of research which influences the research quality and makes it hard for them to do good quality research.

With regard to students' background knowledge about research, three teachers pointed out that students have basic background knowledge about research because they study research as a course from 5th, 6th and 7th semesters. The problem however, is that they do not understand and revise their lessons and do not practice research writing. On the contrary, one teacher holds the opinion that students do not have any background in research because they do not know what research is and they are not taught how to write research reports. The result of this study is similar to another study conducted by Alshehry (2014) which revealed that Saudi Arabian students lack experience and background in research writing because the majority of them do not have any idea of how to search for information by themselves.

When asked whether the library provides students with books they need for doing research, teachers' responses were almost similar except for one teacher. Three teachers agreed that books are not available in the library and the library does not include all the books that are required for students and most of these books focus only on language skills, reading, writing and grammar. Also, there is a lack of up to date resources needed for research. So, students waste their time looking for the books and at the end they find nothing. This result is consistent with another study by Mapolisa and Mafa (2012) which showed that Zimbabwean students face challenges relating to the lack of library resources. On the other hand, the fourth teacher reported that the library contained all the books students need and the problem is not with the resources but with the students themselves because some of them do not know how to search for books.

Regarding whether students have access to the Internet where they can search for resources in the college, all of the teachers agreed that the Internet is not available in the college and if it is available, the connection is very slow. In addition, some students can have access to the Internet only if they have their own network in their mobile phones. One teacher stated, "No, because the Internet connection is not always available and if it is available the connection is too slow. So, this is also another obstacle that most students face while doing their research."

When asked about evaluating students' ability in writing research, teachers' responses differed. One teacher opines that students' ability in writing research depends mainly on their level and motivation. Whereas the second teacher states that students have very strong desire to do research but the problem is that there are not enough resources for the topics that

students are interested in and also students need practice on how to do research. In addition, the third teacher holds the opinion that most of the Libyan learners are not good at writing research because they do not know how to write in English, they have no idea of how to cite references and they do not see their supervisor regularly. On the other hand, the fourth teacher reported that if the students are asked to write a proposal or make PowerPoint presentations, they tend to be lazy, lack confidence about that, and they will not be able to finish any task on time.

Concerning the difficulties that students have while conducting research, teachers reported that one of the challenges that students face is the lack of resources and access to E-journals and articles. Students also have some problems choosing a topic, they do not know how to formulate research questions, are not able to structure correct sentences in English, are not knowledgeable about the difference between qualitative and quantitative data, are not active in their work and have no idea of how to collect and analyze data. Furthermore, some students do not know the area that interests them, they do not like to work and find new information, they do not like questions which need clarification and explanation and they prefer using yes/no questions. One teacher reported:

They don't like to work or even find anything new. Some of them have difficulty in formulating research questions or find a researchable problem. On the other hand, some prefer yes/no question so the answer will be yes or no. The questions that require clarifications or difficult analysis methods, they do not prefer. This happened with me last semester.

Regarding the reasons behind students' weakness in research, some teachers agreed that students do not practice research writing and they do not have background knowledge about research. In addition, they do not study well, they do not read widely in English and they do not have any motivation. Other reasons ascribed to their weakness are that students do not start writing research on time and they put off their work. One teacher reported:

I think lack of practicality, lack of resources, different resources, and their background knowledge they don't have strong background knowledge about doing research and this might relate to the courses available to them. They only have two courses in the sixth seven semesters and these are not enough to develop strong researchers.

When asked whether the academic atmosphere in the college encourages students to write research, three teachers agreed that the academic atmosphere is not good for doing research due to the following reasons: lack of resources, not having courses for analyzing qualitative data, not having statistics for analyzing quantitative data, not having enough research courses, labs are not provided with enough equipment, classes are not enough for students because of their large numbers, students do not work together in groups to exchange ideas and discuss different topics. On the contrary, one teacher reported that new subjects about research have been taught to students which emphasize the significance of research. A teacher said:

The department tries and recently a new subject for research has actually been added, so I think this adds or emphasizes the importance of doing research; teachers themselves maybe have to keep talking about the importance of doing research to their students.

Concerning whether students cannot finish their research due to the short time given to them, all of the teachers agreed that students are given ample time to do their research because they start writing their research from 5th semester and by 7th semester they start doing their proposal. Therefore, they have plenty of time to write research. But the problem is that they do not know how to benefit from the time. As a result, they end up doing very poor research. One teacher states:

They start taking research from 5th semester so if they have anything in mind by the way by the 7th semester, students are asked to do these proposals; actually, we are supposed to prepare them for their graduation project when they reach or when they get to the 8th semester, so they have plenty of time ahead to think and prepare and plan, so yes I think they don't have any excuse.

With regards to the main challenges that teachers face as supervisors, one teacher points out that students' level is one of the challenges. If they are good, she will be happy. While the other teacher states that time is big challenge for him because he advises five or six students at the same time, which is more challenging for him. Whereas the other two teachers agreed that they have many challenges which are students do not work hard, they do not do what they are asked to do, they copy from other works, their writing is very poor, they do not see their supervisor regularly and the Internet is not available to make contact with the students.

When asked whether teachers practice the steps of research with their students in the class, all of the teachers reported that they give their students practice. One teacher stated that she teaches them how to write research questions, statement of problem, research objectives and at the end of the semester, she asks them to bring the whole work. Whereas the other teacher points out that he recommends that students should keep practicing what they are doing:

Yes, I keep actually recommend students practicing what they are doing and this is very important to determine the quality of their research and students are having very good opportunity in practicing they are doing and they are writing they are doing for example the steps that they are taking in the course practically. For example, if they are taking some ideas about analyzing qualitative data I keep telling them to give an example, to go home and try to bring some data to analyze and to bring them back to the class, to discuss them with their colleagues in order to have a very good idea on how to analyze these types of data.

Concerning whether teachers teach steps of writing research individually or all together, all the teachers hold the opinions that they teach research writing step-by-step and they start teaching section-by-section starting from introduction up to the conclusion. "I start section by section and in the section I teach the subsection and I make sure that they get their meaning and they understand how to do it." One teacher reports that she writes the steps first on the board and after she explains in the lecture, she asks her students to prepare PPT presentation to see if her students understand everything. Another teacher states that if she teaches them the steps of research writing as whole, her students will not understand very well. "I teach them the steps of writing individually [section-by-section] because if I give them all of the steps in one lecture, they will not understand everything and they will get confused."

Conclusion

This study investigated challenges faced by Libyan EFL learners in conducting research and it also aimed to find out teachers' perceptions towards students' work. The study used qualitative and quantitative approaches. The participants consisted of Libyan teachers and EFL Libyan learners at Sebha University. Data was collected through questionnaire and interview. The result of the study showed that Libyan EFL Learners have some problems with identifying the area of interest, choosing a topic, formulating research problems and writing a literature review. They also have difficulties collecting and analyzing data with the most challenging obstacle being research writing. Moreover, Libyan teachers' attitudes towards their students' work were negative due to several factors such as weak background knowledge about research, lack of motivation and lack of resources in the library. Based on the result of this study, it can be inferred that Libyan students encounter a lot of shortcomings in doing research because they are not sufficiently aware of the importance of research and conducting research is regarded as a laborious and daunting task for them.

Consequently, those learners will produce a very poor-quality research. To help learners overcome such obstacles, teachers must encourage their students to read widely to enrich their knowledge and students should take intensive writing courses to help them write accurately and correctly. Moreover, learners should also be involved in doing real empirical studies and new and more advanced research courses should be taught in Libyan universities. Furthermore, efforts should be made to promote the practicality of the steps of research in the classroom. It is recommended that more emphasis should be given to the investigation of difficulties of research writing in the Libyan context to find out the area of research in which students have weaknesses. By doing so, it would be possible to be more aware of, and avoid, these problems in the future. Further research should also focus on large number of participants to achieve generalization of the findings and more practical studies should focus on specific areas of research. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of the current study will add more to the literature and help practitioners, teachers, and curriculum designers develop their teaching methods with regard to research. It is also hoped that this study will make a great contribution to the field of language teaching and learning in higher education.

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Incorporating Intercultural Communication Activities in English Language Classes

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Abstract

Intercultural Communication has become a relevant focal point within a variety of fields – science, psychology, politics, journalism, economics, and education, to name a few. Yet, current university students may not even be aware of Intercultural Communication's role in these fields, as well as their studies and future careers. A survey was first conducted to show the absence of Intercultural Communication in higher education, as well as the need for incorporating exercises and activities that stress the importance of communicating to people from different cultures, and respecting their differences. Two classes involving intercultural communication activities were then given to two groups of Japanese students who were studying English in a Japanese university. Results from another survey revealed a majority of the students felt the exercises helped them with self-reflection, as well as evaluating their beliefs and biases, thus supporting the notion of incorporating more Intercultural Communication exercises and activities in English language classes.

Keywords: intercultural communication; cross-cultural communication; second language learning

Introduction

The field of Intercultural Communication has expanded along with a world that is constantly impacted by advanced technology and globalization. Robert Muller (1982), the “father of global education,” provided a hauntingly relevant example of why intercultural communication is so important, and he did so in the form of a quote that could very well be uttered by one of your students, now graduated, as he or she stares into the face of a global society and thinks back on his or her education: “Why was I not warned? Why was I not better educated? Why did my teachers not tell me about these problems and indicate my behavior as a member of an interdependent human race?” (p. 6).

The lesson is easily identifiable, and yet it is still common to find English education programs strictly adhering to a curriculum that relies heavily on textbooks, their accompanying CD-ROMs or DVDs, and easy-to-digest lessons plans that require little-to-no preparation. Curriculum that is textbook-driven is not uncommon, particularly in Asian countries where second-language acquisition can be challenging for a number of reasons. Kumar and Subramaniam (2011) point out that while many Asian countries follow a textbook-centric curriculum,

Not all the resources prescribed in the textbook may be suitable for a classroom and a teacher may need to consider the level of conceptual development as well as the sociocultural background of students to select and use resources from the textbook. Thus, teachers need to develop a critical eye for evaluating textbook content for their classroom and a pedagogy based on their own informed decisions rather than relegating such decisions to the textbook. (p. 87).

There is definitely a right time and place within daily lessons where incorporating readings and activities from a textbook are not only appropriate, but also enhance the lesson: “Textbooks are a detailed sequence of teaching procedures that tell you what to do and when to do it. There are no surprises – everything is carefully spelled out” and provide administrators and teachers with a complete program . . . [that] is typically based on the latest research and teaching strategies” (Fredericks, 2005). That being said, diversification in classrooms around the world has caused educators to pause and reflect on new approaches to educating the ever-changing classroom.

This is not an argument for a radically new approach to curriculum design, for as much as educators welcome changes to the field, such as the recent development and implementation of The Global Scale of English (Pearson English, 2015), certain aspects of curriculum design must remain: “Curriculum design involves the integration of knowledge from many of the areas in the field of Applied Linguistics, such as language acquisition research, teaching methodology, assessment, language description and materials production” (Nation & Macalister, 2010, pp. xv-xvi). Nation and Macalister also include steps in introducing change, which include making sure change is necessary, ensuring the change is neither too dramatic nor too trivial, and preparing for a potentially long period of time to pass before the change yields positive results and is fully accepted (p. 173).

While most experts and educators would probably agree that these are fundamental aspects of curriculum design, and the steps necessary to ponder, some educators, and perhaps even some learners, will disagree with the following viewpoint regarding realistic change to a school’s or department’s curriculum:

The people who will receive the ultimate benefit of the change, usually the learners, are often not negotiators in the change process . . . A change . . . can involve the learners in suggesting and endorsing, or rejecting certain types of activities. Although they might not be involved in the decision . . . they could be involved in how the approach is applied (Nation and Macalister, 2010, pp. 175–176).

Learners should be involved in the process of change in some way, and it seems logical to at least solicit input on the types of activities that are included in class lessons. This leads, however, to the fundamental question regarding whether or not students have the knowledge and understanding to know what may be best for them.

Literature Review

With the rise in global communication brought forth by various reasons (from business to war), intercultural interaction is becoming an important topic for researchers, educators, businesses, and governments. Saint-Jacques (2015) suggests there are three stages of globalization – political (beginning with the founding of the United Nations in 1945), economic (with the spread of free-market capitalism since 1980), and cultural—and that the world’s focus has been primarily on the political and economic, “but the powerful impact of globalization on culture had not been sufficiently analyzed and researched” (pp. 16–17).

With the impact of globalization and the need for deeper cultural understanding, Intercultural Communication is a field that needs more attention in multiple fields, but most importantly in modern academia. Sadri & Flammia (2011) highlighted two of the four aims of the Association of American Colleges and Universities Presidents’ Campaign for the Advancement of Liberal Learning, both having to do with intercultural knowledge: “Expanding cultural, societal, and scientific horizons,” and cultivating democratic and global knowledge and engagement” (p. 18). With the rise in Liberal Arts programs across the globe, Intercultural knowledge should be at the forefront of every program; and yet it is questionable whether current university students are being molded into interculturally knowledgeable members of society.

Martin and Nakayama (2014) highlight four skills that are important when developing as an ethical student of culture: “Practicing self-reflexivity, learning about others, listening to the voices of others, and developing a sense of social justice” (p. 21). However, as important as these skills are, current university students may not even be aware of the field and its importance in their lives and future careers.

There is another situation that many countries, including Japan, face that adds to importance of teaching intercultural communication skills to students. While an aging population seems to have little connection to education, it does, in fact, have a tremendous impact on it, as Yoder (2004) elucidates: “College entrance exams do not fit the present times. Japan is an aging society with fewer young people entering college than any time in the postwar period. This dwindling college population is now requiring colleges to downsize or even close and the situation is projected to get worse” (p. 170). Yoder (2004) was right in his prediction, as the situation has become seemingly bleaker with each passing year. With the rise in interest in globalization, education programs are become more engaged in global and intercultural studies and communication, but, returning to the original concern stated above, just how well these topics are being taught remains unclear.

In 2016, twenty-three (23) Japanese students studying English in a liberal arts department in a Japanese university were asked to define *intercultural communication*. Before revealing the answer, it is important to first provide a few definitions so that the reader has a certain understanding of the meaning: Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) define intercultural communication as the “exchange of information between individuals who are unlike culturally” (p. 1); Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, and Sam (2011) define it as the “exchange of information (verbally or non-verbally) between members of different cultural populations” (p. 471); and Zhu Hua (2011) offers this academic definition: “A subject of study that is concerned with interactions among people of different cultural and ethnic groups and comparative studies of communication patterns across cultures” (p. 422). From these three definitions, an overall working definition of the term *intercultural communication* can be formed.

Going back to the survey that asked 23 Japanese students about the definition of *intercultural communication*: Out of the 23, 100% of the students could not even construct a simple definition. Hall (2003) describes learning about intercultural communication as “freedom from ignorance” (p. 22). If incorporating intercultural communication activities brings forth a freedom from ignorance, and can be supported by a variety of “motives” – personal growth, social responsibility, economic, cross-cultural travel, and the media (Baldwin, Coleman, Gonzalez, & Shenoy-Packer, 2014, pp. 5-13) – perhaps it is time to look more closely at some of the activities that may benefit English language learners in higher education institutions. Current studies have focused on the importance of intercultural communication, most recently Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and although research focuses on the importance, few actually focus on English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) classroom application, specifically precise activities that have shown to be successfully incorporated into lessons.

This paper, therefore, investigates the applicability and effectiveness of intercultural communication activities by addressing the following research questions:

Can intercultural communication activities help students self-reflect and critically evaluate personal beliefs and potential biases, as well as think about other people in new ways?

Should intercultural communication become a required part of English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) instruction?

Method

Twenty-three (23) Japanese students were selected for this study. The students were divided into two groups based on their TOEFL scores – for the purposes of this research, they will be referred to as the “Intermediate” and the “Advanced” groups. The students were given two identical 1-hour-and-fifteen-minute classes that included an introduction of Intercultural Communication, as well as three different intercultural communication activities.

The first activity involved watching a video produced by a Chinese detergent company that caused a tremendous amount of controversy for its depiction of a Chinese woman “cleaning” an African man so that he becomes Asian, followed by a second YouTube video showing members of the American general public viewing the video and offering feedback (Yang, 2016; Phineqx, 2016). After viewing both videos, students were placed into small groups of three or four members, and discussed the prevalence of racism in the world and in Japan, as

well as their reactions to the videos. Each student then shared his or her thoughts, followed by commentary, feedback, and opinions from the rest of the group.

The second activity is called “First Words” (Velasco, 2013), and involves showing participants several different pictures and eliciting the first word or phrase that comes to their minds. The words or phrases given cannot be simple descriptive words (for example, “schoolgirls” in response to a photo of a group of Japanese schoolgirls). The goal is to collect honest responses of what participants think or believe about what or who they see in the image, and oftentimes responses reveal certain misconceptions, biases or even prejudices that participants may not have even been aware they were holding onto.

The third activity is called “Evaluate, Analyze, Describe” (Velasco, 2013; 2015), or “EAD,” as it is most commonly referred to. This activity is based on the D.I.E. (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate), one of the first intercultural communication exercises developed. In both exercises, participants are shown a picture, and asked to provide a description (without being influenced by personal feelings or analyses), an interpretation or analysis of what is occurring, and an evaluation or judgment of who is in the picture and/or what is happening. While the order does not seem important, the E.A.D. is based on the notion that judging is a natural first reaction to new stimuli, and therefore should not be forced back. In other words, the instructions for participants to follow the D.I.E. go against human nature to immediately judge who and what they encounter, and therefore take away potential avenues for open communication among participants. This open communication will allow for self-reflection and growth in ways that will promote openness, understanding, and respect for different cultures.

After the activities concluded, the participants were given a two-statement survey using a standard Likert scale format that asked if they believed the activities helped them self-reflect and critically evaluate their personal beliefs and potential biases, and if they felt Intercultural Communication activities should be a part of English language instruction (see Appendix for complete survey questions). The survey was anonymous, and no personal identifying information was collected, nor attached to any of the forms.

Results

The collected survey results from both the Intermediate Group and Advanced Group are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Both Groups.

| Statement # | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly Agree | <i>n</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Group 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 11 | 23 |
| Group 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 11 | 23 |

Table 2 below shows the results from the Intermediate Group.

Table 2: Intermediate Group.

| Statement # | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly Agree | <i>n</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Group 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 12 |
| Group 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 12 |

Finally, Table 3 shows the results from the Advanced Group.

Table 3: Advanced Group.

| Statement # | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly Agree | <i>n</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Group 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 11 |
| Group 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 11 |

When both Intermediate and Advanced Groups are combined, the following results emerged. For Statement #1, 87% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the Intercultural Communication activities they experienced over the course of the two one-hour-and-fifteen minute classes helped them engage in self-reflection, critically evaluate aspects of their personal belief systems and potential biases (some of which were carried over from childhood), and think about other people's thoughts and opinions in new ways. Specifically, 39% of the participants agreed, and 48% strongly agreed with Statement #1.

For Statement #2, 87% of the participants also agreed or strongly agreed that Intercultural Communication activities should be incorporated in regular English language classes. Specifically, 39% of the participants agreed, and 48% strongly agreed with Statement #2.

When looking at just the Intermediate Group, the following results surfaced. For Statement #1, 83% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the Intercultural Communication activities they experienced helped them self-reflect, critically evaluate their personal beliefs and potential biases, and consider other people's thoughts and opinions in new ways. More specifically, 42% of the participants agreed, and 42% strongly agreed with Statement #1.

For Statement #2, 92% of the participants also agreed or strongly agreed that Intercultural Communication activities, such as those completed in class, should be incorporated in English language classes. More specifically, 42% of the participants agreed, and 50% strongly agreed with Statement #2.

When looking at just the Advanced Group, the following results were revealed: 91% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 1. Breaking this percentage down, 36% of the participants agreed, and 55% strongly agreed with Statement #1. 82% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 2, specifically, 36% of the participants agreed, and 45% strongly agreed with Statement #2.

Discussion

This brief study is actually a continuation of a previous study conducted in 2014 with 180 university students from Japan, China, South Korea, and Brazil (Velasco, 2015). In that study, the university students were given the same exercises as in this current study, however with much more focus on the E.A.D. exercise, as well as a similar survey with a statement measuring the effectiveness of the E.A.D. in promoting self-reflection and an evaluation of personal beliefs and biases, and with that survey, 87% responded “Strongly agree” (ibid.).

Combined with this current study, the total number of students surveyed is 203, with 87% strongly agreeing in 2014 and 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing in 2016 that Intercultural Communication activities help with opening the lines of communication cross-culturally while providing crucial opportunities to reflect on personal thought and opinions on a variety of topics. Although a considerable amount of time has passed before administering the survey, the impact intercultural communication strategies have on English language classes is clear – students enjoy the activities and see value in them. They realize the impact these types of activities have on their current way of thinking and their use of English and communicative skills in their future careers, and this realization should be fostered in a way that ensures personal and academic growth each semester.

