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*Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*

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Chief Editor

Xinghua Liu

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## Foreword from the Editor

*Xinghua Liu*

I am pleased to present the papers in this issue to readers. In the first paper, **Nathaniel Carney** examined the possible transfer effects of a reading rate training course upon students' general reading speed of other texts not covered in the course. The author found that learners' gains in reading rate were generally carried over when reading other types of texts that were not included in the training course. By employing grounded theory, **Dylan Glyn Williams** in the second paper reported a semi-structured interview with a South Korean high school teacher of English and explored the relationship between context and agency in South Korean high school English classroom pedagogy. The study found that social and cultural factors shape the conditions of the teaching environment and in turn influence the teacher's and students' agency. In the third paper, **Yu-ju Hung** triangulated data from a questionnaire survey and held interviews with Taiwanese English teachers who had obtained degrees abroad and were familiar with both local and Western contexts. The results demonstrated that there are social, cultural, and linguistic barriers to implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) in Taiwanese classrooms and that a successful implementation of CLT requires various degrees of adaptation in order to effectively respond to local expectations and needs. The study emphasizes the importance of teachers acting as cultural mediators to help build teacher-student rapport, lower students' psychological barriers, and construct a socioculturally appropriate environment for CLT. In the fourth paper, through a questionnaire survey on university English teachers' beliefs on the use of coded unfocused corrective feedback, **Hamdan Farhan Alzahrani** found that although the surveyed teachers have an overall positive attitude towards this practice, they thought it might be more effective if used selectively and for high level motivated learners.

Through a content analysis of five beginner ESL textbooks, **Janet S. Casta** and **Esther R. Hufana** identified in the fifth paper some "general" and "specific" language functions. They reported that there is an unequal coverage and representation of each type of language function, that most general language functions are presented alongside specific language functions, and that all five ESL textbooks have allotted a greater portion of their content to informative functions. In the sixth paper, with a classroom-based quasi-experimental study, **Wondwosen Tesfamichael** investigated the effects of implementing the Cooperative Learning Method for students doing paragraph writing at Yekatit 12 Preparatory School, Ethiopia. After intervention, the study found that the experimental group significantly outscored the control group on a paragraph writing post-test with regard to content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. In the final paper, **Wilkinson Daniel Wong Gonzales** and **Eden R. Flores** conducted a stylistic analysis of the syntactical/structural, lexical, and phonological features of a British ballad "The Charge of the Light Brigade"; they also shared five interesting classroom activities in syntax, phonology, and lexis which are intended to foster an exchange of ideas and opinions, deeper linguistic analysis, and active participation in a literature classroom.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the authors for advancing the field by contributing insights into practical issues in language teaching in global contexts. Also, I am deeply thankful to my editorial team for their hard work in reviewing submissions and communicating with authors and reviewers. Particularly, for the production of this issue, I would like to give special thanks to our new Associate Editor, Dean Jorgensen, who has tirelessly proofread all the papers in this issue, working with the authors through the often challenging pre-publication process to improve and strengthen the papers.

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## The Transfer of Reading Rate Training to Other Texts

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### Abstract

This paper builds on recent research looking at how reading speed measures from a reading rate training course are reflected in non-course texts. In this study, 23 first language (L1) Japanese English majors enrolled in a university level reading class completed 20 speed reading exercises with comprehension quizzes from an assigned textbook at the participants' reading level. The 20 speed reading exercises were completed during a 15-week semester. Average reading and comprehension scores from these exercises were compared with timed readings and comprehension quiz scores on five other types of texts that students would probably encounter in their English study or daily lives, including a TOEIC test text, a TOEFL test text, a college textbook text, a newspaper article, and a graded reader. Timed readings and comprehension quizzes for these other texts were all carried out in the final five weeks of the 15-week semester. Results show a high correlation between reading speeds from the class textbook and reading speeds with other texts. However, when comprehension scores were incorporated into the relationship, the correlation was barely significant. In light of this and other studies, further research into the relationship between reading rate training and comprehension is suggested.