Past research has shown the impact globalization has had on the world, and stressed the importance of communicating appropriately and effectively with those from different cultures. With the rise of academic departments, educational programs, and post-secondary degrees, such as Intercultural Communication, Global Studies, and International Psychology, incorporating intercultural communication activities in classroom lessons could provide much needed cultural aspects for students, and foster self-reflection and growth.

Of course, there continue to be limitations to this research project, namely the number of participants, as well as their shared nationality, language, culture, and traditions. That being said, this research project was designed with non-native English speakers in mind, so further longitudinal research needs to be conducted using a larger, more culturally varied sample size, similar to the study that was conducted in 2014.

Conclusion

The original objectives for the D.I.E. (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate) Intercultural Communication exercise were to foster self-awareness and discernment between objectivity, inference and speculation, and judgment and personal opinion (Nam & Condon, 2009). The E.A.D. (Evaluate, Analyze, Describe) Intercultural Communication exercise shares the original objectives of the D.I.E.; however, it aims to move beyond self-awareness to a conscious level where positive change can occur. The E.A.D. can help foster better relationships between people of different cultural identities by providing unique and oftentimes rare opportunities to address racial tension or other prejudicial beliefs that could be undercutting goals the larger group may be trying to accomplish. The E.A.D. accomplishes the goal of directly confronting prejudice by asking participants to immediately evaluate what they see, so, by moving backwards through the D.I.E. process, people are able to make progress on improving self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, and effective intercultural communication.

Racism, sexism, homophobia, and most recently xenophobia, have become a part of the global society, and unfortunately, with the Orlando LGBT-friendly nightclub massacre (National Broadcasting Company, 2016), the threat of terrorist attacks, most recently in Brussels (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2016), the controversial vote for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, known as “Brexit,” being fueled by xenophobia (Karabell, 2016), and President Donald Trump’s “America First” policy that has incited racial division and xenophobic reactions in the United States (Patterson, 2017), there is no end in sight to these negative aspects of humanity.

There has never been a greater need for effective intercultural communication than now, and educators have a responsibility to society to help nurture future leaders through education. Although intercultural communication strategies will not solve the world’s problems, exercises such as the E.A.D. may certainly prove to be an effective tool for assisting future teachers, managers, trainers, and leaders with opening the doors of communication between different cultures, and perhaps rid the world of underlying issues of racism and other prejudices one person at a time.

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Appendix

Survey

Please respond to the statements as honestly as possible:

1) Intercultural Communication activities, such as the E.A.D., helped me self-reflect and critically evaluate my personal beliefs and potential biases, as well as think about other people in new ways.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

2) Intercultural Communication activities should be a part of English language classes.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree



Cognitive Learning Strategy of BIPA Students in Learning the Indonesian Language

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Abstract

The study outlined in this article aims to describe and explain the cognitive learning strategies used by foreign students in learning the Indonesian language. The research was designed as a qualitative study. The research participants are foreign students who were learning the Indonesian language in the BIPA program. The data sources of the research were students' behaviors that indicated the cognitive strategies they adopted in learning the Indonesian language. Data were collected by interview and observation, and were analyzed by (1) identifying the data, (2) classifying and categorizing the data, (3) interpreting the data, and (4) drawing a conclusion. Findings of the research showed that in learning Indonesian language, BIPA students used various learning strategies. The cognitive learning strategies used by BIPA students in learning Indonesia ranged from applying their understanding of language structures and punctuations to strategies that drew on higher-level thinking processes. BIPA students selected and applied the learning strategies depending on the types of learning tasks they encountered. Apart from that, individual-factors and the learning environment were also influential in students' selection of learning strategies.

Keywords: cognitive strategy; learning strategy; BIPA student; Indonesian language

Introduction

BIPA (Indonesian for foreign speakers) is a language learning program specifically designed to provide lessons for foreign students who want to learn Indonesian. The language learning materials and processes are tailored to the objectives and needs of foreign learners and aim to enable BIPA students to speak Indonesian and be familiar with the culture of Indonesia.

Foreign students have a variety of purposes for learning the Indonesian language. The results of the research by Suyitno (2017a) indicate that foreign students learn Indonesian to (a) deepen their knowledge of the Indonesian language, (b) conduct research in Indonesia, (c) work in Indonesia, and (d) live in Indonesia. This is in line with Mackey and Mountford's opinion (Sofyan, 1983) which explained that there are 3 needs that encourage a person to learn the language, namely (1) the need for work, (2) the need for vocational training programs, and (3) the need to learn. The findings of this study are in accordance with Hoed's (1995) opinion that BIPA learning is directed at meeting the needs of foreign students learning, namely the need for (1) academic communication for further study in Indonesia; (2) for reading Indonesian language references for the research, and (3) for communicating verbally in daily life in Indonesia.

To be able to communicate academically or socially in Indonesian society, BIPA students need to develop both receptive and productive skills, as well as knowledge and mastery of the Indonesian language. In communicating among speakers of Indonesian language, BIPA students need to demonstrate good communication skills. As such, BIPA courses try to provide students with communicative literacy in Indonesian language both orally and in writing. Additionally, mastery of the language and culture is a fundamental competency that is desirable for BIPA students to demonstrate in order to achieve success in communicating.

In line with the demands of BIPA students, BIPA learning needs to consider the pedagogical norms relevant to the student's needs. Pedagogical norms in the selection of teaching materials and learning strategies are important aspects that teachers need to apply in BIPA courses. In designing BIPA courses, BIPA teachers need to keep in mind the course aims and understand the characteristics of BIPA students, especially the learning strategies used by BIPA students when learning Indonesian.

Learning strategies in the context of this study refer to a package of activities, steps, plans, and routines which are used by students to facilitate task achievement, to promote storing, calling/recalling and information use (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p. 19). Richards and Platt (1992, p. 209) state that learning strategy is an intentional behavior and thought is used by learners during learning to help them understand, learn or remember new information. Cohen (1998, p. 15) similarly defines learning strategy as a special action, tactic, or technique which is undertaken by language learners. Winkel (2003, p. 72) states that cognitive strategies, which is one form of learning strategy, are techniques that learners use to control and monitor their own cognitive processes.

The main aim of BIPA is to improve students' ability to use Indonesian language communicatively. To achieve the target, in the learning process, students are exposed to using the Indonesian language in real communication to understand Indonesian culture, which encompasses the lifestyle of the Indonesian people. Suyitno (2017a) has said that by studying the Indonesian language, students can get to know about the social, cultural and political

contexts of Indonesian people. Learning Indonesian is essentially learning to understand the civilization of Indonesia.

In the learning process, BIPA students are positioned as learning participants who actively acquire and produce the Indonesian language they learn. Teaching materials and activities have been designed to optimize students' use of the target language in real communication. While information on cultural norms have been included as content when designing the program, information on the actual learning strategies used by BIPA students to learn the content are still needed (Suyitno, 2017b). This will help inform the improvement and creation of classroom learning activities (Gass et al., 2002).

Based on the descriptions above, the present research was limited to the study related to the learning strategies used by beginner level BIPA students. The research examines, describes and explains the characteristics of the cognitive learning strategies applied by BIPA students participating in the study. The strategies are classified based on the characteristics of students' learning behavior and are explained by proposing the factors influencing the use of the strategy and its meaning.

The findings of the research will be important for the BIPA program and can be used as a reference to inform and improve the development of BIPA programs for language learning. Teachers who conduct foreign language learning can also use the findings to improve the quality of learning and foster students' trust. Additionally, the findings will be of significance to BIPA institutions as documents that can be used for making decisions related to program regulations, and academic program standards and accreditation.

Review of the Literature

Language learning strategy can be defined as steps or planned behavior used by language learners to get, store, remember, recall, and use new information (Oxford, 1990). It may also refer to the steps learners take to solve a problem, make a direct analysis, make a transformation, and do materials synthesizing. The strategy might be accessed, in research, through several ways such as daily journal checking, interpreting, observation, and through surveys.

Successful language learners tend to use a learning strategy which goes along with the materials, assignments, objectives, needs, and steps of the learning itself (Oxford, Rpberta & Crookall, 1989). They also tend to use a variety of language learning strategies. Stern (1992, pp. 262–266) proposes that there are 5 language learning strategies. They are (1) management strategy, (2) cognitive strategy, (3) communicative strategy, (4) interpersonal strategy and (5) affective strategy.

Zarei and Shahidi (2013) investigated the use of different types of language learning strategies and the contribution to L2 idioms comprehension. The results of their study showed that successful idiom learners most frequently used cognitive and affective learning strategies. They concluded that the two strategies were the best predictors of L2 idioms comprehension.

As Zarei and Shahidi's (2013) study also highlight, in second language learning (L2), learners often use more than one strategy. The use of multiple strategies depends on the learner's proficiency in the target language. Ansarin, Zohrabi, and Zeynali (2012) found that

the learners with higher levels of proficiency used multiple language learning strategies more frequently than the other learners. Abadi and Baradaran (2013) found a positive relationship between the use of learning strategies and learner autonomy in both intermediate and advanced level language learners, but the relationship was stronger in advanced learners.

While Stern (1992) highlights 5 possible language learning strategies of which one is using cognitive strategies, Wenden and Rubin (1987, see also Oxford, 1990, p. 9) identified 6 strategies of cognitive learning which makes a direct contribution toward language learning. These are (1) clarifying and verifying, (2) guessing or doing inductive exploring, (3) reasoning deductively, (4) practicing, (5) memorizing to remember, and (6) monitoring.

Khosravi (2012) explains that in learning language, intermediate level students used cognitive strategies more significantly than did basic level students. The positive relationship between cognitive strategy use and language proficiency indicates that greater use of cognitive strategy is associated with higher levels of language proficiency. The present study describes and discusses the types of cognitive strategies used by beginner level BIPA students in learning the Indonesian language.

Research Method

Research Participants

The participants of the research were BIPA students who were taking the BIPA course at the Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). The BIPA students participating in this research were limited to Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) students, specifically, 5 students at the beginner level. They were selected amongst the large number of foreign students studying at UM to enable a more in-depth understanding of the learning strategies they used.

CLS is a program held for American students. This program receives a grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), United States Department of State. The department first began the program in 2006, and CLS is now available in different countries, including Indonesia. The objectives of CLS have been to enrich knowledge, prosperity, and safety through the learning of foreign language and culture.

In Indonesia, CLS started in 2010 and to date, has been conducted by BIPA (Indonesian for Foreign Students) Program, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), Indonesia. The duration of the course is 8 weeks (June to August). In the BIPA program, students undergo an intensive course to learn the Indonesian language, and practice the language in authentic communication contexts.

Data Collection

Data of the research were collected by observation, interview, and documents study. The observation contexts included observing the participants in their: (1) language classes, (2) tutorials, (3) elective classes, (4) cultural trips, and (5) social interactions. In the collecting data, researchers engaged in the following activities:

1. Wrote field notes,
2. Recorded Indonesian language learning activities by using Sony Carl Zeiss Vario-Tessar Optical Zoom Series 40X and BlackBerry Monza 8500 Handycams,

3. Read students' daily journal that contained students' notes about the learning activity and the development of Indonesian language learning,
4. Provided assignment topics for students to discuss, and
5. Interviewed students.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative analysis model. The procedures conducted in the data analysis included (1) identifying data, (2) classifying and categorizing data, (3) interpreting research data, and (4) drawing a conclusion.

Findings

This study found that in learning Indonesian language, BIPA students used various cognitive strategies in language learning. The strategies are presented in the following description.

Clarifying the Relation of Words Meaning

In learning the Indonesian language, when BIPA students met with difficulty in choosing the correct vocabulary, they clarified the relation between words with similar meanings. The use of the strategy can be seen in the field notes below.

In learning interaction, a student asked the teacher the use of word mau (want). Students already know the word "ingin" in Indonesian and also asked about "pingin" because they often hear the latter being used. Then, the teacher explained by telling them that "'pingin' is for informal, 'mau' for semi-formal, and 'ingin' for formal."

From the quotation, it could be described that students asked their teacher the use of several words in the Indonesian language that are mau, ingin, and pingin. The three words are synonyms. By knowing them and enquiring about the distinctions related to their usage, the students could differentiate the situations for their appropriate use. The behavior of clarifying about the use of synonymous words in learning the Indonesian language may be identified as a cognitive strategy because it involves thinking and analysis.

Another example of a strategy used in learning the Indonesian language can be seen from the following quotation which asks a question to verify the antonym of a word.

[. . .] apa kata Indonesia tidak cepat-cepat? (what is the opposite meaning of 'cepat-cepat' in Indonesian?)
 Hari ini saya belajar tidak cepat-cepat, . . . oh lambat . . . lambat (Today I did not learn quickly (cepat-cepat), . . . oh slowly (lambat-lambat)).
 Ya hari ini otak saya lambat sekali (yeah, today my brain is so slow).

From the extract above, it can be seen that the student is trying to use or recall an antonym. The behavior of using antonyms in language learning helps students to enrich and improve their vocabulary by associating related words.

Classifying the Similar Words in Form

Another learning strategy, which the BIPA participants adopted, was to group and classify words with similar spellings but different meanings. Data from the students' notes showed the following entries made,

bawa-bawah-bahwa (bring-below-that)
 kepala-kelapa (head-coconut)
 merah- marah- murah (red-angry-cheap)
 kucing- kunci- kancing-kencing (cat-key-buttoned-urine)

From the above notations, students adopted the strategy of classifying easily confused words with similar spelling and pronunciation. The classification enables students to distinguish between commonly confused Indonesian vocabularies.

Simplifying Language Learning Tasks

In learning Indonesian language, foreign students applied a strategy of simplifying language learning tasks through using keywords, making inferences, generalizing, commenting, contrasting, and using illustration. The strategy was used to enhance and reinforce their understanding Indonesian vocabulary.

Using Keywords

The using keywords are done by students when they try to understand a conversation or text. The keywords could be in the form of words that they already know before, so that could help students as a guide or support tools to understand a conversation or text. Learning activity which describes the behavior of using keywords could be seen in the following quotation.

[. . .] alat transportation . . . di Indonesia . . . ada di Malang . . . tidak cepat . . . mobil lebih cepat . . . tidak ada engine . . . roda tiga . . . based on . . . itu becak (transportation in Indonesia . . . in Malang . . . not too fast . . . car is faster . . . no engine . . . three wheels . . . ah that's pedicab).

Keywords like what the quotation mentioned above is a guiding word for students to answer the question. From the keywords, students could conclude that the keywords were indicating pedicab suggesting that the students were synthesising information provided by different keywords to identify the target mode of transportation described in the text.

Making Inferences

Students also used inferences as a learning strategy where they made conclusions based on context. The students learning activities which describes the using of inferences may be seen from the following quotation.

Tuhan bekerja lebih keras di Indonesia karena orang-orang tidak take care dirinya (God works more diligently in Indonesia because Indonesians do not care about themselves).

Di Amerika Tuhan bekerja lebih santai karena orang-orang disiplin ketika naik mobil (In America, God feels more relaxed because Americans drive their cars more carefully).

From the quotation, it is evident that students draw their own conclusion. The behavior above showed that students are using inference which means that they use a cognitive strategy.

Generalizing

The strategy of making generalization can be shown from the students' statement as quoted below.

Saya tahu banyak kata Inggris bisa pakai di Indonesian language (I know there are a lot of English language words that could be used in Indonesian).
Kata Inggris with ending -tion jadi -si dalam BI (the ending of -tion could be -si in Indonesian).

From the statement, it can be said that students are making a generalization from Indonesian language words. Students know that the Indonesian language adopts several vocabularies from several countries. There is a good deal of English vocabulary that is adopted in the Indonesian language. From the process of generalization, students could find another vocabulary. For example: *standardization*-standarisasi, *education*-edukasi, *function*-fungsi, dan *irrigation*-irigasi.

Commenting

The strategy of commenting was used by BIPA students when they were expressing their opinion in discussing. When talked about “wayang”, one of the students made the following statement.

Dalang orang pandai karena harus ingat semua karakter di wayang (Puppeteer is a smart person because they must know all the puppet characters).

From the above quotation, it can be seen that the BIPA student expressed his opinion about the “puppeteer”. The statement expressed by the student contains comments. The quotation illustrates that in learning Indonesian language, BIPA students also apply the strategy of using comments.

Contrasting

The strategy of contrasting can be seen in the context of the following speech.

Orang Indonesia banyak suka bicara kalau bersama teman-teman, tapi tidak banyak . membaca. Orang Amerika suka membaca sendiri-sendiri, mereka tidak banyak bicara (Indonesian people generally like to talk with their friends when together. American people prefer to read, but they do not like to talk much).

From the quotation above, it can be drawn that BIPA students used a contrasting strategy to express their opinions in a conversation. To explain complex ideas, they have limitations on the vocabulary they master. Therefore, they express their opinion by contrasting the 2 ideas.

Using Illustration

The strategy of illustrating in learning the Indonesian language can be seen from the activity of avoiding direct translations or straightforward explanations about objects. The strategy of using illustration can be described in the quotation below.

Waduh . . . makan mie setan seperti makan api. Mulut saya bakar (Oops, I ate Devil Noodle, it feels like I ate fire. My mouth is burning).

From the quotation, it could be drawn that students were trying to illustrate how spicy the Devil Noodle is. The illustration of spicy is “ate fire” and “burning mouth”.

Imitating Model of Indonesian Language Use

The strategy of using the model can be identified from the field notes and students’ direct utterances. The strategy of using language model can be seen from the student's utterances quoted below.

Saya rasa pendapat saya salah (I think my opinion is wrong).
Ini saya suka, menurut saya baik (I like this, according to me is good).
Saya tidak koreksi lagi . . . begini saja (I don’t correct it again...that’s okay).
Ya begitu menurut saya (That's okay according to me).

Students were trying to use a style of Indonesian language model. Some expression like “saya rasa . . .”, “. . . menurut saya . . .”, “. . . begini saja”, and “ya begitu . . .” are expression that are often used by Indonesian people in communication. The Students acquired the language model from seeing, remembering, and imitating Indonesian people when they speak.

Utilizing Technical Aids of Memorizing

The strategy of utilizing technical aids in memorizing can be described in the activity of making notes, repeating, representing sounds, and highlighting.

Taking notes

Making note is one of the strategies used by students to remember the language they learn. The students’ utterances which represents the behavior of remembering in the Indonesian language is showed by the quotation: “. . . saya mengingat kata-kata Indonesian language lebih baik kalau saya menulis kata-kata itu (I can remember Indonesian words better when I write it down)”. The quotation showed learning behavior of remembering Indonesian vocabulary by writing down the vocabulary or word. The strategy of remembering vocabulary which has been done by students as what the quotation showed is one of a part of their learning strategy.

Repeating

The students also repeated or rehearsed using new words as a learning strategy.

Saya memakai kata-kata sering untuk berbicara dan menulis, supaya saya mengulang memakai kata itu. Jadi saya tidak lupa (I use words often to talk and write, in order to repeat the use of that words, so that I can remember).

The using of words repeatedly gives the opportunity to students to remember longer words. One of the principles to master a target language, is to use the vocabulary of the target language repeatedly in order to remember the words or phrases. The words that students seldom use will be easier to forget.

Associating Sound with a Target Word

The vocabulary naming the target object was associated with sounds heard when the object is produced or used. This is done in order to remember the word signifying it. The students' activity that describes the behavior of representing the sound in the Indonesian language showed by the quotation, “dok dok . . . itu nasi goreng (the sounds of someone who sell food around the village and students could identify it as a fried rice seller)”. From the quotation, it is known that students make an association of dok-dok' sounds and fried rice seller. Students identify and memorize the sound to recognize and compare the objects. Students recognize the sounds which are referenced to food names in Indonesia because of their experience and Indonesian people information.

Highlighting

Highlighting is mainly done when students read the text. This is done by underlining, making a little fold in books or using a coloured pencil to make important information prominent. The students' activity which describes the behavior of highlighting in the Indonesian language showed by the quotation, students read Indonesian text. In the text, there are several important parts. The important parts were highlighted by color pencil. The highlighted words are difficult terms that students did not understand. Highlighted sentences or word make it easier students easier to find the sentence.

Using Code Switching

When students did not know an Indonesian word, they used the English word or substituted the word with the English version.

Saya tidak **finish** membaca karena teks panjang dan banyak kata sulit. (I did not finish reading because the text is just too long and difficult).

Terlalu banyak kata-kata saya tidak mengerti. Maaf! (too many words that I can't understand, sorry!).

From the quotation, it is known that students used code-switching as a learning strategy to convey their intended meaning to the teacher. The behavior of inserting English to replace the Indonesian word was done because the student either did not know or could not recall the words that he or she wanted to use. The use of “finish” in the Indonesian utterance was an instance of code-switching which helped the student to maintain fluency in the use of Indonesian language despite not knowing or remembering the Indonesian word for “finish”.

Thinking language aloud

Thinking language aloud is one of the learning strategies used by students to understand the language they learn. In learning language, the strategies were realized in activities guessing words, verifying word meaning, analyzing language use, and elaborating word meaning.

Guessing words based on contexts

Students use a strategy of guessing as seen from the following quotation.

[. . .] saya pikir itu . . . tidak memakai masuk rumah, memakai selalu dua, . . . harga kurang Rp 100.000, memakai bersama sepatu . . . adalah ini . . . shocks . . . kaos kaki (students were in the process of guessing about socks and several clues were provided in the quotation).

Based on the quotation it could be described that students are trying to guess accurately. Students decided that “socks” was the target word after the process of guessing which is based on inductive searching. Students are searching inductively through information given the clues at the beginning to guess the target word from the game.

Verifying Words Meaning

The strategy of verifying can be observed from the students’ behaviors during the activity. When they learn Indonesian language, students do checking, selecting, clarifying, and evaluating information. For example, students were observed verifying the suffix “-nya”. In Indonesian, the suffix “-nya” when attached to the end of an object, indicates possession or belonging to. In the term “bukunya”, “buku” is book while “-nya” functions as a pronoun to indicate his or her or their book. The suffix “-nya” is sometimes also used to mean “the”. For example, in the utterance, “Desainnya cantik” “-nya” is used as “the” or “The design is beautiful”. Based on the above examples, students made attempts to verify the varieties of meaning of the suffix “-nya”.

Analyzing Language Use

The strategy of analyzing can be identified from the following quotation.

Orang di pasar berbicara BI jarang memakai prefiks (People in traditional market seldom talk using a prefix).
Tapi di kelas saya harus berbicara memakai prefiks supaya saya punya bahasa formal (Inside the class I must talk using a prefix, in order to make it formal).
Saya mau berbicara BI seperti orang di pasar tidak pakai prefiks dan menulis baik pakai prefiks (I want to speak like people in traditional market and write well with prefix).

Based on the quotation, students analyzed the language by comparing the variety of formal and informal language. The variety of formal Indonesian mentioned tends to use prefixes. The variety of informal Indonesia reduces the usage of prefixes in informal contexts like the traditional market.

Elaborating Word Meaning

The strategy of elaborating can be identified from utterances and students' notes when they learn the Indonesian language. In the process of learning, students elaborate the meaning of "masak" (cook), "masuk" (come in) and "saja" (only). The activity of elaborating vocabulary can be seen from the quotation below. From the notes, it is known that students try to organize the use of "saja". Students understand that "saja" have a meaning as "only". Students understand that different context gives a different meaning to the word "saja". In a sentence, "saya tidak makan, saya minum saja" the "saja" word means "only". But, the different context gives a different meaning of word "saja" in the sentence "Mas Patrick baru saja pulang ke rumah dia" the word "saja" means "just". And the word "saja" in the sentence "siapa saja yang pergi ke Bali" means "any". From the examples in the sentences it can be seen that "saja" has three meanings; only, just and any. Students tried to find out the different meaning because they were elaborating examples of sentences.

Self Searching Words Meaning

Self-searching words meaning is the learning strategy used by students to enrich their vocabularies. In learning language, the strategy was realized in the following activity.

Saya membaca Jawa pos untuk berdiskusi tentang topik hangat di Indonesia (I read Jawa Pos newspaper to discuss hot-topics in Indonesia).

Banyak kata baru saya belum belajar di kelas, jadi saya mengerti sedikit (There are a lot of new vocabularies that I never heard in class before, so I just understand a little bit).

Pictures di Jawa Pos membantu saya mengerti sekarang hangat di Indonesia (Pictures in newspaper help me to understand that the weather is hot in Indonesia).

Based on the quotation, it can be drawn that students use authentic sources in the form of the newspaper as a news source. The using of authentic sources in the Indonesian language were used to improve the student's ability to communicate.

Another example of self-searching strategy could be seen in the quotation, "Saya tahu kata 'begadang' karena di kelas saya belajar lagu dangdut Roma Irama. (I know words 'begadang' because I just heard dangdut song)". From the quotation, students were using the context of such a word to remember a word.

Discussion

The research findings showed that BIPA students used various strategies in learning the Indonesian language. For understanding the meaning of Indonesian words, students applied a strategy of clarifying the relation of words meaning. To minimize and avoid mistakes when using similar words, they applied a strategy of classifying easily confused similar words. The use of different strategies may stem from learners' differences, diverse program designs, and variation of the materials they learn. By applying the different strategies, students could control their understanding and their own cognitive processes (Winkel, 2003, p. 72). Some techniques BIPA students demonstrated in this study are using keywords, making inferences, making generalizations, commenting, contrasting, and using illustrations. Apart from that, they also used the technical aids of memorizing, like making notes, repeating, representing sounds, and highlighting. Students also used the strategy of modifying concepts for delivering

a difficult word. Some other strategies used by BIPA students were thinking aloud and looking up the meaning of words. Some techniques used in thinking aloud strategies are guessing words based on contexts, verifying words meaning, analyzing language use, and elaborating word meaning.

Based on the summary of research findings, it can be said that in learning Indonesian language, BIPA students used the varieties of learning strategies. The findings supported research findings conducted by Ramirez (1995, p. 159), Stern (1992), and O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 46) on the various types of the cognitive strategies used by students in learning the language. The varieties of strategies used by foreign students found in this research were also in line with research findings reported by Oxford (1990) and Felder and Solomon (2000).

The diversity of learning strategies undertaken by foreign students in learning the Indonesian language is possibly due to the characteristics of the language materials they are learning. The background knowledge possessed by students has an important role in the mastery of language materials they learn. Language learners will be able to easily learn the language if they know the culture of the target language they are learning. Guo (in Yung Liu, et.al., 2016) states that the more one knows about a language's culture, the easier it is for him/her to comprehend listening and reading materials. BIPA's emphasis on the equal importance of knowledge about Indonesian culture possibly helped facilitate BIPA students in their acquisition of the Indonesian language.

Helping teachers understand the learning strategies students adopt was another aim of this study. The identified learning strategies used by BIPA students will facilitate teachers' preparations of language materials. For instance, in learning reading, the teacher's role is to engage their students with a text. Teachers must create experiences and environments that introduce, nurture, or extend students' abilities by incorporating several methods of instruction to foster their students' motivation for reading. To motivate students to read, McLaughlin (2012, p. 434) advised that teachers must use explicit instruction, which includes modeling, scaffolding, facilitating, and participating.

Additionally, this study found that BIPA language learners will develop more varied and more effective learning strategies if they are given the opportunity to select the language material they learn. For instance, in learning reading, students could be given an opportunity to select the text they will read. In that way, students may be more motivated and develop the right strategy to understand the text. In learning Indonesian language, BIPA students need to be encouraged to develop autonomy and effective learning strategies. Students can choose the right strategy if they have meaningful experiences gained from their learning process in the classroom.

Conclusions

From the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the learning strategies BIPA students used ranged from mechanical level strategies to strategies that engage higher-level thinking processes. The selected strategies used by students in learning language depend on types of the learning tasks that students faced, individual factors and the learning environment which also play a part in influencing the students' selection of learning strategies to use.

The findings of this study have important benefits for language teaching, especially for BIPA (Indonesian for foreign students) teaching as they can be used as a basic reference to design language learning processes for BIPA courses.

The research findings are however, limited as they only describe the varieties of learning strategies used by BIPA students. The research did not examine which learning strategy is the most effective for learning Indonesian. Future studies may investigate the effectiveness of different learning strategies used to learn a language, the types of learning strategies based on the level competence of students, or the influence of the use of students' learning strategies on their language learning and acquisition.

Although the research only described the various learning strategies BIPA students used to learn Indonesian, the descriptions can be used as a reference for conducting further research.

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Linguistic Error Analysis on Students' Thesis Proposals

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Abstract

This study identified and analyzed the common linguistic errors encountered by Linguistics, Literature, and Advertising Arts majors in their Thesis Proposal classes in the First Semester 2016–2017. The data were the drafts of the thesis proposals of the students from the three different programs. A total of 32 manuscripts were analyzed which was based on the actual number of groups. Results showed that of the three kinds of errors, namely grammatical, syntactical, and mechanics/substance, grammar as a main concern in writing competency was the most common linguistic error among these students. Moreover, the prevalent grammatical errors were: disagreement between the pronoun and antecedent, wrong usage of tense, and disagreement between the verb and subject. In the area of syntax, the most problematic areas were: fragments and run-ons. Lastly, in terms of mechanics, the top errors were: punctuation and spelling.

This study recommends that an intensive refresher writing course that focuses on the error-prone areas be conducted to prepare graduating students for their thesis proposal writing; to consider that team teaching and other interventions be considered so linguistic problems together with content can be addressed, since form and content go together, and finally, that a thesis editing guide or writing handbook be prepared, with an abundance of examples, practice exercises and writing activities, for instructors' and students' use.

Keywords: grammatical errors; higher education; linguistic errors; mechanics; syntactical errors; thesis proposal writing

Introduction

Thesis Writing is an important part of any college education program. Before students can obtain any degree in a university, they should have a passing grade in a thesis writing class. A thesis is an end product that students must write after attending several major courses accompanied with English courses.

Among the four macro skills, writing is considered as the “most intricate and most complex task.” It is deemed as the “most difficult of the language abilities to acquire” according to Allen and Corder (1974) cited in Lasaten (2014). It was further observed that errors still exist even for those students in the tertiary level despite that they were already exposed to language courses in their academic years (Lasaten, 2014). It is in this context that this research was undertaken since the researchers believe that the Linguistics and Literature majors are not spared from this phenomenon.

Brant (1946) cited in Alinsunod (2014) mentioned that for the educators to be satisfied with the written work of students, the latter should submit works which have “good grammatical structures, appropriate punctuation marks, verbs in their right tenses, pronouns in the right case and correct spelling of words.” It had been assumed that these students, having passed several English courses would have acquired those skills and therefore could prepare well-written thesis proposals for their thesis writing class. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case.

The researchers’ actual experience handling the Thesis Writing class in their home department in the Department of Communications, Linguistics and Literature (DCLL), and lately partnering with the Fine Arts Department where the latter’s thesis proposal classes are handled by DCLL instructors showed that students encountered the same problems. Thus, it is necessary to systematically study the drafts of the thesis proposals submitted by students in order to identify and describe the common flaws in writing thesis proposals. The results can serve as basis for a rigorous training aimed at helping the students improve their way of writing. Thus, DCLL, together with the Department of Fine Arts, will be able to advance the issue of thesis quality.

To reiterate, it is important that DCLL attend to matters such as this so that the thesis proposals of good quality are produced, which will culminate in a quality thesis in the second semester because a well-written proposal is the foundation of good research.

Linguistic Errors

This section presents the different linguistics errors identified by Darus and Ching (2009) cited in Lasaten (2014). The study includes three major categories, namely: grammatical errors, syntactical errors, and mechanics.

First, grammatical errors include the wrong usage of the different parts of speech. All examples mentioned here were taken from Lasaten (2014).

Verb Tenses

Example: A year ago, I need (needed) to stop from studying because my parents cannot (could not) afford to send me to school.

Prepositions

Example: He wanted to go out to (from) the room, but he was scared.

Articles

Example: I felt gap between me and him.

I felt a gap between me and him.

The second part encompasses the analysis determining the syntactical errors. All examples mentioned here were taken from Lasaten (2014).

a. Fragment

Example: Myself undesirable and unwanted.

I am undesirable and unwanted. (sentence)

b. Run-on sentence

Example: The sale was in full swing in the store people crowded the aisles.

The sale was in full swing. In the store, people crowded the aisles.

c. Misplaced modifier

Example: A man fell over a rock running in a race.

A man running in a race fell over a rock.

d. Dangling modifier

Example: To go to the game, seats must be reserved.

To go to the game, you must reserve seats.

e. Faulty parallelism

Example: Planning, drafting, and revision are three steps in the writing process.

Planning, writing, revising are three steps in the writing process.

Third, mechanics refers to “the technical part of constructing sentences.” All examples mentioned here were taken from Lasaten (2014).

a. Capitalization

Example: The instructor began by saying, “music is a way of painting a picture with melodies.”

The instructor began by saying, “Music is a way of painting a picture with melodies.”

b. Punctuation

Example: In our relationships we encounter several struggles. (omission of comma)

In our relationships, we encounter several struggles. (comma inserted)

c. Spelling

Example: I beleive that someday I can make a difference. (believe)

I saw him with his redish eyes. (reddish)

Review of the Related Literature

Certain language researchers (Kikula and Qorro, 2007; Manchisi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015; Purnawan, n.y.; Lasaten, 2014; and Darus and Ching, 2009) have been interested to

conduct studies analyzing the common mistakes in writing either a research proposal or an academic writing.

The first part of the literature comprises studies where the analysis targeted the common problems encountered when participants wrote and submitted their research proposals.

Kikula and Qorro's (2007) research objective was to identify the common mistakes and problems in research proposal writing. The data consisted of 240 proposals. Their results revealed that the top three most problematic issues were: writing the research problem, articulating the importance of the research problem, and proposing an appropriate methodology.

Similarly, Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza's (2015) study focused on establishing the common mistakes committed by postgraduate students. A total of 100 respondents participated in face to face interviews and focus group discussions. The findings of their study indicated that, first, the respondents presented broad and unclear topics, failed to state the problem and identify the gap in the literature, employed wrong methodology, wrong referencing style, and lastly, committed plagiarism. Second, when respondents were asked about the different challenges they faced, their responses centered on the unavailability of lecturers for consultation, negative comments from supervisors, limited time to write the proposals, and lack of materials. In the same way, the Linguistics, Literature and Advertising Arts majors were asked to validate the results of the study concentrating on the most problematic linguistic errors.

Another research that identified the common flaws in students' research proposals was done by Purnawan (n.y.). Her study analyzed 30 proposals. It revealed the following flaws: lack of vocabulary mastery, grammatical mistakes, citation and methodological flaws.

The second group of studies investigated the most common linguistic errors of students in their writing classes.

Lasaten (2014), Darus and Ching (2009), and Tizon (n.y.) examined students' errors. In the study of Lasaten (2014), he analyzed the common linguistic errors in the English writings of teacher education students. The most common errors were on verb tenses, sentence structure, punctuations, word choice, spelling, prepositions, and articles.

Likewise, Darus and Ching (2009) determined the most common errors in essays written by Chinese students. Results revealed that mechanics, tenses, preposition, and subject-verb agreement were the most common errors of the students. For Tizon (n.y.), she analysed the local and global errors of 236 students from the different colleges of La Salle University. In her study, local errors are minor mistakes which do not cause problems in comprehension. In contrast, global errors are major mistakes which make a sentence difficult to understand. The findings revealed that the School of Hospitality Management got the highest number of local and global errors. Thus, she suggested that students in the said school should actively attend remedial activities to reinforce their writing ability.

The researchers mentioned here in the second part did not analyze thesis proposals, but the results of their study can greatly help in explaining the occurrences of the different linguistic errors which this study aimed to investigate.

Statement of the Problem

This study attempted to identify and analyze the common linguistic errors incurred by the Linguistics, Literature, and Advertising Arts majors in their Thesis Proposal classes in the First Semester of AY 2016-2017.

- a. What linguistic errors occurred in the thesis proposals of the students?
 1. Grammatical Errors
 2. Syntactical Errors
 3. Mechanics/Substance Errors
- b. How does each error qualify for a specific linguistic error?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed content analysis as it described and analyzed the frequent linguistic errors observed in the students' thesis proposals. Moreover, students were also interviewed in order to validate the findings.

Research Participants

The participants were the fourth-year level students who were enrolled in English 115A (Thesis Proposal) in the Department of Communication, Linguistics and Literature (DCLL), and AA410 (Thesis Proposal) in the Department of Fine Arts, during the first semester of 2016-2017. For English 115A, two programs were covered: Linguistics and Literature.

Research Data

The data were the drafts of the thesis proposals submitted by Linguistics, Literature, and Advertising Arts majors to their English 115A or AA410 Instructors, respectively, in the first semester of academic year 2016-2017. A total of 32 manuscripts were analyzed (AA 10; Ling 15; Lit 7).

Research Procedure

Gathering of Data

A letter was sent to the Chairs of the Department of Communications, Linguistics and Literature and the Department of Fine Arts requesting permission to conduct a study analyzing the thesis proposals of students enrolled in English 115A and AA410, respectively. The students were assured that all information gathered will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Treatment of Data

When these students submitted their drafts to their research instructors, the researchers compiled the drafts and afterwards coded the errors as grammatical, syntactical, or mechanics-related. The details of each of the errors were written in the coding sheets. The

coding sheets reflected the specific kind of error and the exact phrase/sentence containing the error.

A summary of the percentages of error by linguistic category and by program was illustrated in Table 1. To further illustrate the linguistic errors, Table 2 showcased the grammatical errors; Table 3 exhibited the syntactical errors; and Table 4 conveyed the different errors in mechanics. These four tables answered the first sub-problem. After the presentation of each linguistic error, the researchers took specific samples from the thesis proposal drafts to illustrate the most prevalent errors in grammar, syntax, and mechanics, and provided a detailed explanation to answer the second sub-problem. Aside from the descriptive statistics, a chi square test was done to determine if there was a significant relationship between the linguistic errors and the three programs from which the thesis proposal manuscripts were taken.

After obtaining the results on the most prevalent linguistic errors, students enrolled in English 115A and AA410 validated the findings. The purpose for doing the validation was to find out whether the students were aware of their writing problems and whether their responses were consistent with the findings. Through this activity, the views of the students were used to crosscheck the results of the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Kinds of Linguistic Errors.

| Kinds of Errors | Advertising Arts | Linguistics | Literature |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------|------------|
| Grammatical Errors | 69.39% | 60.50% | 43.48% |
| Syntactic Errors | 12.02% | 25.21% | 32.61% |
| Mechanics/Substance | 18.59% | 14.29% | 23.91% |

From the percentages of the three categories of errors, namely, grammatical, syntactical, and mechanics/substance that have been the main objective of this study, it can be noted that grammar as a main concern in writing competency is the most common error among the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students while writing their thesis proposals.

Because grammatical error appeared as the top linguistic error across the three programs, confirmation was sought from the students, and majority of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors agreed that it was indeed a major problem for them. The following are direct quotes from students:

Because for the past 3 years in Advertising, we only focus on execution (like making artworks). We don't really write long paper works. Now, we are expected to write a book without reviewing our English grammar before we started writing our thesis (AA#20).

I agree that advertising arts students have difficulty in grammar because I believe we are more visual. English is not our major and maybe that is another reason why we are not good in grammar (AA#17).

Grammatical errors occurred the most frequent because students have deadlines to meet and it is obvious that students have little or no time to proofread or recheck (Ling#56).

We somehow tend to overthink during our drafts and revisions, Yes, I can agree that this could be one of the reasons why grammatical errors appeared to be the most committed mistake in our thesis writing. Other reasons could also be because of cramming and procrastination. Oftentimes when we do our paper, and some of us do not have enough time to proofread everything anymore (Ling#47).

Yes, because up to now I am still confused by many grammar rules, like subject-verb agreement and verb tenses (LIT # 2).

I think it's because we really need to master the rules in grammar and have more exercises or drills to internalize the rules (LIT #6).

Table 2: Kinds of Grammatical Errors committed by Advertising Arts, Linguistics and Literature Students.

| Errors | AA | LING | LIT | Total |
|---|-----|------|-----|-------|
| Disagreement Between the Pronoun and Antecedent | 95 | 12 | 3 | 110 |
| Disagreement Between the Verb and Subject | 56 | 13 | 6 | 75 |
| Wrong Usage of Tense | 51 | 26 | | 77 |
| Wrong Verb Form | 20 | 6 | 1 | 27 |
| Lacking Verb | | | | |
| Unnecessary Verb | | | | |
| Wrong Preposition | 27 | 2 | 5 | 34 |
| Unnecessary Preposition | 3 | | | 3 |
| Lacking Preposition | 2 | 3 | | 6 |
| Wrong Pron | 15 | 6 | 1 | 22 |
| Lacking Pron | 1 | | | 1 |
| Wrong Indefinite Pronoun | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| Wrong Number of Noun | 8 | | 1 | 9 |
| Lacking Determiner | 2 | | | 2 |
| Wrong Determiner | 1 | | | 1 |
| Unnecessary Determiner | 2 | | 2 | 4 |
| Disagreement Between the Determiner and Noun | 5 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| Incorrect Embedding of Wh- Question | 8 | | | 8 |
| Total | 297 | 72 | 20 | 389 |

As shown in Table 1, grammatical errors were found to be the most common category of linguistic error in the thesis proposal drafts of the students in Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature. Table 2 lists the different kinds of grammatical errors committed by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors.