**Keywords:** reading rate, reading fluency, fluency training, transfer, reading comprehension

### Introduction

Reading fluency is a requisite part of good reading skill in a second language (L2) (Grabe, 2009, 2010) yet still may be under-researched (Yamashita & Ichikawa, 2010). One area that remains under-researched is reading rate training (Grabe, 2010), though recent years have seen a significant increase in such research (e.g., Chang, 2010, 2012; Macalister, 2008, 2010; Tran, 2012; Underwood, Myskow, & Hattori, 2012), all of which focuses on reading rate training in L2 English. At the heart of reading rate training is the effort to enable L2 learners to read faster while improving or maintaining comprehension, two principal components of fluent reading (Grabe, 2009).

Where exactly reading speed and comprehension fit within the concept of fluency is loosely defined in the literature. However, experts' descriptions and definitions of reading fluency shows there is little contention that fluent readers read quickly with strong comprehension.

Fluency in reading is the ability to read rapidly with ease and accuracy, and to read with appropriate expression and phrasing. It involves a long incremental process, and text comprehension is an expected outcome of fluent reading. (Grabe, 2009, p. 291)

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Fluent readers are the readers who can comprehend a text's meaning smoothly and effortlessly at an appropriate rate. (Yamashita & Ishikawa, 2010, p. 264)

Both L1 and L2 fluency researchers concur that fluent readers engage in automatic, accurate, and rapid recognition of letters, letter combinations, and words....This leads to a fast reading rate, good text comprehension, and expressive renditions of text in oral reading, suggesting prosodic structuring. (Taguchi, Gorsuch, Takayasu-Maass, & Snipp, 2012, p. 31)

These definitions and descriptions signal that reading fluency is more complex than simply speed and comprehension. Still, reading rate training seems to offer a very efficient, inexpensive pedagogical method for improving L2 reading on some level. Reading rate research to date has invariably found that training increases the majority of students' L2 reading speeds (e.g., Chang, 2012; Chung & Nation, 2006; Tran, 2012). Given that reading rate training is efficient, inexpensive, and easily implemented in almost any context, it merits further attention from researchers to better understand its effects. One effect that has not thoroughly been discussed in the literature is how L2 reading speeds transfer from training texts to other texts. This paper discusses how L1 Japanese university EFL students' L2 reading speed and comprehension of reading rate training materials are related to reading speed and comprehension of other texts.

### **Reading Rate Training in Foreign and Second Language Learning**

The earliest studies of reading rate training, West (1941), Bismoko and Nation (1974), and Cramer (1975), investigated whether reading speeds in the L1 related to reading speeds in L2 English. More recent research has focused on quantifying the reading speed increases from reading rate training courses (e.g., Chung, 2010; Chung & Nation, 2006), understanding how reading speed increases are retained over time (Macalister, 2008), studying the development of comprehension along with reading speed from training courses (Atkins, 2010; Chang, 2010; Utsu, 2003, 2005; Weigle & Jenson, 1996) comparing the effects of reading rate training and repeated reading (Chang, 2012), considering vocabulary's role in reading speed and comprehension in reading rate training courses (Underwood et al., 2012), and determining how reading speeds (and comprehension scores) carry over to other texts (Macalister, 2010; Tran, 2012; Weigle & Jenson, 1996).