The top three grammatical errors were: **disagreement between the pronoun and antecedent** which marked the highest number of errors, followed by **wrong usage of tense**, and lastly, **disagreement between the verb and the subject**. This finding calls to mind the research of Ulla (2014) in which she noted that pronoun-antecedent agreement has not been fully grasped by the respondents resulting in this particular grammatical error to be one of the highest percentages of errors in her study.

Noting the top three grammatical errors, students offered the following sentiments:

I think we lack knowledge about the pronoun and antecedent (AA#23).

Because we are not aware of the pronouns used and the corresponding antecedents used (AA#21).

We just wrote down right away what is in our mind that time without noticing the error (AA#13).

The wrong usage of tense might have been the highest or most frequent type of grammatical error because sometimes we forget about the context where the verb is being used. It is sometimes confusing especially when it is enclosed in embedded sentences and lengthy sentences (Ling#41).

I agree that wrong usage of tense is the most grammatical error committed because sometimes there is confusion in determining the proper tense to be used in the entire research paper (Ling#40).

I think it is because during our research writing ideas get complicated or complex that we are unable to use the correct tenses for a specific idea (Ling#44).

I really have this grammar problem, especially subject-verb agreement. It's very confusing for me (Lit #5).

I have to review preposition use. I'm confused about what antecedent means, too. I'm really challenged here (Lit # 4).

This part presents specific examples of grammatical errors taken from the thesis proposal drafts of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors. The study provides examples which are accompanied by explanations regarding the three most frequently-incurred grammatical errors.

Examples of Disagreement between the Pronoun and Antecedent

The Ranch Resort has problems in communicating to their possible target market (from the Advertising Arts program).

All languages have the same linguistic aspects such as syntax, morphology, phonology, and etc. but they differ in the content of its variety depending on the speaker of the language (from the Linguistics program).

... both pitfalls can be remedied by the adaptations as it prompts the readers to go back . . . (from the Literature program).

To recall, pronouns should agree with the nouns that they refer to, or their **antecedents** (Yarber and Yarber, 2010). Students in these three cases were not mindful of what the antecedents of their pronouns are, thereby committing error in pronoun-antecedent agreement. In example 1, *The Ranch Resort* is the antecedent and a singular noun, hence, the pronoun that refers to it should have been the singular form *its* rather than the plural *their*. On the other hand, in example 2, the singular pronoun *its* is used although the antecedent is the plural noun *languages*. Thus, the correct pronoun should have been *their*. Example 3 illustrates the same type of error with the use of the singular pronoun *its* rather than *their* since the antecedent is *adaptations*.

Examples of Wrong Usage of Tense

. . . the researchers proposed an advocacy campaign for marine conservation in Moalboal (from the Advertising Arts program).

In addition, Anton-Carillo (2011) presented a discourse analysis of race and otherness in press editorials published in Cuban newspapers during specific periods of the twentieth century. It analyses the discursive strategies... (from the Linguistics program).

Advertising Arts students failed to remember the proper use of the different verb tenses. To recall, the past tense can only be used when one describes events that took place in the past (Lester and Beason, 2013). In example 1, the students knew very well that their research is yet to be conducted in the second semester of 2016-2017. Hence, the simple past tense *proposed* cannot be used; rather, it should be the future tense form, *will propose*, made up of the base form of the verb coupled with the modal *will*. In contrast, example 2 suggests that Linguistics majors failed to observe consistent tense use in talking a study that was conducted in the past. In the follow-up statement, the simple past form *analysed* should be used instead of the present tense, *analyses*.

Examples of Disagreement between the Verb and Subject

The price of their cottages are 300 and 500 depending on its sizes (from the Advertising Arts program).

Lakoff have included context as a deciding factor in determining a tag's usage . . . (from the Linguistics program).

There is *Ang Camatuoran* (1908), *El Precursor* (1910), *La Revolucion* (1910) . . . (enumerating pre-war Cebuano periodicals) (from the Literature program).

Agreement here means that the number of the verb must match the number of the subject of the statement (Lester and Beason, 2013). Apparently, the Advertising Arts students have difficulty in identifying what the real subject is when a prepositional phrase comes between

the simple subject and the verb. In example 1, the prepositional phrase, “of the cottages”, comes between the simple subject “price” and the verb, and so the students misidentified “cottages” as the subject. This led them to use the plural verb “are” which makes the sentence erroneous. Langan and Goldstein (2011) noted that “the subject of the sentence is never part of a prepositional phrase” (p.40).

For most English sentences, the verb follows the subject just like in example 2. Although the subject and the verb are close together, Linguistics students used the incorrect number of the verb *have* which is plural although the subject, the scholar Lakoff, is singular hence the verb should have been singular in form, “has”. Lastly, example 3 demonstrates a common error made by students when beginning a statement with *there* or *it*, the so-called **expletives**, which results in a “postponed” or delayed subject, according to Fowler (1980). Moreover, an inverted subject-verb order occurs with the expletive construction of “There . . .” or “It . . .”, but the verb should still agree with the subject despite the inversion (p. 166). In example 3, the sentence subject is the various periodicals, but the student mistook *there* for the subject and based her verb use on it.

Table 3: Kinds of Syntactical Errors committed by Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students.

| Errors | AA | LING | LIT | Total |
|---------------------|----|------|-----|-------|
| Fragments | 20 | 11 | 12 | 43 |
| Run-ons | 15 | 12 | | 27 |
| Comma Splice | 10 | 5 | 3 | 18 |
| Misplaced Modifiers | 1 | | | 1 |
| Faulty Parallelism | 7 | 2 | | 9 |
| Total | 53 | 30 | 15 | 98 |

Table 3 presents the specific types of syntactical errors made by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students in their AA410 class.

Details of syntactical errors presented in Table 3 show **fragments** to be most pervasive, followed by **run-ons**, and **comma splices**. According to Lester and Beason (2013), “Even though fragments are common in speech and informal writing, they are considered one of the most serious types of errors in formal writing” (p. 111).

The students shared the following reasons for having committed these syntactical errors:

Fragments surface a lot in our paper since students fail to identify if their sentences provide a complete thought (AA#16).

Advertising students are so used to writing short headlines that help create poster ads successful. It could be possible that this is the reason why advertising students write fragments instead of long sentences (AA#12).

It is difficult to write complete sentences because even if it is fragmented, we assumed that it has already a complete thought (AA#17).

I guess we committed a lot of run-ons because we didn't know how to end or where to the sentence/s (Ling#33).

I would attribute this to how students at times have to so much to say and would therefore put too much in a sentence (Ling#39).

Run-ons surface to be the most frequent error in syntactical errors because Linguistics majors have full of ideas, in which it causes less awareness on when to divide a sentence (Ling#52).

I guess it's because I tend to just follow where my thoughts go when writing (Lit# 1)
I really need to review rules in sentence construction (Lit# 6).

I thought it was OK to use comma between two long sentences (Lit # 3)

The following examples were extracted from the drafts of the thesis proposals of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students. This study provides an explanation for the three most common syntactical errors.

Examples of Fragments

Younger age groups as well, along with their parents and guardians (from the Advertising Arts program).

Specifically, in the Philip Van Engelen building in the School of Arts and Sciences (from the Linguistics program).

By questioning what, how and how much a character eats, as well how food is prepared, served (from the Literature program).

The three examples are groups of words that cannot stand alone as grammatically complete sentences, hence, **fragments**. Example 1 only presented the subject but lacked a verb. In order for this fragment to have a complete thought, this should have a predicate. Example 2, in contrast, needs a subject. Woods (2010) stresses that "every complete sentence has at least one subject-verb pair and must express a complete thought" (p. 59). The third and longest example is still a fragment since it does not express a complete thought. In this example, the student writers have failed to consider the two conditions in composing a complete sentence as emphasized earlier by Woods (2010). According to Yarber and Yarber (2010), "fragments usually suggest that the writer is careless and unable to formulate a complete thought" (p. 190).

Examples of Run-On Sentences

The role of branding is in great significance in the food business there are already a number of this kind of business in the food industry (from the Advertising Arts program).

Perlocution refers to the action which hearer will do what the speaker's wants and it refers to an action that produces consequences or effects on the hearer through the speaker's utterance (from the Linguistics program).

As defined by Langan and Johnson (2013), “A run-on is made up of two complete thought that are incorrectly run together without a connection between them.” (p. 102). Example 1 should be revised by inserting a period and starting the separated sentence with a capital letter. The revision should be: The role of branding is in great significance in the food business. There is already a big number of this kind of business in the food industry. Moreover, according to Langan and Goldstein (2011), “When there is no punctuation at all separating two complete statements, the result is a run-on.” (p. 72). For example 2, the run-on can be remedied if the statement is broken into two sentences.

Examples of Comma Splice

In getting around the island people can ride a pedicab or motorcycle which usually cost Php 20.00, people may also rent a bike if they prefer for Php 10.00 only per hour (from the Advertising Arts program).

A linguist named J.R. Firth believed in a tradition where the approaches of function is to describe the language as interactive an interpersonal, and cited by Berns (1984a, p. 5), it is a way of acting and making others act (from the Linguistics program).

It was set in the modern era of the US, essentially it was modernized (from the Literature program).

To recall, “A comma splice consists of two independent clauses connected by only a comma” (Yarber and Yarber, 2010, p. 197). The students failed to recognize that they were actually writing two independent clauses and were using commas to separate them. This kind of error as shown in examples 1 to 3 can be corrected by using end punctuation such as semi-colon or a period between the independent clauses, making two separate sentences. Fowler (1980) considers comma splices along with run-on sentences and sentence fragments as “serious errors” suggesting carelessness on the part of the writers or lack of understanding of sentence structure.

Table 4: Kinds of Mechanic/Substance Errors Committed by Advertising Arts Linguistics, and Literature students.

| Errors | AA | LING | LIT | Total |
|----------------|----|------|-----|-------|
| Capitalization | 25 | 5 | 3 | 33 |
| Punctuation | 34 | 10 | 4 | 48 |
| Spelling | 23 | 2 | 4 | 29 |
| Total | 82 | 17 | 11 | 110 |

Table 4 notes the details of the difficulties of Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students in terms of mechanics.

The three kinds of errors in terms of mechanics/substance incurred by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors suggest that they were mostly confused on **punctuation**. This finding is similar to that of Alinsunod (2014) where the writings of her Filipino respondents also manifested difficulties in punctuation and capitalization.

According to Raimes (2004), “Punctuation is a visual aid used to help readers understand the meaning of a written text” (p. 26). She observed that those “inexperienced writers of English have trouble with the conventions of English punctuation” (p. 26). Students shared the following sentiments:

I always have difficulties on using punctuation marks. It is very confusing (AA#22).

Advertising Arts students have difficulty writing punctuations because we don't analyze sentences very well. Maybe some of us weren't really taught well in the previous years how and when to use punctuations (AA#18).

When writing our paper, we get confused of the correct punctuation we have to use in the sentences (Ling#46).

It is difficult to master punctuations because we sometimes forget as to what and how a punctuation can be used in the sentence (Ling#45).

. . . MS Word sometimes correct the words I encode automatically. What's unfortunate is that their auto-corrections causes errors in my paper (Lit # 2).

I get confused what the proper punctuation should be, especially comma and period (Lit # 4).

The following examples of errors are taken from the drafts of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students. This study provides an explanation of the most prevalent errors in mechanics/substance.

Examples of Punctuation

For example, the bloggers_s reaction towards the place will give its feedback like place, space, preservation and nature (from the Advertising Arts program).

What specific linguistics strategies can elicit positive audience response from Atkinson (1984) Linguistic Strategies? (from the Linguistics program).

Bacatan research shows that . . . (from the Literature program).

One of the uses of apostrophe is to signal possession or ownership (Raimes, 2004). In example 1, it is indicated that the reaction belongs to the bloggers. But Advertising Arts students failed to put the apostrophe right after the plural noun “bloggers”. Also, students in example 2 omitted the apostrophe when in fact “Atkinson” possesses the Linguistic Strategies. To form the possessive of the singular noun “Atkinson”, the Linguistics students should add 's (apostrophe s). In example 3, the writer refers to a research done by Bacatan, hence should have written “Bacatan's research” or “the research of Bacatan”. Table 5 below reveals the result of the chi-square.

Table 5: Result of the chi-square.

| Kinds of Errors | Programs | | |
|--|------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Advertising Arts | Linguistics | Literature |
| Grammatical Errors | 69.39% | 60.5% | 43.48% |
| Syntactic Errors | 12.02 | 25.21 | 32.61 |
| Mechanics/Substance | 18.59 | 14.29 | 23.91 |
| Chi square = 23.98, df = 4, $p < .001$ | | | |

Chi square test of association indicates that there are significant differences in terms of the linguistic errors and the respective programs of the papers being analyzed: chi square (4, $N = 597$) = 23.98, $p < .001$. Across all programs, the top linguistic error is grammar. Among literature and linguistics students, most errors are found in grammar, syntax, and mechanics respectively. Among advertising arts students, most errors are found in grammar, followed by mechanical errors, and lastly, syntactic errors.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate which of the three kinds of linguistic errors could be the most pervasive linguistic error across the three tertiary programs (Linguistics, Literature and Advertising Arts). The findings of this study showed that the most prevalent errors in grammar, syntax and mechanics were incurred in varying frequencies across the three programs. Thus, it can be inferred in this present study that despite the fact that the students had been studying grammar, syntax, and mechanics since grade school until the tertiary level, they could not be said to have fully grasped or mastered the basics of correct written English, and even appeared to be in need of reminders on those oft-repeated conventions especially on grammar and mechanics. Also, based on the disclosures or explanatory comments of the students, this study has also concluded that errors have surfaced because students did not spare time to proofread their thesis manuscripts before submission.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, there really is a need for an intensive language refresher course for incoming fourth year students in order to prepare them for thesis proposal writing. The short refresher course, or writing workshop, which may be conducted during the summer term immediately preceding the semester the students are due to enroll in the thesis writing course, should not just be a review of the basic rules of writing but must be focused on the identified error-prone areas in grammar, syntax and mechanics with samples taken from the students' writing outputs to serve as authentic examples or exercises.

It is also highly recommended that language teachers or teachers of academic/technical writing courses (such as a thesis writing course) take the results of this study positively by considering course/syllabi enhancements on the writing component to incorporate grammar, syntax and mechanics review, as applicable, with particular emphases yet again on the identified, repetitive linguistic errors and proposing specific outcomes. Also, teachers should allow more time for the students to edit and proofread their drafts.

Team teaching in which one of the instructors tackles the language component of the thesis proposal writing course, as already practiced in DCLL and the Department of Fine Arts, should be considered as another important intervention, on condition that the language

instructors pay particular attention on the error-prone areas, with visible positive results in the written outputs.

Lastly, it is highly recommended that a thesis editing handbook or writing practice book/work text be seriously considered for preparation as a product and offshoot of this study, to serve as a handy reference for both instructors and students' use, and with an abundance of authentic examples and practice exercises.

If their focus is not only content but also linguistic accuracy, instructors should bear in mind that students' writing flaws can greatly obscure content or hamper clarity of meaning or message; therefore, equal importance should be given to both content and form or linguistic accuracy in thesis proposal writing. Finally, it bears noting that, of all the significant writing projects students do in their college years, thesis proposal/thesis writing is the one that they tend to take most seriously, considering that the thesis is unquestionably an important graduation requirement. Therefore, students have a vested interest in writing their theses well, and a stronger grasp of grammar, syntax and mechanics in their written English will help them achieve that goal.

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**Bringing the Brain to Bear on Context and Policy in Primary
Languages Practice in England**

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Abstract

The learning of modern languages in primary school (PL) was recently promoted to statutory status in the curriculum of England and Wales, but practice remains patchy. Low PL capacity amongst primary school teachers and constraints on curricular time persist. Viewed through the lenses of policy, learning theory and context, current PL practice can be problematised to find solutions. Neurobiological evidence attests to how the young brain learns language, particularly its heightened sensitivity to language phonology. Additionally, policy documents' currently eclectic approach is discussed. Activity Theory's framework is employed to interconnect such contextual and theoretical factors. The evidence suggests that without optimising the PL environment, learning may be at least ineffective, or at worst, detrimental to pupils' future language learning.

Keywords: primary languages; age-dependent aptitudes; neurobiology

Introduction

The delivery of language learning in primary schools (PL) in England has been statutory for Key Stage 2 pupils (aged 7–11) since September 2014. Current practice is reportedly patchy and occasionally non-existent. This study problematises the situation. Problematisation may take different forms but essentially critically confronts a situation or premise in some way in order to find solutions (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Language learning is a complex process. In order to critically confront issues affecting current PL practice, multiple perspectives need to be recognised within an analytic framework that reflects their interrelationship. This article addresses three broad considerations: the influence of rhetoric and governmental policy on PL; language learning theories and approaches and the teacher beliefs they encourage; and the implications of neurobiological studies' findings for such learning.

Over recent years, various policies have affected teachers' own level of modern language skill and hence their degree of confidence towards supporting their class's PL learning. Teachers' statutory time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) (DfES, 2005b) often results in schools buying in PL expertise. Class teachers' resultant lack of involvement in their pupils' PL learning misses the opportunity of remedying their low confidence levels. At secondary school, with only Key Stage 3 pupils (aged 11–14) statutorily required to learn a modern language (DfES, 2004a), current teacher trainees tend to demonstrate low PL capacity and little confidence. Few previous studies of PL practice, and seemingly none in PL in England and Wales, bring neurobiological findings to bear on the current situation. This would seem to be an important aspect, given the differences between young language learners' and adults' brain architectures. As the vast majority of school-based studies have been conducted in secondary schools, due to language learning being the domain of secondary schools until 2014, any age-dependent factors need essentially to be identified, and subsequently taken into account in terms of their contribution to, and/or influence upon, other factors in the learning environment. These age-dependent aptitudes, notably young pupils' temporary sensitivity to language "phonology" (Schumann et al., 2014), suggest the appropriateness of a focus on pupils' oracy skills which, according to one study, teacher trainees identify as a modern language skill in which they are least confident (Phillips, 2012). Thus, while policy claims to aim to increase language capacity, the nature of that capacity requires further study.

Teachers often remain unaware of pupils' innate, but temporarily heightened, aptitude for language phonology (Schumann, 1998), thus are unlikely to harness it, instead applying their own beliefs about language learning, influenced by their own experience and non-qualified claims for pupils' greater "receptivity" at a certain age (King, 2007). Important pointers from neurobiological studies suggest "brain-friendly" ways of PL learning but currently, these are neither echoed in government policy, nor generally implemented within schools' practice. With language learning, until recently, virtually the domain of secondary schools, secondary practice is likely to inform the beliefs of teachers supporting PL learning. In secondary schools, subjects are timetabled alongside each other, thus the different timings required for procedural, rather than substantive, learning are unlikely to be accommodated. To acquire modes of synchronous communication, procedural learning of skills is required. The different learning environments of procedural and substantive knowledge, respectively, are not accommodated within the timetabling of such learning. While Krashen (1982) recognised specific factors influencing language learning and/or acquisition, the distinction is rarely

recognised in governmental surveys (Tinsley & Board, 2017) of school learning environments.

By problematising PL practice, multiple contributory factors and their influence may be taken into account. This study aims to identify issues, and potential outcomes of current practice, by drawing largely on the literature. Additionally, my experiences as PL and secondary school modern foreign languages (MFL) teacher, current university teacher training in PL, and researcher (Phillips, 2010, 2015) bring insider knowledge of both the actualities of PL practice and theoretical underpinnings. Current practice generally has low expectations of pupils' PL skills; it receives little attention from OfSTED, an inspecting body who produce public publications of schools' performance against certain standards. With schools' accountability judged mainly on performance in the core subjects of English and Maths, other subjects, including PL, need positive outcomes to maintain their curricular time allocation.

A further threat to PL practice has to do with brain plasticity which essentially describes how neural pathways in the brain are built according to the activities undertaken. Predilections established during PL learning are thus likely to affect pupils' language learning in the future. The implications for PL practice are therefore significant, laying considerable responsibility on this new policy initiative. The establishment of counterproductive learning habits and pupils' negative attitudes could jeopardise their next stage of learning at Key Stage 3. Added to this risk is the phenomenon of synaptic pruning of underused brain pathways. These phenomena suggest the importance of better understanding of the influence that language skills have on each other.

Literature Review

Context

Because PL practice is only recently statutory in the curriculum, a brief historical account may better explain its underlying tenets, as well as the influences of stakeholders involved in current PL practice. Many real-world studies are contextualised but may not include the influence of the context within their analysis. A further consideration is that of previous practice, the historical influence of which may remain unchallenged in current practice. Such inherited "rules" or "norms" of practice can be taken into account by including them within an Activity Framework, explained later in this paper.