Theoretically speaking, reading rate training is seen as a component of fluency training, though exactly how reading rate training benefits L2 learners remains unclear. With regard to L1 "timed and paced reading practices", Grabe (2009) writes, "there is little supporting evidence, but there is intuitive appeal" (p. 305) as to its value for developing readers' fluency; furthermore, "in L2 contexts, little research directly supports fluency-development practices" (p. 305). In short, reading rate training's value has not been substantiated to a significant degree in theoretical terms. Chang (2012) cites research related to working memory, postulating that when readers get bogged down in bottom-up processing activities like word decoding, then they will have less cognitive attention for top-down processing. Certainly, one of the processes that seems to slow readers down significantly is fixating a long time on a word or words (Nation, 2008; Urquhart & Weir, 1998), which under time pressure, may necessarily decrease. However, perhaps a larger question is how a decrease in such fixations might affect comprehension. While long fixations obviously slow readers down, in some cases they conceivably also aid overall comprehension of a passage. Knowing exactly when this is the case is extremely difficult for researchers given that reading comprehension itself is such a complex amalgam of bottom-up and top-down processes which likely vary with the content and context in which reading is done (Grabe, 2009). Thus, determining how reading rate training works from a theoretical standpoint remains unclear. What is clear, is that in practical terms, reading rate training's allure, or intuitive appeal, has been supported by research; every published paper on L2 reading rate research to date has successfully increased the majority of ESL and EFL students' reading rate over a relatively short period of time (e.g., Chang, 2012; Chung & Nation, 2006; Macalister, 2010).



### **Research on Carry-Over Effects of Reading Rate Training**

Three studies have previously looked at how reading rate training courses carry over to other types of texts. Weigle and Jenson (1996) tested how much carry-over effect there was from an ESL reading rate training course to reading longer academic texts. Participants were ESL students at a major university in the United States. The study had students take a pre-test and post-test reading long academic texts (1690 and 1712 words, respectively) which were longer and more difficult than the texts in the reading rate training course (1000 word readings). The authors found that students' reading speeds on the pre and post-tests were significantly higher, but that comprehension was significantly lower for one experimental group in the study. The authors suggested that a number of variables—the students' proficiency, the content of the readings, or the emphasis on reading speed vs. comprehension—could be the issues. In fact, they found that higher proficiency students had less trouble with comprehension on the academic texts, and concluded that “it also seems that rate improvement does carry over to readings of a more academic nature, but perhaps only for the more proficient readers” (Weigle & Jenson, p. 67).

Macalister (2010) also studied how reading rate training carried over to another text. Macalister used three excerpts from a 1952 essay by George Orwell to look for a carry-over effect from a reading rate training course. The three Orwell excerpts were comparable in vocabulary level to the readings in the reading rate training course. The Orwell readings were administered at different points of a 12-week term; one was given at the beginning of the course, one was given at the end of the main reading rate training period (the 6<sup>th</sup> week of the term), and one was given at the end of the 12-week term along with three more reading rate training texts. This design was used to determine how reading rate carried over to the Orwell texts both during the course and after a 6-week delay. Macalister found that the experimental groups' reading speed increases on authentic texts were greater than those of a control group, though not all students had increases in reading speeds. Macalister (2010) states that “students who do a speed reading course are significantly more likely than those who do not...to read an authentic text more quickly” (p. 112), both after a reading rate training course ends as well as at the end of a term.

Tran's (2012) is the most recent research related to reading rate training's carry over effect on reading other texts. Similar to Weigle and Jenson (1996), Tran (2012) had students take a pre and post-test on readings that were similar to each other, but different from the texts in the reading rate training course. In contrast to Weigle and Jenson's (1996) and Macalister's (2010) studies, Tran (2012) used adapted texts to test for carry-over effects. Both the pre and post-test were texts from 1,000-word level graded readers, and each had ten comprehension questions (it is not clear whether the questions were from the graded readers or created by the researcher). As for adapting the texts, Tran (2012) writes that “the two texts had been modified to contain approximately similar numbers of total words, academic words, words at the 1,000-word level, words at the 2,000-word level, and off-list words” (p. 25). While this made them similar to the reading rate training texts, Tran adds that “these texts differed from those in the course by being longer, being read on a computer...and involving different topics from those in the course” (p. 26). The results were encouraging; both experimental groups increased reading speeds and most participants maintained or increased comprehension scores during the reading rate course and on the pre and post-tests, i.e., the non-reading rate training texts. Tran concludes that “the most optimistic finding that emerged from the research is the speed transfer from the course to other types of texts” (p. 36).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 23 L1 Japanese university students, all members of a first year required EFL reading class. Students were informed in their L1 (Japanese) of the general nature of the research study (i.e., about reading fluency) and that provision of their performance data for research was voluntary and they could choose not to participate at any time. All students elected to participate.

## Materials

### Textbooks

As a requirement for the class, all students purchased a commercially available reading textbook, *More Reading Power*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2004), which contains many different reading skills exercises, including a section of reading rate training texts. This textbook was selected for the class by the researcher three months prior to the first class, in accordance with university regulations. When the textbook was selected, the general class proficiency level was known (classes were streamed into seven different proficiency levels by TOEIC scores). Thus, based on the researcher's past experience, *More Reading Power* was expected to be appropriate. All students took the Vocabulary Size Test (Nation & Beglar, 2007) on the first day of the semester as a normal part of the curriculum used to determine individual students' general vocabulary sizes. Students took the bilingual Japanese version which could yield higher scores than the monolingual English version. Vocabulary scores ( $n = 23$ ,  $M = 7609$ ,  $SD = 446$ ) implied that *More Reading Power* was at an appropriate reading level based on the vocabulary profile of the texts (see Table 1), though the *More Reading Power* textbook itself does not explicitly say how vocabulary level is controlled in the reading rate training texts (see Nation, 2008 for courses that have been specifically controlled).

### Other Texts

Criteria for selection of 'other texts' for this study was primarily based on text type. Of concern to many Japanese university students is preparation for high-stakes English exams like the TOEIC and TOEFL tests (both of which are taken by students at the researcher's university). Thus, TOEIC and TOEFL texts were selected from the following current test preparation materials: *Barron's TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication*, 5th ed. (Loughleed, 2010) and *Barron's TOEFL iBT*, 13th ed. (Sharpe, 2010), respectively. Likewise, two other texts students are likely to encounter are online news texts and readings from university class textbooks. In the case of the online newspaper text, an article was chosen from a current issue of *The Japan Times*, a leading English-language newspaper in Japan. The decision to choose a news article of which students would have prior knowledge was intentionally done in order to make the reading easier for students to process. For the college textbook, an excerpt was chosen from Tina Seelig's (2009) *What I Wish I Knew When I was 20*, a best-selling book aimed at native speakers of English which also was used as a text for one of the upper-level classes at the researcher's university, i.e., presumably the kind of text students might encounter in their future undergraduate studies. Finally, a reading from a level-two Penguin graded reader, *Amazon Rain Forest* by Bernard Smith (2008), was used. This graded reader was chosen since English language learners are often required to read such texts as part of extensive reading programs, and the easier vocabulary level would resemble the reading rate training texts to some extent.

Compared with the *More Reading Power* texts, the other texts used in this study presented somewhat varied characteristics. While all texts from *More Reading Power* had about 500 words and always had eight comprehension questions, this was not always true with the other texts; the TOEFL text, college textbook text, and graded reader texts were all excerpts from longer texts. This was necessary so as to have word lengths of reasonably similar length to the *More Reading Power* texts, but also to be fair to students for whom reading longer texts could cause fatigue and a loss of interest. The news text and the TOEIC text were used without changes. The news text was similar in length to *More Reading Power* texts. The TOEIC text, however, was much shorter than the other texts. To maintain its authenticity as a reading, it was not changed. Nevertheless, because it was short, it was understood that reading times on the TOEIC text would yield narrower words per minute rates than other texts.

With regard to comprehension questions, the researcher, an experienced test writer, wrote questions for the news text (eight questions), the textbook text (six questions), and the graded reader text (six questions). For the TOEIC text, there were only five questions which were the original questions from the TOEIC test practice book. For the TOEFL text, there were six questions, chosen from among the questions in the TOEFL test practice book that corresponded to the excerpt.