PL was made statutory in England and Wales within the primary curriculum for Key Stage 2 pupils (aged 7–11) in September 2014, some 50 years after the abandonment of a previous pilot study (Burstall, 1974). Brief governmental guidelines for PL learning (Department for Education (DfE) 2014) allude in the broadest terms to desired skillsets for pupils to attain, rather than to learning approaches to be adopted. This contrasts with a previous government's publication, the Key Stage 2 Framework (Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2007), which suggests lesson content alongside activities and skills to be attained across the intended four years of learning, namely oracy, literacy and intercultural understanding. Both the current and previous documents imply that four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing should be learned concurrently. As Key Stage 1 pupils (aged 4–7) are still heavily involved in learning these skills in their first language, this may be a reason for omitting this age-group from statutory PL learning. Whereas previously 24 units of topical learning and grammar knowledge were outlined (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (2007)), the current national curriculum describes desired attainment in the broadest of terms. Within

its 2-page programme of study for PL, there is very wide scope for interpretation of expected outcomes, including the relationship between language skills.

Primary Languages Practice

With standard inspections of PL practice by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) yet to be published, and current PL practice reportedly patchy and diverse (Tinsley & Board, 2017), it is the *processes* of PL practice which urgently require review. The British Council annually surveys language practice in schools in England and reports:

Almost all primary schools in England now provide at least some teaching of languages to pupils throughout Key Stage 2, and just over one third of schools now have access to specialist expertise in the teaching of languages within the school. However, there is evidence that some schools are finding it challenging to provide the kind of systematic and consistent language teaching envisaged in the national curriculum (Tinsley & Board, 2017, p. 10).

One interpretation of this statement could be that “systematic” and “consistent” teaching require more specific guidance for teachers involved in this essentially new initiative. ‘Specialist expertise’ should include both subject knowledge of the chosen language as well as experience of young children’s learning aptitudes, identified as requirements for effective learning to take place (Driscoll, 1999). As original funding sources for training primary teachers have largely dried up, the training of future teachers may fall mainly to schools themselves even though these are apparently short of PL expertise.

Although the generic form of a modern language is its spoken form, the national curriculum’s suggested option of learning an ancient language (DfE, 2014) suggests that it is acceptable for pupils to learn the historic culture of the ancient language rather than undertake language learning *per se*. A wide interpretation of the goal of such learning is thus possible. With low confidence levels in PL, particularly in speaking, teachers may be tempted to choose the dead language and its cultural collateral, delivered in English, rather than refresh their own knowledge of a living language including its spoken form.

The 2016/17 survey (Tinsley & Board, 2017) includes case studies which identify curricular time constraints, and teachers’ confidence as factors commonly challenging schools in implementing PL in the curriculum.

Primary Languages as a Set of Skills

Language learning is commonly conceptualised as involving four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, within both current (DfE, 2014) and previous (DfES, 2007) governmental guidelines for primary and secondary language learning. Both documents’ assumption that these four skills are mutually supportive is reflected in OfSTED reports and is rarely challenged or discussed. Neurobiological insights can provide evidence of distinct neural pathways for declarative and procedural knowledge. While the natural sequence of L1 acquisition is to comprehend, articulate and manipulate the phonological form before tackling literacy skills, many schemes of work introduce the written form soon after, or even concurrently with, imitating and articulating the targeted language in spoken form. The virtually simultaneous introduction of written and spoken forms of vocabulary is suggested in the (now archived) Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) schemes of work, and

overtly recommended in the Key Stage 2 Framework (DfES, 2005a), a scheme compiled by a previous government in preparation for the new initiative.

Many arguments support the simultaneous exposure to learners of the written and spoken forms. Many adults prefer to write vocabulary down to help them memorise the language. However, this assumes they can access the spoken form from the recorded written form, a skill that requires knowledge of the relationship between the phonemes and graphemes. However, few secondary pupils have learned the phonics system of the targeted language. The chance to imitate the language's sounds may also have been missed, due to the prioritising of the written form. While English cognates bring the advantage of easier comprehension of them, this does not guarantee comprehending *spoken* forms. Thus, understanding written words does not guarantee progress in oracy skills unless the phonics system is learned.

In primary schools in England, a renewed emphasis on systematic phonics for learning (English) literacy skills advocates daily discrete phonics sessions in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes (pupils aged 4–7); this practice recognises that associating graphemes with phonemes, blending and segmenting them, as well as developing the motor skills involved in articulating and writing them, require “little and often” sessions. By contrast, *PL* phonics is reportedly rarely discretely learned in either primary or secondary school language learning; recently, amongst 78 student teachers under my auspices, only one remembered undertaking such learning. This signifies a discrepancy between the “rules” or “norms” of learning literacy skills between each language, the L1 and PL. Young pupils decoding the orthographic form of the PL need support in discrete learning of PL phonics. Logically, when L1 and PL orthographies employ the same alphabetic code, pupils may apply L1, rather than PL, phonics rules for decoding the PL, as they are well rehearsed in the former (Palacios, 2015b) and the PL's orthography seems unfamiliar. Because learning of a phonics system cannot be undone, its effect has been likened to “brainwashing” (Blakemore & Frith, 2005). Applying L1 phonics to a distinct phonics system, such as the PL's, results in mispronunciation. In my study of 51 trainees' perceptions of the challenges of preparing to be future deliverers/supporters of PL learning (Phillips, 2012), pronunciation was most commonly identified as contributing to their confidence levels as future PL teachers.

Studies asserting the beneficial effect of literacy skills on language progression are commonly reported for near- or post-pubescent school pupils, or adult learners (Kuhl, 2010). Because younger learners' brains are at a different stage of development and therefore of aptitude than adults, these findings may not be presumed to represent the young learners' case. Additionally, such studies presume the reciprocal benefit of learning of any one skill on any other, because they give little account of the apportioning of time spent on each skill. However, as our senses are represented in different neural systems (Blakemore & Frith, 2005), it cannot be assumed that our ability for reading and writing skills necessarily enhances auditory language skills. The benefits for *general* language skills claimed for adults learning literacy skills may not apply in equal measure to young learners (Kuhl, 2010; Kuhl, et al., 2003). The claimed benefit of learning literacy skill requires further scrutiny: whereas literate adult learners are able to manipulate the phonemes within a word, for example, take the /v/ from the front of Vatican, illiterate adult learners reportedly lack this ability (Kuhl, 2010). Kuhl's study involved testing learners in their L1, in which meanings of words are presumably secure; it therefore remains to be shown whether, in a *targeted* language, the manipulation of phonemes might potentially weaken the meaning associated with the phonological form. There is scope for further research on primary school pupils' attainments

in different language skills after literacy learning. While oracy skills are innate, literacy skills are not and therefore require a greater cognitive load. Thus, claimed benefits for adults may not apply to primary school pupils still learning the literacy skills of their first language (L1). The possible assumption that pupils' initial inaccuracies in pronunciation will improve over time poses risks on several fronts. Firstly, pronunciation is likely to affect comprehension (Khaghaninejad & Maleki, 2015; Ahangari et al., 2015) and therefore the importance of its accuracy should not be underestimated. Poor pronunciation may disadvantage subsequent learning. Palacios (2015a, p. 2) claims that “reading too early impairs acquiring second language (L2) pronunciation”. In my experience of teaching year 6 pupils (aged 10-11) in brief weekly 20-minute sessions, their application of English phonics when decoding orthographic forms of French negatively affected their pronunciation. Some skills may therefore be inappropriate for learning at a particular age and/or stage. These opinions thus challenge assumptions of two respected policy-bearing documents, firstly, that the four broad skills are mutually supportive, and secondly, that there is no particular order in which they should be learned. Figures 1 and 1 below sum up the differentiated foci on oracy and literacy skills, respectively.

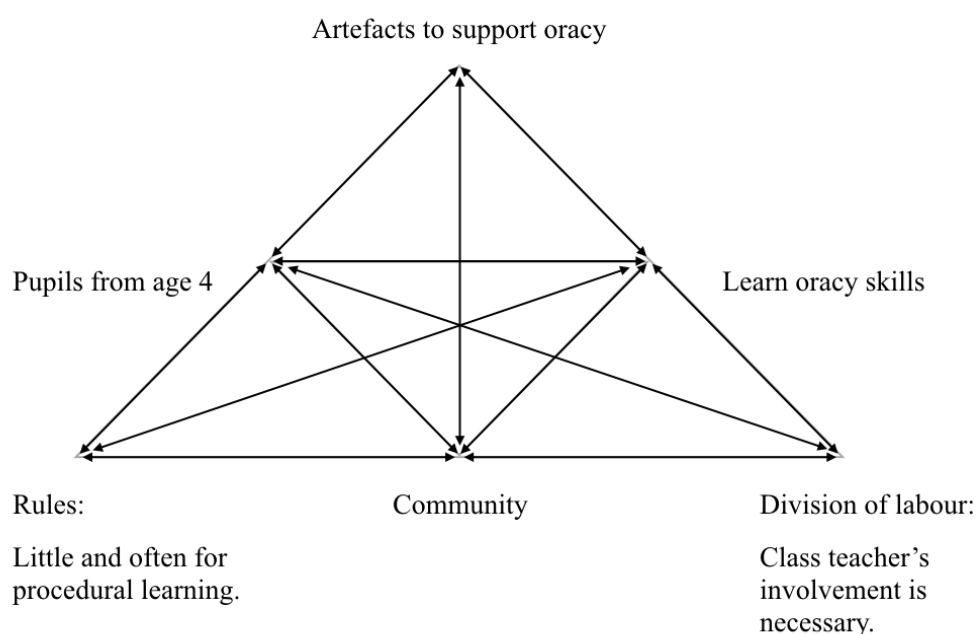


Figure 1: Oracy skills as the main “artefact” of primary languages learning.

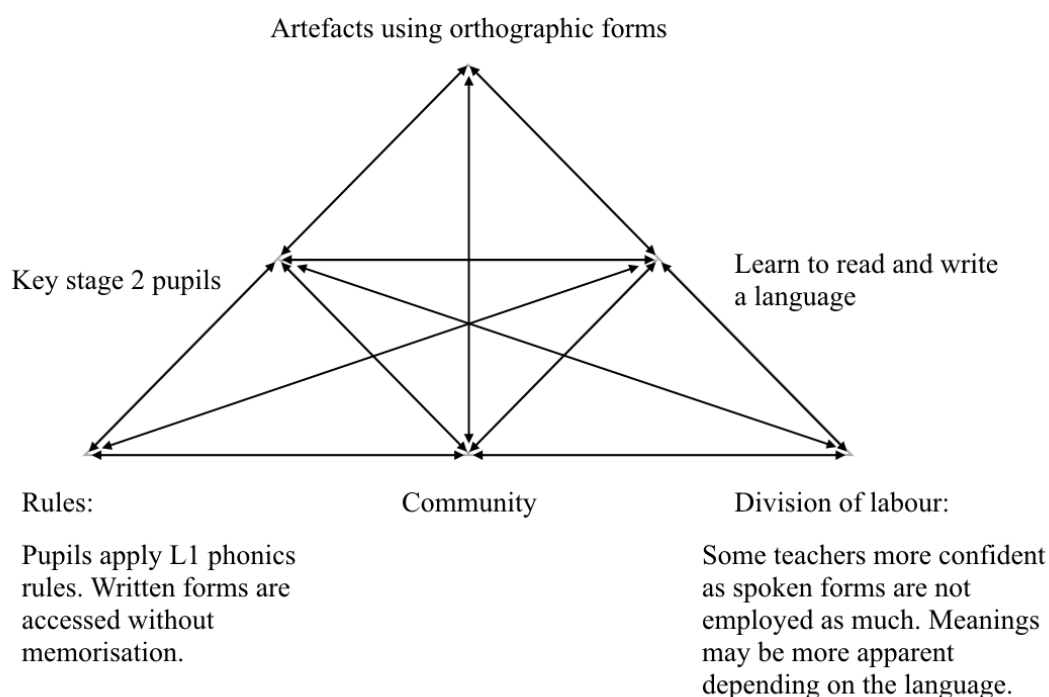


Figure 2: Literacy skills as the main “artefact” of primary languages learning.

Language Skills: Accessing Meanings

The generic form of a modern language is its spoken form, a phonological code for experienced events. As Stevick (1978, p. 145) observes, “Pronunciation is the primary medium through which we bring our use of language to other people”. Not only is accurate pronunciation needed for other people to understand it, but also it affects the learner’s *own* comprehension (Ahangari et al., 2015). From this, we surmise its seminal importance. Because a PL is learned *after* the L1, which has already encoded life experiences, a PL pupil may resort to translating the PL into the L1 to access meaning. However, the habit of accessing meanings through the L1 logically requires more time than coding an experience directly into the PL.

To avoid translation, using the learners’ L1 to access meanings, requires some sort of contextualisation of the spoken language. To overcome the limitations of contextual clues in the classroom, vocabulary can be semantically primed to ensure understanding of words prior to learners’ actively responding to/using them. Bloem & La Heij (2003) compare the semantic priming strategies of using either context words or context pictures. They deem the latter more effective, not so much due to the speed taken to access meanings from a picture, but due to its priming of a pre-verbal concept. “Words in different languages access a common conceptual representation” (Kroll, 1993, p. 55) whereas the lexical representations are activated independently. If pictures were used for semantic priming, there was a virtually simultaneous onset in the brain of “access to phonological information...with semantic processing”. (Miozzo et al., 2015, p. 3343) This strategy for accessing meaning avoids translation, similar to the way young learners acquire their first language (L1A), when events are experienced (or represented by an image) alongside spoken language.

The time factor indicated may apply equally in PL learning where authentic communication could take place *in context*. A language learning theory proposing the mapping of language onto experienced events, known as usage-based linguistics (Tomasello, 2003), is briefly discussed among other language learning theories in this article.

Time and Timing in the Learning of PL Language Skills

Previous PL guidelines indicated the amount of curricular time to be devoted to PL learning.

A minimum of 60 minutes per week is needed for children to make progress, but this can be spread across the week. A “little and often” approach is ideal as it enables children to recall languages and reinforce their understanding and skills at regular intervals (DfES, 2007, p. 2).

By contrast, current guidelines make no allusion to curricular time allocations. With one in ten schools “not providing a minimal 30 minutes per week language teaching”, a considerable disparity in PL provision can be seen (Tinsley and Board, 2017, p. 41). Language learning in primary schools in England tends to be timetabled; learning sessions are commonly weekly events. The previous section on policy noted how class teachers miss opportunities to learn subject and pedagogical knowledge due to their PPA rights and subsequent absence from class. Therefore, pupils may lack the reinforcement needed to retain and recall ephemeral phonological forms learned in weekly specialist-led sessions. The “little and often” basis is assumed as essential for learning English phonics but overlooked in PL, thus affecting pupils’ speaking skills detrimentally.

Time and timing of sessions may affect more than the memorisation and recall of language. Visiting “specialist experts” may bring secondary modern foreign language (MFL) traits or “rules” into primary practice. In secondary schools, for example, sessions of commonly 45 minutes or more often involve learning all four language skills. However, this length of time is probably unsustainable for PL pupils, partly due to their shorter attention spans but also because a focus on oracy (speaking and listening) skills requires briefer sessions.

These sections have explored the parameters of certain policies and the resulting “rules” of PL practice, pointing out how timing and timetabling affects both the division of labour amongst teachers supporting PL learning in some capacity, the approach they may adopt, and the skills that are learned. Importantly, without the “little and often” proviso for effective learning, which necessarily involves the class teacher, learning may be ineffectual.

The next section provides an overview of commonly understanding of language learning theories, as they are likely to influence current practice and beliefs.

Divisions of Labour Amongst Teachers

This section discusses the variety of potential roles played by teachers in supporting or delivering PL, which may involve a division of labour amongst them. Language has a distinctively social nature: it codes meanings into phonological form so that human beings can communicate with each other. As social behaviour underlies our ability to acquire language, it requires other interacting human beings (Maye et al., 2002; Saffran et al., 1996; Kuhl et al., 2003). In a PL classroom setting, the teacher’s likely role in modeling spoken

language and providing a counterpart in meaningful communication requires their confidence to take on these roles. With potentially only three statutory years of language learning at secondary school, teachers may not feel confident in undertaking these roles. Teachers identifying their PL speaking skills as in need of development may find it challenging to find native speakers with whom to speak the PL. With English the “lingua franca” of world trade and culture, speakers of other languages are likely to have had far greater exposure to their targeted language (English) than the native English speaker to her/his. The resulting discrepancy in speaking skills is likely to bias the odds for the more advanced language to be used (unless a protocol for practice is implemented). The question arises, then, of a potential division of labour for supporting and delivering PL learning.

Effective PL learning requires a “little and often” approach (DfES, 2007, p. 2). This requires the class teachers’ cooperation for reinforcing pupils’ learning between their weekly lessons. “Improving the confidence of classroom teachers who teach languages” (Tinsley & Board, 2017) is one of four principle challenges for PL practice recently reported by schools. However, in England, there is a lack of time and budget for professional development of necessary skills (Tinsley & Board, 2017). A suggested division of labour between so-called specialists and generalists concludes that this could be a successful combination (Rowe et al., 2011); by rehearsing/practising with their class teacher the skills learned in the weekly, specialist-led session, pupils learn effectively.

A “general reduction in the forms of support used by primary schools” (Language Trends Survey, 2017, p. 41) reports that 30% claim no access to specialists, compared with 23% in 2015 (Tinsley & Board, 2017, 62). However, outside expertise in subject knowledge does not guarantee pedagogical knowledge and skills for supporting the learning of oracy skills (Driscoll 2000). The success of such a division of labour may depend on timetabling, as the skills learnt have different requirements of time and timing (Palcios, 2015b).

Teachers’ confidence levels within different skills are likely to influence their choice of activities in supporting/delivering PL sessions in class. A study of languages teachers’ opinions in England found:

Of the four language skills, the one that our teachers felt there was most need for research to illuminate was speaking (Macaro, 2003, p. 6).

Non-specialist teachers lack confidence in *speaking* a targeted language. Teacher trainees reportedly are unable to decode the written language into its phonological form, their secondary school learning having involved predominantly the orthographic form, but no explicit phonics instruction (Phillips, 2012). Furthermore, with access to the written form, little memorisation of language is required. For those opting to take a GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) in PL, with its spoken section usually facilitated by the pupils’ own teacher, memorisation of two pages of prepared spoken sentences reportedly sufficed to secure a pass on that section. Trainees report that this prescriptive memorisation has been subsequently forgotten. While orthographic forms can be reproduced without knowledge of the phonological forms, oracy skills necessarily require some form of articulation and secure pronunciation. The potential solution of a division of labour, with a specialist modeling spoken forms in weekly lessons, and non-specialist class teachers facilitating follow-up activities, meets logistical challenges due to the teacher’s absence from the classroom during PPA time.

The so-called “specialist expertise”, which here includes a native speaker or a member of staff with a degree in the language, should be qualified by the guarantee of effective learning of oracy skills.

Policy

This section considers the effect of policy on current PL practice within its “community” of teachers and pupils. It then discusses the National Curriculum requirements for pupils’ PL learning, with particular regard for the skills to be learned. It then focuses on expectations implicit for teachers’ capacity to support, if not deliver, pupils’ learning.

The initial declaration of the intention to implement language learning in primary schools (DfES, 2004a), hitherto largely the domain of secondary schools, coincided with its demotion at Key Stage 4 (pupils aged 14–16) to optional status (DfES, 2004a). The legacy of such a demotion is that current cohorts of primary teacher trainees may have undertaken only 3 years of language learning. Their subsequently low confidence levels due to lack of PL subject knowledge and/or pedagogical skills (Tinsley & Board, 2017) is a likely reason for schools to expect to staff PL provision through someone *other* than the class teacher.

As outside visiting teachers are often deployed during class teachers’ planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, a statutory right for minimally 10% of a teacher’s timetable (DfES, 2005b), there are several implications for PL practice. Firstly, the ring-fencing of PPA time indicates that class teachers are unlikely to be present at the specialist-led PL session; their confidence for supporting pupils’ PL skills between specialist-led lessons is thus unlikely to develop. This represents a missed opportunity for class teachers’ involvement to build their capacity as specialists can help to improve non-specialists’ confidence (Rowe et al., 2011).