### Text Characteristics

All texts were analyzed with the Range program (Heatley, Nation, & Coxhead, 2002), which, among other information, tells how many words from the analyzed text are included in the 2000 most common words of English, according to West's (1953) *A General Service List of English Words*. Their total token count, type count, and respective percentages included in the first 2000 words of the General Service List are shown in Table 1 below, along with the mean token count, mean type count, and mean percentages for four reading rate training texts from *More Reading Power* (MRP). Flesch-Kincaid scores for the texts are also included for reference.

Table 1

*Text Characteristics According to the Range Program and Flesch-Kincaid*

| Characteristic                      | TOEIC | TOEFL | News  | Textbook | Graded Reader | MRP (mean score) |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|---------------|------------------|
| Total Tokens                        | 267   | 499   | 465   | 500      | 463           | 497              |
| % Tokens in first 2000 words of GSL | 79.25 | 72.75 | 79.14 | 82.40    | 90.07         | 89.14            |
| Total Types                         | 153   | 261   | 241   | 280      | 179           | 159              |
| % Types in first 2000 words of GSL  | 73.21 | 59.01 | 71.78 | 71.43    | 86.60         | 82.05            |
| Flesch-Kincaid                      | 58.3  | 31.1  | 47    | 53.3     | 76.8          | 56.8             |

### Data Collection

During 13 weeks of a 15-week term, the participants completed 20 timed readings with eight comprehension questions per reading. Generally, participants completed two timed readings from *More Reading Power* each class. During the final five weeks of the 15-week term, the participants also completed five other timed readings, including one from a TOEIC practice test book, one from a TOEFL practice text book, one from an online newspaper article, one from an English book that was used as a text for another class for English majors at the university, and one from a graded reader that was below the students' reading level. All of these readings were adapted to be timed readings since they were from authentic sources. The reading schedule for all texts is written below in Table 2.

Table 2

*Schedule of the Reading Rate Training Course*

| Week    | Activity   |
|---------|--|
| Week 1  | <i>Vocabulary Size Test</i> (Nation & Beglar, 2007)                    |
| Week 2  | <i>More Reading Power</i> practice text + <i>More Reading Power</i> #1 |
| Week 3  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #2-3   |
| Week 4  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #4-5   |
| Week 5  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #6-7   |
| Week 6  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #8-9   |
| Week 7  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #10-11                                       |
| Week 8  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #12-13                                       |
| Week 9  | <i>More Reading Power</i> #14-15                                       |
| Week 10 | <i>More Reading Power</i> #16-17                                       |
| Week 11 | <i>More Reading Power</i> #18 + News Text                              |
| Week 12 | <i>More Reading Power</i> #19 + TOEIC text                             |
| Week 13 | <i>More Reading Power</i> #20 + TOEFL text                             |
| Week 14 | Textbook Text + Graded Reader Text                                     |
| Week 15 | Gather class feedback  |

The process for doing timed readings from *More Reading Power* was as follows. All students were asked to find the timed reading in the *More Reading Power* textbook and then close the textbook while keeping a finger in to mark the page. Then, on a large screen at the front of the room, a stopwatch set to 0 was projected. The teacher then instructed students to begin reading and started the stopwatch. Upon finishing the reading, students would look up at the screen projecting the stopwatch and write down their reading time. Then, the students turned the page in the textbook to the eight comprehension questions for the readings. The students were instructed to not look at the reading while answering comprehension questions, and this was easily monitored by the teacher who was carefully observing the students. Students were given between four and five minutes to answer the questions. This time was chosen so that students had a limit (in order to conserve class time), but not a limit that would prevent them from having time to attempt all the comprehension questions. The time deemed appropriate through pilot testing with groups not involved in the study who were doing similar reading rate training exercises. After completing the reading, the students then did a second timed reading following the same process. Finally, after completing both readings, answers to the comprehension questions were provided and students marked their comprehension scores and reading times on individual reading charts based on charts provided in *More Reading Power*. These charts were collected by the teacher at the completion of the activity each class meeting. For other readings, the process was basically the same. However, students received new reading speed charts for each of the other readings since not all of the readings had the same word count as the *More Reading Power* readings. For example, the TOEIC reading was considerably shorter, with 267 words. In order to determine the words per minute for the TOEIC reading (and for other readings with different word counts), a reading speed conversion chart (see Appendix A for a sample) was created by dividing the reading word count by the time, which was represented as a decimal. Each five second interval was represented by an increase of .083 in the decimal. For example, one minute was represented by 1, and one minute five seconds was represented as 1.083. Thereafter, values increased by .083 up to six minutes.