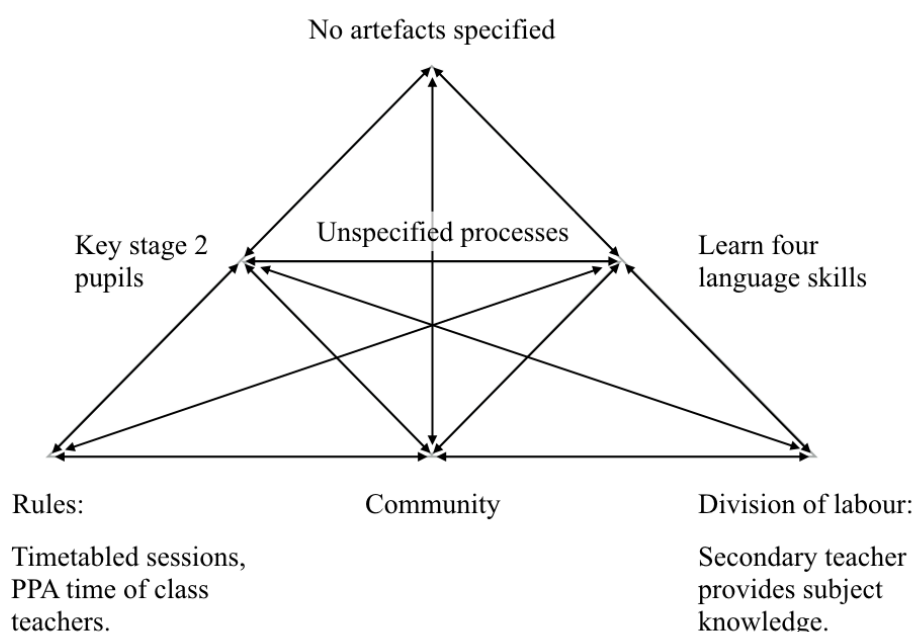


Figure 3: Activity Theory framework showing the situation due to policy, circumstances, and inherited beliefs or “rules” from previous language learning practice.

Apart from low PL capacity amongst class teachers, there is a shortage of specialist teachers. Furthermore, OfSTED (2008) acknowledges that once-a-week sessions do not ensure that

language learning is effective and retained. Secondly, the timetabling of PL sessions during PPA sessions, normally weekly and often for 30 minutes or more, are more likely to result in pupils' declarative rather than procedural learning. Each of these forms of learning have distinctive requirements, therefore the learning environment has an impact not only on the efficacy of pupils' language learning, but also on the skills learned.

The National Curriculum requirement for “substantial progress in one language” (DfE, 2014, p. 213) is unlikely to be met if pupils study more than one language, because of limited curricular time. The statutory four years' PL learning (for pupils aged 7–11) puts greater demands on teachers' subject knowledge/expertise; this, in turn, may increase schools' reported struggle to staff their PL provision. While an “appropriate balance of spoken and written language” is cited (op. cit.) for learning a PL, no stipulation is given of what that balance might be. A neurobiological premise of age-dependent aptitudes suggests the “balance” may differ according to learners' age but again, the National Curriculum does not specify those differences or on what basis the “balance” is affected. The “rules” of practice are therefore insufficiently defined or understood within policy, nor are the skills specified which are necessary for teaching to be effective for pupils' learning.

The National Curriculum ascribes different stipulations for those choosing ancient languages as a PL:

The focus will be to provide linguistic foundation for reading comprehension and an appreciation of classical civilization . . . [pupils] take part in simple oral exchanges while discussion of what they read will be conducted in English (DfE, 2014, p. 240).

This descriptor contrasts markedly with the “appropriate balance” of skills prescribed for *modern* language learning, which are often broadly categorised as listening, speaking, reading and writing. The characteristics of each skill present different challenges. For example, teacher trainees' identification of pronunciation as the skill in which they had least confidence (Phillips, 2012) suggests the particular challenge of speaking a language. Surprisingly, perhaps, the National Curriculum's provision of choice of an ancient, rather than modern, language allows the avoidance of such a challenge. The predominant use of English implicit in the DfE specification above questions the premise of learning a language. Declarative learning, such as knowing *about* classical civilisation, requires a different pedagogical approach to knowing *how to use* the language, which constitutes procedural learning.

The policies discussed in this section signify potentially lower teacher capacity to support/deliver PL learning, and also, lack definition regarding the processes for PL learning. One of these involves the relationship of language skills, addressed in the next section.

Language Learning Theories

In problematising the reportedly scant and disappointing outcomes of current PL practice in England, greater insight is needed about the *processes* of how young learners learn languages. Logically, to ensure effective learning, a language learning theory should be adopted to provide integrity to policymakers' decisions regarding practice. However, policymakers have been wary of advocating any one approach, perhaps in deference to teachers' lack of confidence and the perceived resulting need to accept whatever they can offer.

There are a number of mechanisms and tools which can be utilised as a menu to deliver the strategy (DfES, 2002, p. 7).

Both in this relatively newly instigated statutory practice, and within a retrospective view of the previous Pilot Study (Hawkins 2005), no single method of learning is advocated. This section starts with brief discussion of language learning theories likely to influence teacher beliefs, and therefore their practice. It proceeds to discuss the distinction of procedural and declarative knowledge, followed by neurobiological findings recently gained about how the young brain learns languages.

Studies of recent PL over the last decade rarely address the actual process of language learning, a knowledge considerably enlightened by neurobiological studies. Having noted Chaudron's (1988) similar opinion, Ellis claimed that "there still is no theory of L2 acquisition" (Ellis, 2012, p. 341). However, this claim now demands reconsideration. Divergent theories of language learning can now be scrutinised through a neurobiological lens, arguably an irrefutable source of influence, due to the visually captured images it can provide of brain aptitude, and its age-dependent nature (Klein et al., 2014), of particular significance for PL learning.

Over the last decades, research literature has straddled the fields of both language learning and neurobiology. Avoiding the more complex terminology associated with studies of the brain, neurobiological literature from reputable sources has become accessible to educationalists. The dangers of misinterpretation or overgeneralisation can result in popular neuromyths which then affect school practice but this potential trap should not deter practitioners from such an important insight (Sharples, 2009).

The "rules" adopted from previous PL learning practice and school protocols are contextualised within current PL learning in the next sections.

A brief Overview of Language Learning Theory

Repetitive mimicry, which has long been part of a primary school "oral tradition" is representative of the behaviourist tenet of learning through habit formation (Skinner, 1957). Thus, its application to oracy skills is particularly pertinent for a young age-group. However, while behaviourism dominated language acquisition beliefs from the forties to the sixties, actual practice evolved further characteristics such as the need for repetition until perfection is reached: this tenet applied equally to *written* language. When applied to, and practised on, the new computers in the 80s, such behaviourist-driven written tasks eventually became known as "drill-and-kill" (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Schumann's (1998) Neurobiological Theory of Affect cites novelty/satiation as one of 5 factors contributing to motivation levels. Arguably, balancing the need for repetition against the risk of over-satiating pupils is one of the biggest challenges facing language educators. Thus, while there are useful tenets to be recognised within behaviourism, pupils' affect needs to be taken into account.

Chomsky's innatist position (1959) directly confronted behaviourist theory; he questioned how children could imitate and produce complex language forms in the face of restricted language input. He proposed that a human language acquisition device (LAD) in the brain has a natural ability, a universal grammar (UG) which can process any language's grammar. The brain's ability "to contain all and only the principles which are universal to all human

languages” (Lightbown & Spada, 1999) underlies a largely positivist view of language learning, evidently still in existence but also now refuted:

[...] research on the brain has found it very difficult to identify any areas or circuits that might constitute UG [universal grammar] (Schuman et al., 2014, pp. 1–2).

Scans of the working brain show that many areas of the brain are employed in the complex task of language processing. This suggests that the complex networks that are used for language skills are also employed for multiple other functions. Despite strong challenge from neurobiology (Kuhl, 2010) and more recently proposed theory, this innatist view is still widely embraced. Teachers may mistakenly believe from Chomsky’s theory that the LAD is set into action merely by exposing pupils to the language. Where this might have seemed to be the case in acquiring the first language, it has been largely challenged by usage-based linguistics, a theory that language is essentially the symbolic mapping of experienced events, with grammar a derivative of that process (Tomasello, 2003). Intention-reading and pattern-finding may propel language processing through contextualised acts of communication. Far from Chomsky’s rationale of a poverty of input, “. . . mature linguistic competence . . . is a structured inventory of constructions” (Tomasello, 2003, pp. 6-7).

Tomasello suggests that:

The implications of this new view of language for theories of language acquisition are truly revolutionary . . . it is possible that children’s early language is largely item-based and yet they can still construct an adult-like set of grammatical constructions originating with these baby constructions . . . a much closer and more child-friendly target than previously believed (Tomasello, 2003).

Over several years of training future teachers, no trainee has heard of usage-based linguistics before commencing the course. Thus for teachers in post, their language learning beliefs are likely to be built on, and constrained by, outdated theory. The tenets of usage-based linguistics suggest that if authentic acts of communication took place in and beyond the classroom, pupils’ temporary aptitude for acquiring their first language may be harnessed for PL learning. Teachers would need to create opportunities for this learning to take place, with approval from policymakers. The learning of functional language in authentic acts of communication might not only more closely match National Curriculum requirements for serious study of a language, but also produce programmes which void being “too noun based” (Macaro, 2003a, p. 201).

Two further distinct forms of learning, declarative and procedural are discussed in the next section, and the implications of this distinction for PL practice.

Declarative and Procedural Knowledge

An important paradigm of learning distinguishes declarative and procedural knowledge as distinct forms of knowledge or memorisation. Declarative knowledge (knowing *what*), or factual information, is distinguished from procedural knowledge (knowing *how*), or skill; the latter requires frequent practice until very little cognitive effort is required to perform the skill and the learning has become automatised. “Automatisation is another name for acquiring procedural memory” (Lee, 2014). It is a process of “exercising to help diminish the time necessary in order to access information and to operate the encoding” (Annoni et al., 2012).

Thus the two forms of learning, declarative and procedural, have distinct requirements for practice and activate different pathways in the brain (Schumann et al., 2014). Speaking skills must involve some procedural learning and “cannot rely on declarative knowledge” (Macaro 2003, p. 183). Therefore, frequent practice is important for progress in oracy skills in order to reduce the cognitive load of learning and to achieve automatisisation. This need for frequency may not be reflected in schools’ curricular timetabling. Where outside expertise is brought in once weekly, and without the class teacher’s involvement between those weekly sessions, the likely resulting emphasis is on literacy skills, which do not rely on synchronous memorisation. If the different forms of learning are not recognised, the most likely result is ineffective timing for pupils’ oracy skills.

Neurobiological Implications for Language Learning

While in the past, not enough was understood from a cognitive perspective as to how children may learn or acquire a language, or how “the child’s intellectual development” (Crystal 1987: 234) may be harnessed, nowadays, findings can shed light on the innate characteristics of the human brain by scanning it in action. To avoid being “25 years behind the times” (Schumann et al., 2014, p. 179), any study of learning *processes* needs “to draw more links between the neurobiological mechanisms and second language acquisition” (Ellis, 2002, xi). This is because “psychological models must be answerable to their neuroanatomy and neurophysiology” (Schumann et al., 2014, p. 179). To further problematise PL practice in England, this section discusses findings regarding young pupils’ language learning aptitudes, in particular, oracy skills.

Brain Plasticity

Brain plasticity is the brain’s ability to adapt its neural pathways, even into old age. This is because the brain is architected according to the activities it undertakes.

There are intrinsic forces that contribute substantially to brain development, probably providing more than just scaffolding for cognitive development, in the sense that they can also shape the directions in which further development can occur (Greenough & Black, 2013, p. 155).

Undertaking activities not only forges the architecture of the brain, but also sets a predilection for future learning, by reinforcing synaptic connections in the brain. Furthermore, once a predilection is established, it may be difficult to change. This casts considerable responsibility on policymakers and practitioners in their choice of a suitable pedagogy, particularly for procedural memorisation which requires repetitive activities to reach automatisisation.

The *order* in which a modern language is learned relative to acquiring the L1 also affects the brain’s structure. A study of fMRI scans of brain structures of 22 monolinguals and 66 bilinguals categorised the latter within various different L2 learning stages, namely: simultaneously with the L1; after proficiency in the L1, in early childhood; in late childhood; or later (Klein et al., 2014). They found that “learning a second language after gaining L1 proficiency, modifies brain structure in an age-dependent manner whereas simultaneous acquisition of two languages has no additional effect on brain development” (Klein et al, 2014, p. 20). This implies that during the period for L1 acquisition, the same pathways may be utilised in acquiring another language as those for the L1, when spoken language is

mapped onto authentic experienced events. The “age-dependent manner” (Klein et al., 2014) in which this may occur suggests that young learners’ brains are better placed to acquire a PL in a similar process as first language acquisition (L1A).

Because neuroanatomy evidences different “routes” or brain pathways for undertaking distinct language skills (Lee, 2014), the transfer of learning between them should not be assumed (Palacios, 2015a). Learning to read PL words even reshapes the brain’s neural organisation of previously learned languages (Mei et al., 2014). Reading and writing are not innate aptitudes. Indeed, in the case of an emphasis on *literacy* skills in PL learning, the resulting strengthening of particular neural networks potentially sets predilections for future learning arguably inappropriate to the young learner. The setting of predilections is exacerbated by a further property of brain plasticity; synaptic pruning is a severing of synaptic connections which naturally occurs when pathways fall into disuse over time. This is discussed in the following section.

Plasticity and Learner Age

A neurobiological stance on the significance of learners’ age on their learning outcomes claims:

Evolution has designed the brain to acquire grammar and phonology by about four years of age through natural interaction with others. Some margin of heightened adaptability probably extends this learning period to the middle of the second decade of life. Once that period has passed, the brain can be viewed as “damaged” with respect to the skill to be acquired (Schumann, 1998, p. 38).

The temporary nature of children’s heightened sensitivity to phonology advises its harnessing at an appropriate stage of life between 4 and 14 or so years of age. PL learning is currently statutory from the age of seven, three years after Schumann’s suggested peak age (Schumann, 1998). Current policy thus fails to exploit three years of prime time for acquiring language. Kuhl (2010) claims that “exposure to language in the first year of life influences the brain’s neural circuitry before infants speak their first word.” This suggests the immediacy of a child’s language development. She suggests that a goal of future research

[. . .] will be to document the “opening” and “closing” of critical periods for all levels of language and understand how they overlap and why they differ.’ ‘Vocabulary development “explodes” at 18 months of age, but does not appear to be as restricted by age as other aspects of language learning – one can learn new vocabulary items at any age (Kuhl, 2010).

The accessibility of vocabulary learning for any age-group implies it could also dominate language lessons throughout school learning. Indeed, an indicator of progress in schemes of work such as the Key Stage 2 Framework is commonly an accumulation of vocabulary, evidenced through written forms which are quicker to assess than spoken recordings.

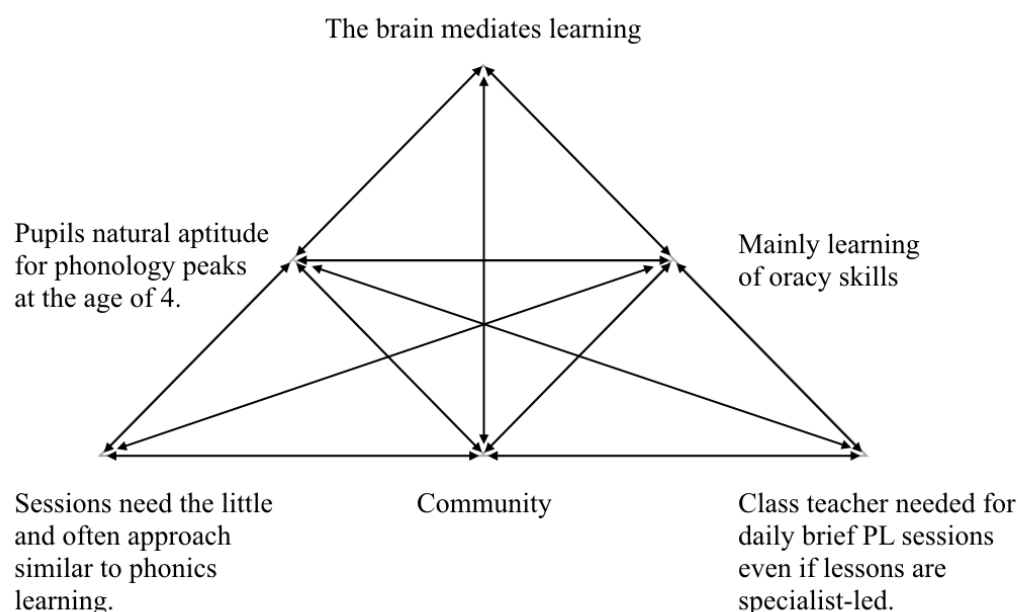


Figure 4: The neurobiological implications for age-dependent PL provision.

Previous sections discussed Schumann’s clarification of young learners’ aptitude for the *phonology* of the language. Listening and speaking are innate capabilities, hardwired in the brain whereas reading and writing take many years to learn (Blakemore and Frith, 2005). The claimed age-sensitivity for acquiring grammar and phonology could be harnessed for PL pupils in the classroom using the PL for authentic communication in experienced contexts. However, as previously discussed, this would require teachers’ confidence and pedagogical knowledge. In cases where teachers bravely agree to learn alongside their pupils, the disparity between teachers’ and pupils’ language learning aptitudes may pose a challenge.

Degrees of age-dependency in language learning exist. “The machinery of synaptic pruning” (Takesian & Hensch, 2013, p. 7) shows that brain circuits can be pruned even to the point of redundancy, during a critical or sensitive period. So despite the brain’s potential for plasticity, learning can be affected by “brake-like factors” (Takesian & Hensch, 2013, p. 23), a realisation that effectively dismisses “the traditional view of a fixed, immutable circuitry that is consolidated early in life” (Takesian & Hensch, 2013, p. 23). Not only do language learning activities shape the brain’s architecture in strengthening synaptic pathways but also, where some activities take precedence over others, underused pathways are pruned. Where policy, and thus in all likelihood teachers’ beliefs, supposes that language skills are interdependent and reciprocally supportive of each other, the question arises as to whether the visual nature of literacy knowledge may suppress those of oracy skills. Literacy is formed of visual, enduring data which can be decoded non-synchronously, whereas spoken forms are ephemeral and therefore must be decoded synchronously, relatively more demanding on cognitive load.

The written form of language can be stored and therefore does not require repetitive practice. By contrast, the spoken form is often committed to memory through learned “habits” or repeated procedures; these are difficult to change. Continued years of “repetition . . . are resistant to alteration or suppression; they function independently of executive control, and are cognitively impenetrable” (Lee 2014, pp. 67–68). Thus, great caution is needed to vary pupils’ learning and ensure its progress for any particular age-group. Adult aptitudes, no

longer include particular sensitivity to language phonology, are thus at variance with their pupils”. Given the paucity of primary school teachers confident in their modern language skills, particularly in speaking, any improvement of their skills may experience the “automatic and involuntary” nature of the “previously learned processing habits” (Blakemore & Frith, 2005). Such teachers may perpetuate learning processes that they, themselves, experienced at secondary school. The subsequent danger of the PL statutory requirement being a “watered down” version of secondary practice (Martin 2008), is real in the absence of specific governmental directive, or feedback from OfSTED.

Methodology

This study’s particular aim of problematising a practice by confronting its situation takes it beyond the confines of actual classroom research, and into the effects of policy and the broader learning environment in which practice is likely to take place. As such, its aim diverges from many previous studies of language learning which have tended to focus on specific aspects of practice, and often of secondary school or adult learners.

The wide range of theoretical opinion concerning language learning environments, and their very complexity, make it necessary to identify factors which influence them. A schema is needed to demonstrate the possible interrelationships between such factors.

The methodological question arises as to how the factors are to be identified. Studies gathering data in real world learning environments could explore the interrelationships of commonly occurring factors contributing to PL learning. However, because PL practice is patchy (Tinsley & Board, 2017), a broader viewpoint is required to explain the variety of existing practice. My own insider experience and insight of both school PL practice and teacher training includes visiting schools to quality assess schools’ provision. Guided by these experiences, I undertook a literature review to ensure that a broad range of perspective and opinion could be included.

The standing of literature reviews within established research traditions is discussed in order to both explore its strengths and weaknesses, attesting to its validity and acknowledging its weaknesses.

A literature review may constitute one component part of an account of research, its purpose to foreground the issues embodied in the study undertaken. By contrast, this study comprises a literature review in order to gather an intentionally eclectic range of data: contemporary PL practice and policy; a brief PL history leading up to an unprecedented statutory PL status in England and Wales (DfE, 2014); and theoretical underpinnings. This eclecticism may satisfy the need to apply research findings to classroom practice, or “awareness raising” (Ellis, 2012, p. 145).

The review “has a long pedigree as an area of academic research and endeavour” (Booth et al., 2016, p. 9); while some journals may decline review articles, others welcome annual reviews, or overviews. The literature review can be a generic term for more specific review processes, including critical, mapping, meta-analysis, evidence synthesis, rapid, scoping and systematic reviews (Grant & Booth, 2009). Its terminology may be pinpointed more precisely through identifying the purpose of the study. “Qualitative evidence synthesis” (Grant & Booth, 2009.) integrates findings from qualitative studies and may employ conceptual models, or theories; it may also employ purposive sampling, to meet its intended aim. In this

study, the identification of component factors to fulfil Activity Theory's nominators, in a sociocultural language learning scenario, may constitute such purposive sampling. However, in fulfilling such a purpose, it may also be said to be critical, because it "seeks to identify [the] most significant items in the field" (Grant & Booth, 2009). The interpretation of such "significance" is likely to match the researcher's own viewpoints, and may therefore be said to be a weakness of such an approach. In this study, this possible weakness is acknowledged only insofar as interpretation is involved; in citing quantitative data gathered by other researchers' empirical studies, my own views of current statistics are overridden.

Traditional quantitative or qualitative research designs have, respectively, either a confirmatory approach of some initial premise, or a descriptive purpose (Ellis 2012: 21), with many designs incorporating elements of both. This study's premise of the sociocultural element of language learning seeks a framework by which to represent multiple contributory factors. Activity Theory nominates such factors and schematises their interrelationships. This contrasts with both the establishing of correlations by analysis of data sets through a quantitative approach, and a qualitative approach of analysing expected and emergent themes from the data. Instead, a literature review is able to widen its remit through literature relevant to PL learning, in identifying factors nominated by Activity Theory. The broader lens afforded by literary sources can incorporate logistical real-world learning environments of different institutions, the age of the learners, historical comments regarding PL in England, the effects of recent policies, and the modern language capacity of class teachers. Additionally, theoretical underpinnings can be included as they influence stakeholders' beliefs and their implementation of the complex process of language learning. However, by including quantitative data to provide descriptive statistics, the review employs mixed methods which "harness the power of stories alongside the power of numbers" (Pluye & Hong, 2014).

The Place of Theory in a Literature Review

The multiple opportunities offered by literature reviews for engagement and interaction with theory allow theories relating to a particular issue to be examined through an evidence synthesis (Campbell et al. 2014). This, therefore, lends a wider scope of engagement than a study involving data drawn only from real world scenarios. Because of the tendency for research to be carried out and reported within defined fields of interest, recognised as hindering the impact on practice of a study's findings (Sharples, 2009), the opportunity for recognising reciprocal influences between the fields of primary languages and neurobiology arises through a synthesis of evidence.

Systematicity

Amongst the essential qualities of a literature review is "systematic, explicit and reproducible metho" (Fink, 2005), or alternatively, "clarity, validity and auditability" (Booth et al., 2016, p. 19). Systematicity may be variously interpreted but is generally considered a process requisite for achieving validity, or a study's defence against the potential of bias. "Selection bias", a predilection on the part of the reviewer to select studies that support her stance, may apply in this study although, as stated previously, the quantitative data gathered is from large surveys representing established views, from well-respected policy documents, or from neurobiological findings. Additionally, the range of literature dealing with the PL age-group is relatively limited and therefore more likely to be representative than if there were more sources. Different degrees of systematicity (Booth et al., 2016) may be identified amongst

several genres of review, including the “integrative review” which synthesises findings from previous studies. Amongst several advantageous characteristics of such reviews are the yielding of findings for practitioners and policymakers in providing an overview of impact, or the appropriateness of strategies for future practice (Sweet & Moynihan, 2007) as is the case of this study, to identify the interrelationships of issues facing current PL practice in England and Wales. “Auditability” (Booth et al., 2016, p. 19) refers to the reliance on the reviewer’s conclusions to be transparent and grounded upon the data it alludes to. This concern may be partially satisfied by direct reference to the sources of opinions.

Insider Research

“Formal” research is “conducted by an external researcher drawing on one or more of the established research traditions” (Ellis, 2012, 21), motivated by theoretical or pedagogical issues. By contrast, “practitioner research” is undertaken by the practitioner in the classroom of her/his practice. This study brings both to bear; firstly, literature reviews are recognised as an established research tradition. My own action research as school teacher, and subsequently reflecting on trainees’ experience and conditions of practice, are essentially reflective practices.

As a practitioner amongst other PL stakeholders, at a time when significant policy changes have affected primary languages (PL) practice, my experience and reflections are as a partial insider researcher. The influences of my own previous PL practice in school, recent accounts of trainees under my supervision, and school teachers that I visit in schools in northwest England, are acknowledged as influencing the writing of this study. However, in all my previous capacities, fortunate opportunities to reflect on practice, take feedback from others and manage change subsequently, have ensured adaptations within those practices. “Teachers need opportunities to become researchers in their own classroom as well as consumers of research...through action research and exploratory practice” (Ellis, 2012, p. 145). Furthermore, this combination of insights may help to bridge a perceived “gap” between theory and practice.

All insider research has to acknowledge the extent to which the researcher’s own experiences, aptitudes, and practice may influence research decisions. Even the positivist’s aim for value-free data is posited on some initial hypothesis upon which the research is designed. Such quantitative research studies cannot be considered to be entirely value-free. While insider research may be considered to be biased, hence threatening the validity of the study, the teacher/researcher can synthesise theory and practice (Ellis, 2012) with insight.

Where small-scale studies undertaken in the real world might identify traits of effective learning, the insights they might provide may not be generalised, due to their small-scale nature. This study accesses these insights through the literature, and applies them to the scrutiny of an analytical framework. As stated at the outset, the problematisation of a situation has the ultimate aim of finding solutions. However, rather than suggesting solutions, this article confronts PL practice by nominating factors contributing to its current state, and implying the relationship between them.

Most particularly, it points out the anomalies contributing to the current, patchy situation: these are summarised in the Results section of this paper. While alternatives to some current beliefs and practice point to changes that could be made, this is beyond the scope of this

article. Further research needs to be undertaken to test out a usage-based linguistics approach perpetrated in the primary school environment.

Activity Theory provides such a framework and is outlined in the following section.

Activity Theory Nominators: An Analytic Framework

Any study of a collaborative learning *practice* requires a framework which reflects the complexities of the learning environment. Rather than adopting the premise of measuring outcomes of a direct linear relationship between an applied stimulus A provoking the response B (Figure 5, below), Activity Theory recognises an interconnected system of multiple factors of influence. Leont'ev (or Leontijev) (1981) proposed that the tool (or instrument) of any task exerts an internal psychological influence; a conceptual triangular relationship is proposed between the stimulus of the activity, the response and the tool mediating it.

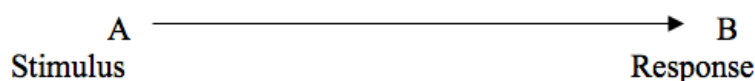


Figure 5: Unidirectional “cause and effect” dynamic in which stimulus A provokes a response B

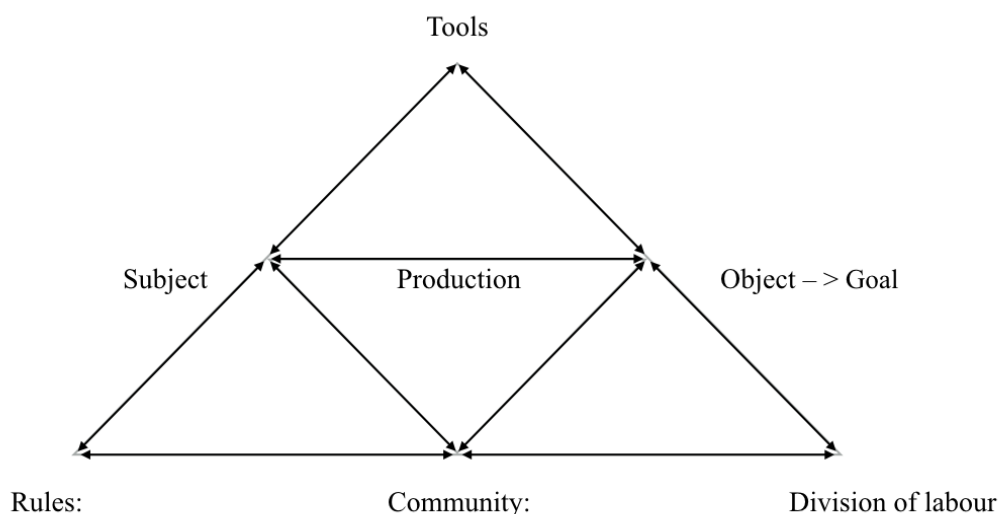


Figure 6: Activity system (from Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy, 1999, p. 63).

By recognising the inseparability of learning and doing, Activity Theory recognises the activities themselves within a system of interdependent, contextual factors, in the case of this study, identified within the learning environment of PL practice. The activities of other human beings and social relations within a community of people engaged in realising a common goal are represented within a *socially* mediated context (schematised in Figure 6). In the case of PL learning, the “subject/subjects” are pupils, while the “object” of the activity/activities is learning PL, which is mediated by certain “tools” or artefacts. Norms or “rules” of previous practice are likely to be inherited from previous, normally classroom-based practice, and influenced by governmental rhetoric and policy. The “community”

involved in PL practice may consist of not only pupils and teacher/s but also the extended community of parents and other stakeholders, including governmental policymakers.

This study looks particularly at policy, as well as language learning theories, as important contributors influencing the “rules”, or accepted norms of practice. A potential division of labour in staffing PL provision arises in the face of primary teachers’ broad generalist knowledge as compared to secondary teachers’ expertise in usually one curricular subject. On the upper triangle of the activity system, “tools” or “artefacts” mediate the activity in question. This study adopts a particular form of mediator, namely, the young learner’s brain and how it may be deployed effectively to learn language. The insightful information enabled by modern technology’s brain scanning techniques provides useful insights about how young pupils’ learning, and the relationship between the processes involved in learning different language skills. These are interconnected with other factors influencing the complex process of learning a language (Figure 7 below).

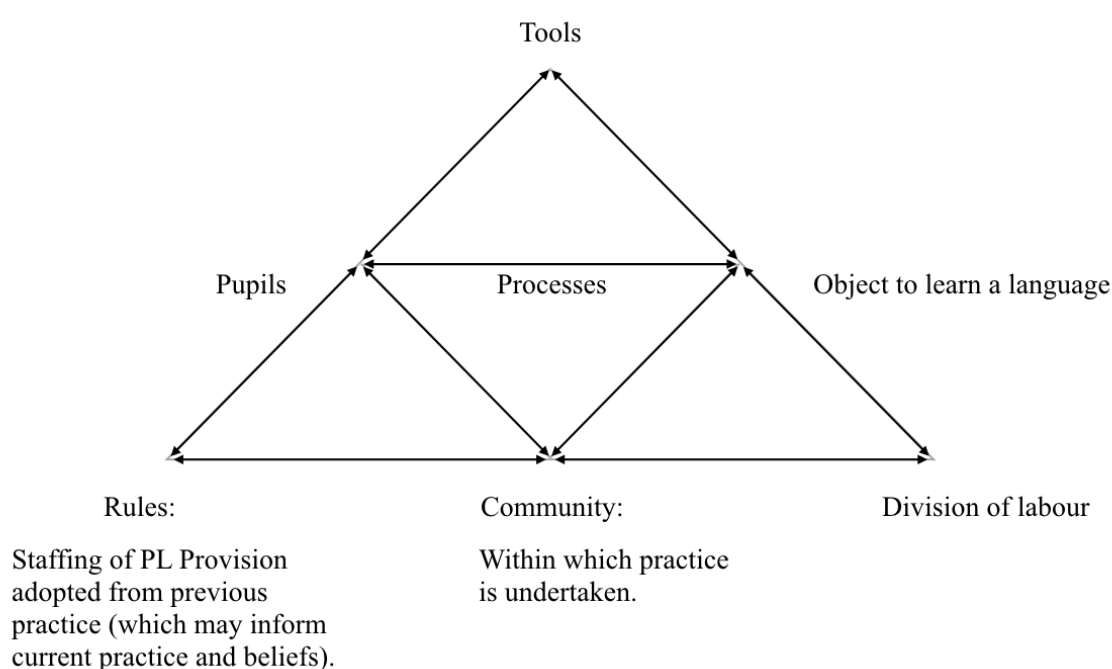


Figure 7: PL practice schematised within Activity Theory.

This study explores the potential interrelationships shown within the Activity Theory framework; this provides interconnected conceptual levels for consideration. The baseline represents the school’s learning environment and provision in response to policy; the mid horizontal level is explored through various objects, and different mediating artefacts or “tools” of the brain are considered at the apex. While these relationships are discussed in the Literature Review, the Results section schematises the broad conclusions.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the outcomes of the literature review’s discussions are summarised in schematic form within an Activity Theory framework and a written overview. The first three outcomes (figures 8, 9 and 10) show the impact, or “rule”, of governmental policy on different factors within the activity system of Primary Languages provision. They suggest the effects of these policies on the community involved, as well as raising questions about the kind of PL practice, or approach, resulting from them. Figures 11, 12 and 13 take the

indications of the first figures and insert them as “tools” schematically to track likely outcomes for adopted teaching/learning approaches. Indications taken from figures 11,12 and 13 are applied as “rules” to each of Figures 14, 15 and 16, and the human brain is represented as the “tool” of learning.

In the Activity framework, arrows indicate the interconnectedness of all of the factors within it. The labeling of each figure provides a brief overview to show factors contributing to the Activity system: this section is merely representative of the discussions in previous sections. The Activity framework is used to input data drawn from the literature in order to identify and analyse aspects of the activity. In problematising PL provision, little discussion of adopted approaches is evident. In each of figures 8 – 10, therefore, the learning approach is surmised from the other factors taken from the literature review. These approaches are then applied as the “rules” in figures 11 – 13, so that their implications may then be surmised within the other factors of those systems, in particular, the characteristics of the learning environment. For figures 14 – 16, the implications of the neurobiological “tool” of the human brain are described within other aspects of the Activity system, particularly the learning environment. The symbol // on a line showing the interconnectedness of two factors at each end of the line indicates a suggested disruptor between those two factors.

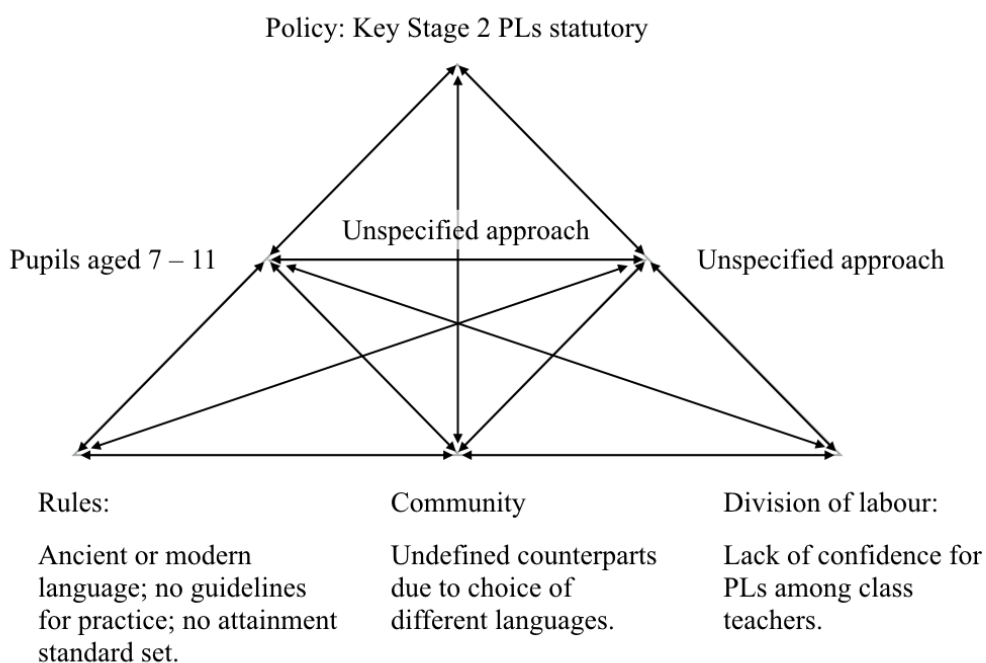


Figure 8: Primary Languages: The effect of policy, statutory provision for Key Stage 2.

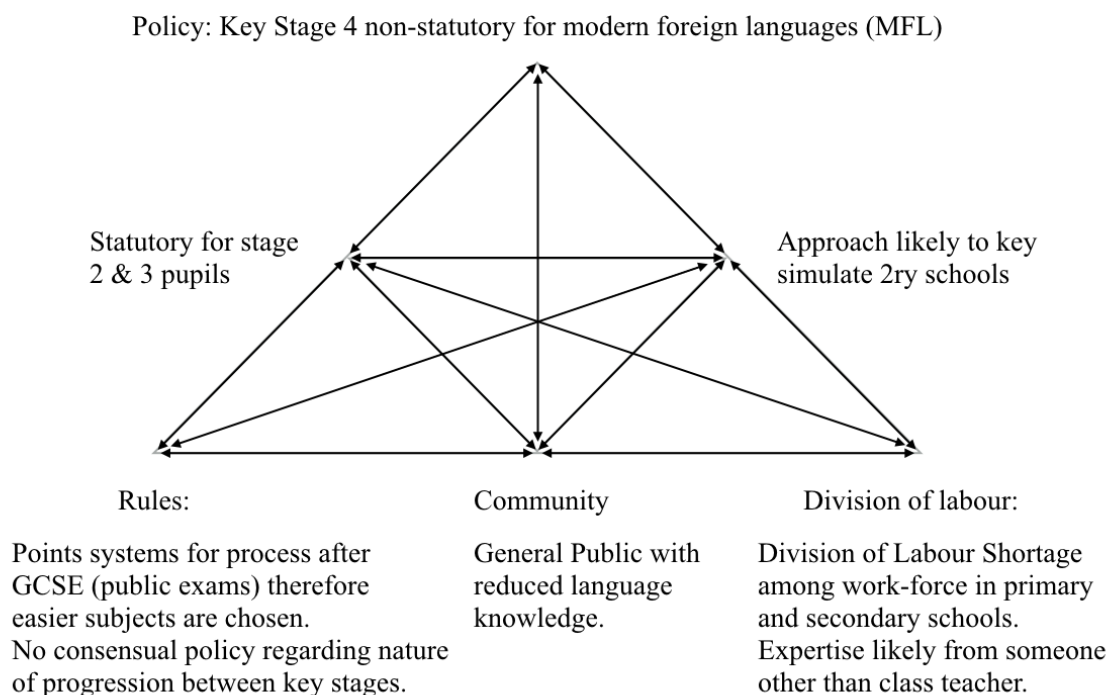


Figure 9: Primary Languages: The effect of policy, Key Stage 4 MFL becomes non-statutory.

The change of status of Key Stage 4 MFL from statutory to optional (DfES 2004b) has resulted in varying levels of confidence but not uncommonly, current generations of teacher trainees have only three years of MFL study behind them. Those who started at primary school usually started again at the beginning when transitioning to Key Stage 3 in secondary school. Class teachers are thus likely to be inadequately equipped for supporting PL learning.

Language learning requires time. In particular, the acquisition of oracy skills requires a ‘little and often’ basis. Schools struggling to release in-house staff other than once a week may buy in outside expertise on a weekly basis. The upshot, therefore, is that class teachers are not expected to be part of the PL community. Furthermore, they do not witness the sessions delivered to their pupils. The Languages Trends 2016/17 study (Tinsley & Board 2017) documents increasing numbers of schools accessing ‘specialist’ expertise, but omits to say which skills and approach are being adopted. It also has no comment on the approach adopted by schools for PLs to be learned.

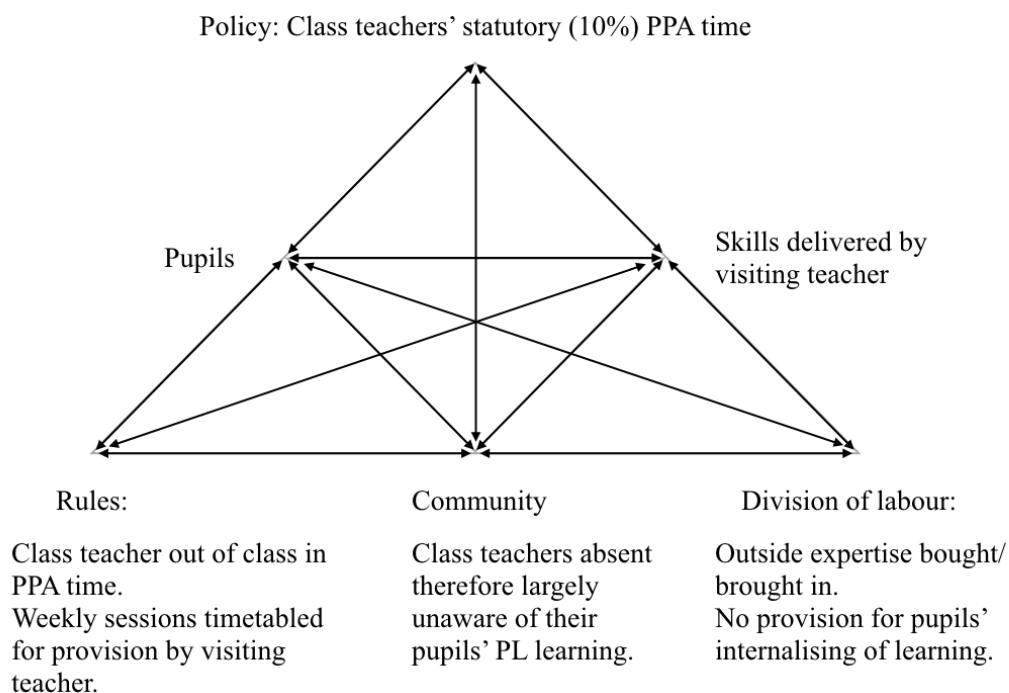


Figure 10: Primary Languages: The effect of policy: Planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time statutory for class teachers.