For most of the timed readings (all *More Reading Power* texts and most other readings) students were not graded on their reading speed and comprehension. The purpose was for students to chart their own progress and practice reading faster. This was made clear to students at the beginning and throughout the reading rate training course. However, the final two readings of the semester were set as a graded activity. These readings included the university textbook reading and the graded reader reading. In this case, the procedure for doing the readings was the same as done with the textbook, but completion times for the readings were verified by the researcher through video recording the class (with student permission) and noting the times when students finished reading (indicated by raising their hands), and the comprehension questions were graded by the researcher, not the students.

The data collected for this study included participants' reading rate charts from the *More Reading Power* textbook readings, as well as the reading charts from other readings used to measure transfer. As noted, the *More Reading Power* textbook charts were collected after every class session (i.e., every two readings). Results from readings were recorded then. This was done to prevent learners from losing their charts, and also to maintain a constant record of progress throughout the study and not lose data. Transfer reading charts were collected after each respective class and recorded before being returned to learners.

Other data for this study included learner reflections completed after the completion of all of the timed readings. To complete the reflections, learners were given a piece of paper during the final class session and asked to comment on various components of the reading course which were written on the chalkboard at the head of the classroom; these components included the reading rate training exercises. Learners were asked to complete the reflection anonymously, and when finished, to place the reflection in an envelope that was placed on an empty desk in the classroom.

## Research Questions

The main research question for this study was as follows:

1. How are reading speed and comprehension measures on leveled reading rate training materials with a commercial textbook reflected in reading speed and comprehension measures on other types of texts?
2. What are students' attitudes toward reading rate training?

In order to answer the first question, correlations between reading speeds from *More Reading Power* and reading speeds from other texts were calculated and interpreted. To address the question of how comprehension scores between *More Reading Power* were correlated, a reading factor variable was computed. The reading factor combined reading speed with comprehension, with the justification that comprehension should be tied to reading speed in determining its relative importance. A similar notion was conceived by Atkins (2010, pp. 664-665) as a "composite score." All statistical analyses for this study were performed with SPSS, version 20.0. In order to answer the second question, a brief survey was conducted.

## Results

### Reading Rate Training Transfer

In order to answer the first research question, average reading speed scores were calculated for reading speeds on the *More Reading Power* readings and on the other types of texts. Then, correlations between average reading speeds on *More Reading Power* texts and other texts were computed. Because the normal distribution of the data was borderline, with a skewness ratio over 2 (see Weinberg & Abramowitz, 2002, p. 278, as cited in Larson-Hall, 2010, p. 78), bootstrapping (Field, 2013, p. 271) was used to find Pearson *r* correlations and their bias corrected and accelerated bootstrap 95% confidence intervals, as reported in Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Relationships between Reading Speed in More Reading Power (MRP) Texts and Other Text Types*

| Measure               | 1               | 2               | 3               | 4              | 5              | 6 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---|
| 1. <i>MRP</i> texts   | —               |                 |                 |                |                |   |
| 2. News text          | .65* [.33, .87] | —               |                 |                |                |   |
| 3. TOEIC text         | .55* [.34, .88] | .73 [.36, .91]  | —               |                |                |   |
| 4. TOEFL text         | .84 [.61, .94]  | .56* [.18, .80] | .60 [.01, .85]  | —              |                |   |
| 5. Textbook text      | .88 [.65, .96]  | .74 [.56, .93]  | .66 [.16-.88]   | .78 [.41, .93] | —              |   |
| 6. Graded Reader text | .82 [.41, .94]  | .63 [.42, .87]  | .55* [.02, .79] | .72 [.31, .88] | .95 [.82, .98] | — |
| 7. All other texts    | .88 [.66, .96]  |                 |                 |                |                |   |