Timetabled weekly sessions require internalisation of learning for pupils' successful memorisation and recall of language. However, the PPA effect (fig. O3) effectively excludes the class teacher from the PL community in school; while the visitor teacher belongs, s/he is a part-time member of the school community. These factors are likely to exacerbate a low profile for PL in comparison with other subjects. The visitor teacher is likely to deliver in the same way that s/he learned, likely a secondary school model involving the concurrent learning of all four skills (This is because the statutory status of PL in the curriculum was only recently endowed.)

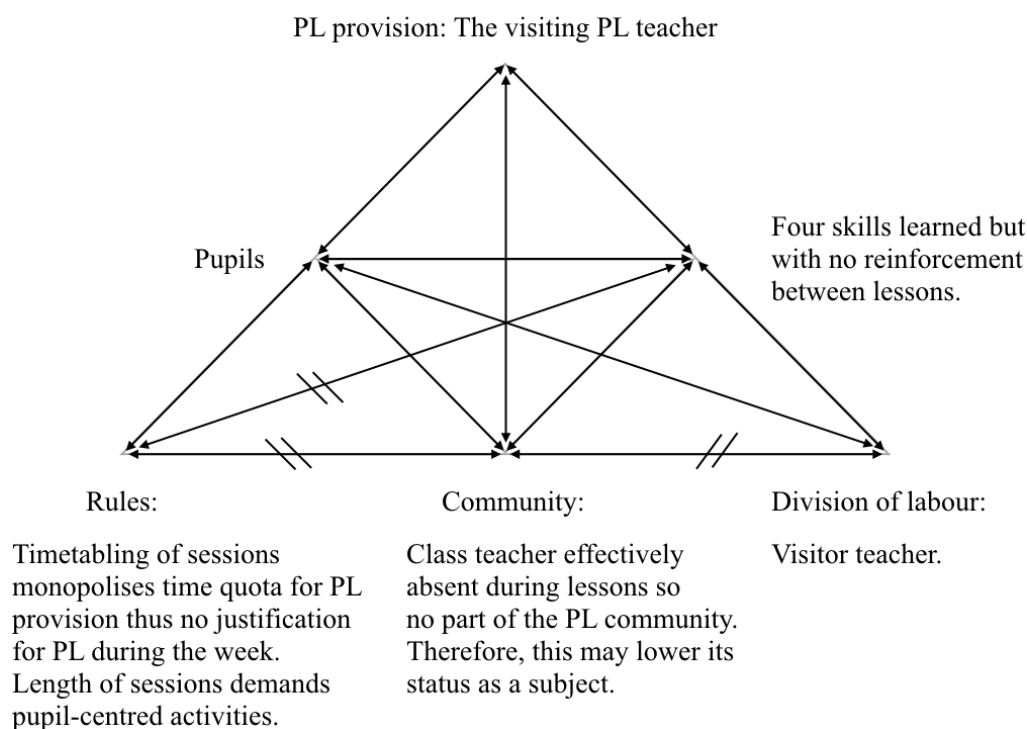


Figure 11: PL provision: Outside PL ‘expertise’.

Due to human brain plasticity, visitor teachers are likely to deliver the subject in a similar way that they themselves learned it, unless they receive training in alternative approaches. Added to this, current PL resources rely heavily on the written form of language. The visual form of orthography may supersede the ephemeral auditory form. Adult members of the community may be more attracted by this emphasis on written forms. OfSTED reportedly look for written labels and orthographic forms of the language in their inspections. One result of the concurrent learning of skills is a bottom-up approach.

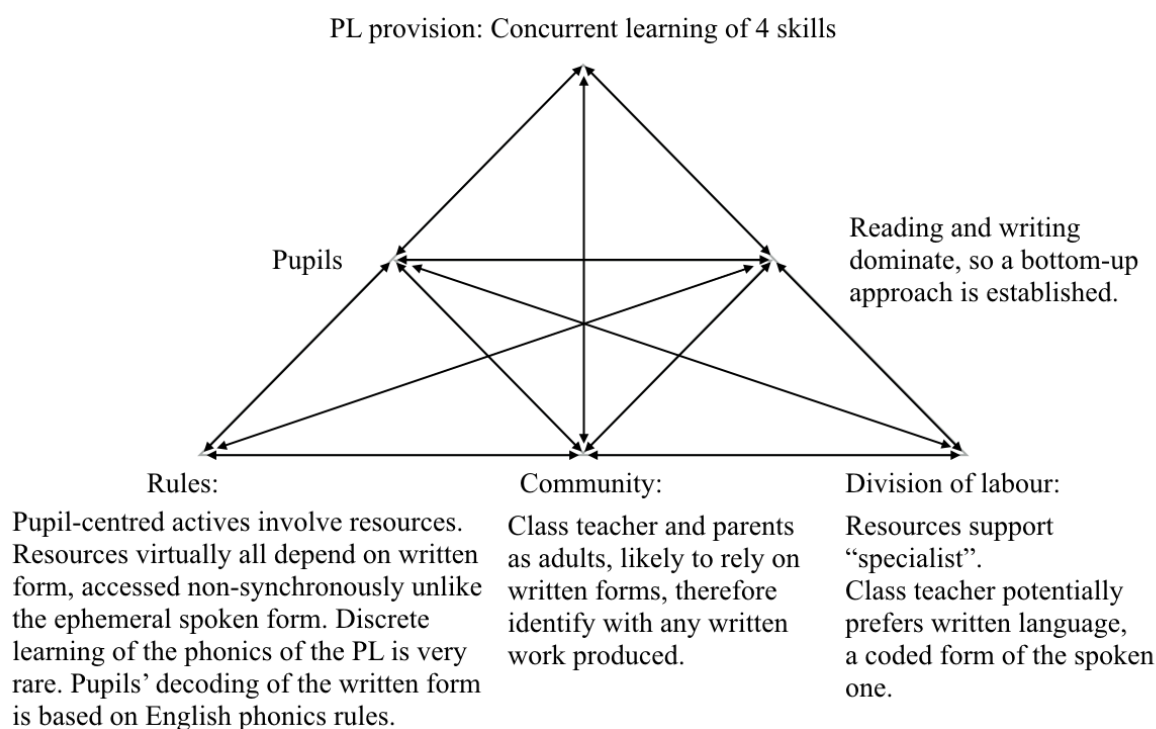


Figure 12: PL provision: Concurrent learning of 4 skills.

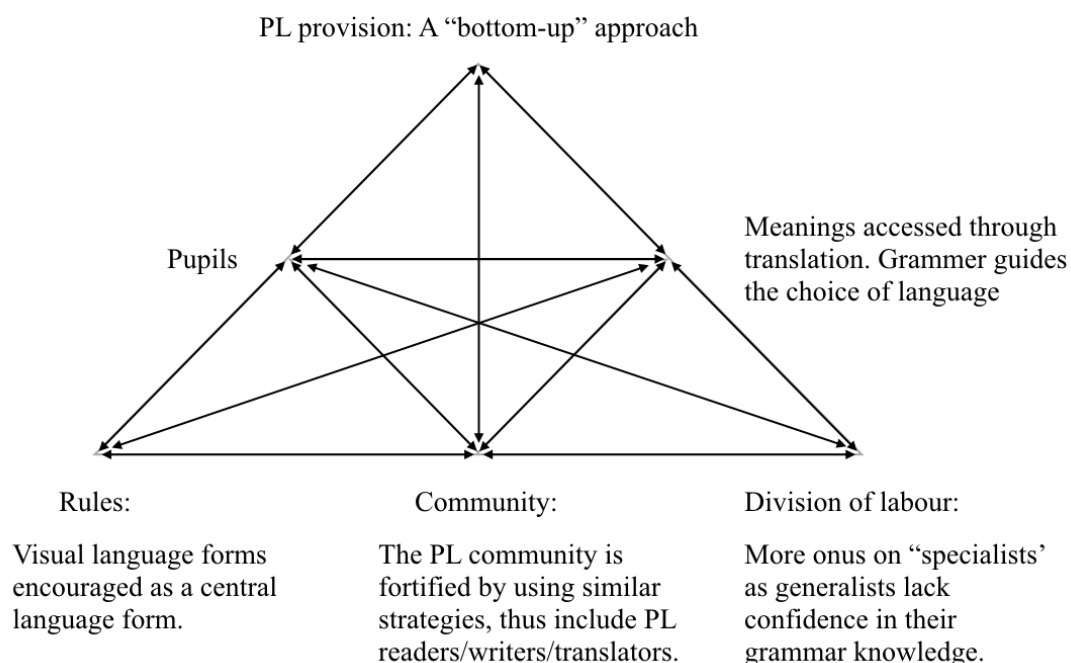


Figure 13: PLs provision: The effect of a ‘bottom-up’ approach.

A bottom-up approach involves learning separate lexical items which are then built up into functional sentences (This compares with a top-down approach in which functional soundstreams of language are learned as a unit, and subsequently analysed so that its constituent parts can be manipulated to make new meanings). To construct such sentences usually involves accessing meanings via the first language (L1), namely through translation. Because languages do not correspond on a word-for-word basis, generating functional meanings from lexical items may rely on guidance from grammar rules. However, the required cognition for this may require greater maturity in pupils than those in Key Stage 2.

The following three overviews summarise the neurobiological implications of the 3 approaches implicit in figures 11, 12 and 13.

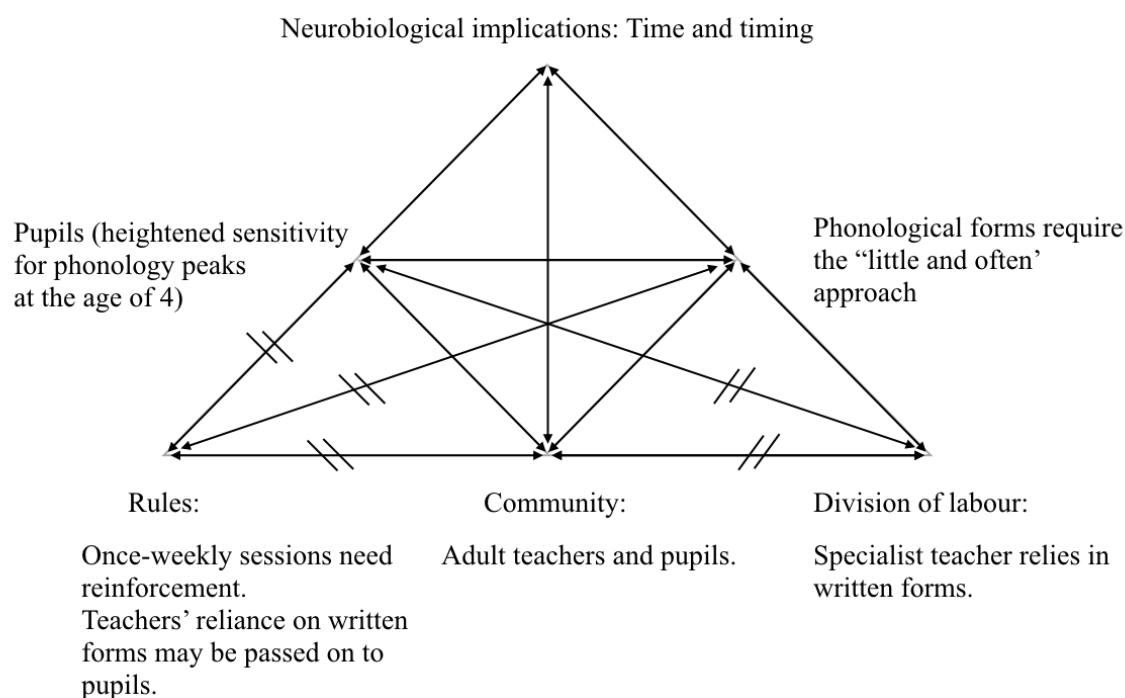


Figure 14: PLs: The neurobiological implications of once-weekly sessions.

Pupils’ heightened sensitivity to language phonology peaks at the age of 4, and thus 3 years of this valuable opportunity to learn oracy skills may be bypassed, if pupils start to learn a PL statutorily through Key Stage 2. The ‘little and often’ approach required to learn oracy skills is currently scarce in primary schools, due to class teachers’ PPA time.

Two significant brain behaviours are associated with its plasticity. Not only are synaptic pathways built and reinforced by the activities that the brain undertakes, but they are also pruned back if underused. As visual data can be accessed non-synchronously, whereas auditory data is ephemeral, the greater accessibility of the former in a time-constrained curriculum may set synaptic precedents in the brain.

These predilections may set preferences for future learning which are difficult to change.

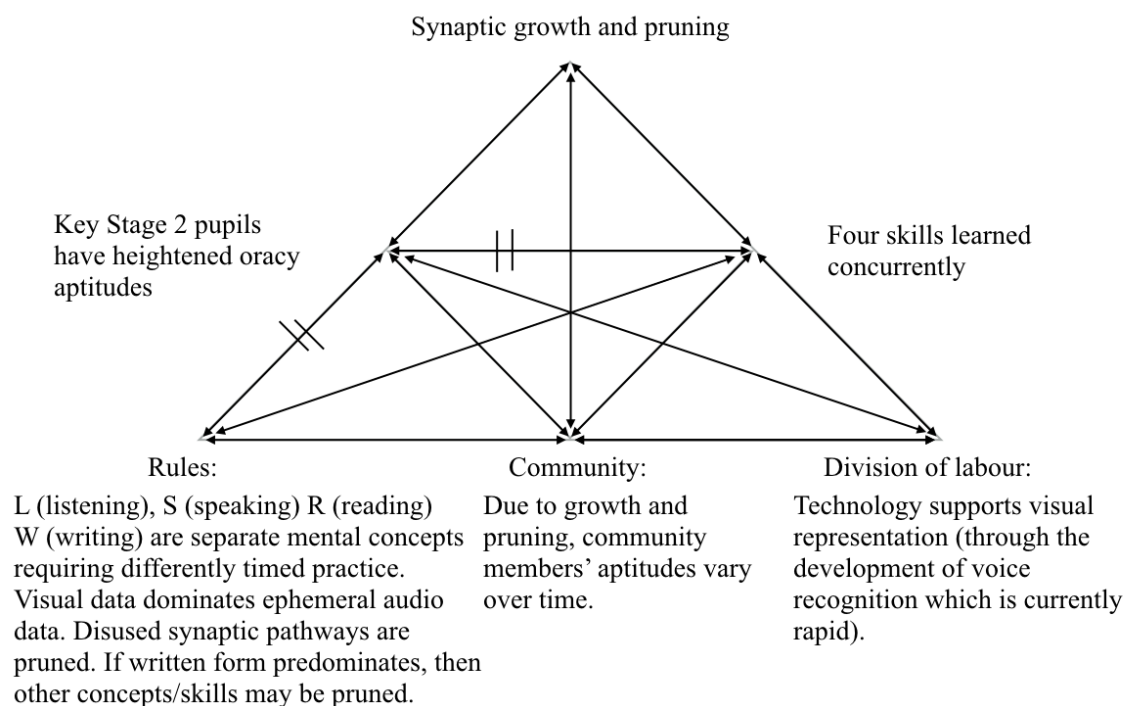


Figure 15: PLs: The neurobiological implications of learning four skills concurrently.

Pupils' developing cognition may be immature for the sophisticated task of building sentences based on a set of grammatical rules. While pupils in England and Wales now learn grammatical terminology in English, the rules governing word classes in English may not apply in the same way to the PL. Although pupils have innate oracy skills that the brain has evolved, a bottom-up approach is different; pupils' cognition may be insufficiently developed to apply grammatical rules with reasonable success. Furthermore, their PL learning is undertaken in limited time.

Significantly, if literacy skills supersede oracy skills, the latter may be 'pruned', due to the brain's plasticity.

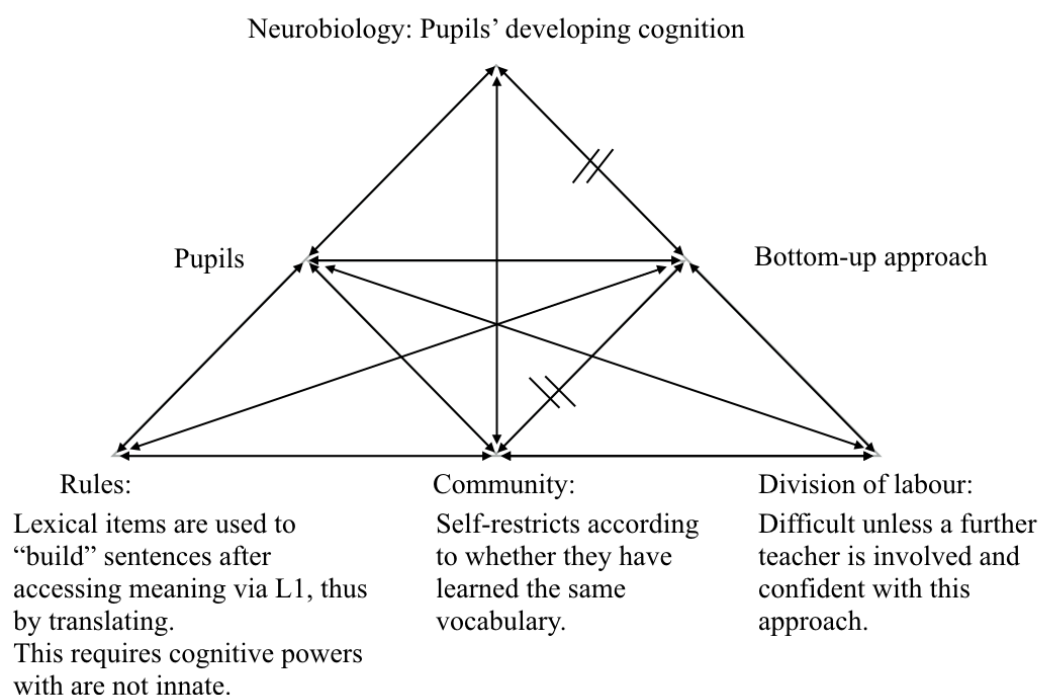


Figure 16. PLs: The neurobiological implications of a bottom-up approach.

Conclusion

In this study, problematising PL provision in England, the nominators and framework of Activity Theory are employed to analyse factors within that collaborative activity. The current situation of PL practice in England suggests that its recently endowed statutory status within the curriculum does not guarantee its effectiveness. Rather, it is endangered by several factors, not least, class teachers' lack of confidence to support the 'little and often' practice necessary for learning procedural skills. Class teachers absenting themselves from specialist-led sessions timetabled during their PPA time, fail to witness speaking and listening exercises from which they might learn and build capacity. Visiting teachers' approach may be based on both their own secondary school learning and possibly outdated theories, and also, timetabling effects.

Current beliefs about language learning should be repositioned by neurobiological findings such as children's temporarily heightened sensitivity to the phonology of the language, said to peak at four years of age. Currently, statutory PL learning applies only to Key Stage 2 (pupils aged 7 – 11) and thus fails to harness three years of pupils' prime aptitude. Future research may reveal more about critical and sensitive periods for different language learning skills. Meanwhile, because vocabulary learning has no particular neurobiological age-dependence, it risks over-exploitation. This is evident in previous schemes of work imitating secondary school models, in which the accumulation of vocabulary may continue to be the main criterion of progress.

Policy influences, if not drives, the 'rules' of PL practice in schools. When timetabling of PL sessions is within class teachers' PPA time, bought-in expertise may result in sessions of 30 minutes or longer, bringing a heavy reliance on literacy skills to fill the timespan. The call for greater focus on PL literacy skills in preparation for secondary school learning (Nuffield

2014) may set predilections for literacy skills over oracy skills, as the brain adapts itself to the activities it undertakes. Without ‘little and often’ reinforcement, this predilection is compounded. Where mental concepts are stored as written forms, no memorisation is required nor is there a necessity to associate a phonological form with the written one.

While there is much to be celebrated in the setting up of PL learning in England since September 2014, undefined learning processes remain a central factor, as indicated on the activity system diagrams. The brain’s pathways, architected according to the activities undertaken, and also, the synaptic pruning of certain underused brain pathways, reinforce the predilections of practice and of pupils’ learning. If the mental concepts of language that pupils are encouraged to use effectively interfere with their natural, but temporary, aptitude for phonological forms, there is potential detriment afforded to children starting a PL in Key Stage 2. PL practice needs to learn from these Essential neurobiological pointers suggest strategies to develop children’s natural aptitudes so that they can successfully build their coding skills for orthography.

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