*Notes.* All correlations are  $p < .01$ , unless otherwise indicated;  $\alpha < .05$

In order to understand participants' comprehension, a new number created by the researcher, called the *reading factor*, was computed. The reading factor is the product of the reading speed and the comprehension score divided by 100. The rationale for computing the reading factor was to represent the interplay between reading speed and comprehension, since in fact the goal of reading speed training is not only to read faster, but also to comprehend. Dividing by 100 made the reading factor a more manageable number. The highest conceivable reading factor for *More Reading Power* would be 24. This is based on 300 words per minute speed for native English speakers (Carver, 1990; Grabe, 2009) and correct answers to all eight reading comprehension questions for a given *More Reading Power* text. The calculation would be  $300 \times 8 / 100$ , i.e., 24. However, a realistic goal for the students of this study would be reading around 150 words per minute and getting 6 out of 8 comprehension

questions correct. For such a hypothetical student, the factor would be 9. For the other texts in this study, as previously mentioned, the number of comprehension questions differed among readings. In order to compare with the reading factors of the *More Reading Power* texts, comprehension scores on other texts were adjusted to an eight-point scale. For example, comprehension scores from the TOEIC reading, which only had five comprehension questions, were multiplied by 1.6 (i.e., 8/5), and this constituted the adjusted comprehension score, which was used to find the adjusted reading factor value. After reading factors were found, the correlation between participants' mean reading factors from *More Reading Power* and the mean adjusted reading factor from the other types of texts was determined. The result was a significant correlation, though with broad confidence intervals,  $r = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% BCa CI [.05, .80]. Values for individual participants can be found in Appendix B.

### Students' Attitudes

As a normal class practice, all participants in this study were asked to anonymously reflect about the reading class at the end of the semester in Japanese or English. Among other class components, participants were asked to offer feedback about the reading rate training course. The majority of feedback was positive. Examples of positive comments included students writing that the reading rate training course helped them read faster. For example:

今まで文を読むのが遅かった私にとっては、とても意味のあることでした。どんどん読む速さが上がって行って嬉しかったです。(Because I read very slowly before, this activity was very meaningful for me. Little by little I was able to read faster and I was so happy.)

Reading faster is good. It is important not to repeat the sentences, so it can be a training.

Reading faster was a little difficult, but I came to do it quickly now. I want to use this for TOEIC and TOEFL.

Despite the majority of positive comments, there were important negative comments with regard to comprehension, which did seem to be an issue in this study. Some examples are as follows:

正解数に大きい変化が表われなくて残念です。(It was too bad there was no big improvement in my comprehension.)

Reading faster is bad because I can't understand so fast.

Reading faster was very difficult for me. I couldn't get a good score, but I could read faster.

These comments suggest that while improvement in reading speed was positively experienced by most, a lack of comprehension was a negative feeling by a number of students. How students feel about reading rate training could significantly affect not only their progress during the course, but their attitudes about improving their reading speed in the future.

### Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether reading speed and comprehension on leveled reading rate training texts from a commercial textbook would transfer to reading speed and comprehension abilities with other text types that students typically encounter. With regard to reading speed, the answer was that in this study students' reading speeds were generally consistent across texts ( $r = .88$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BCa CI [.66, .96]). However, with regard to individual readings, the TOEIC test was an outlier that did not correlate with the *More*



*Reading Power* texts or with most of the other texts. One explanation for this is the short passage length. Perhaps reading a short passage led to less variation in students' reading speeds, as having fewer words makes the reading speeds per five seconds (as was calculated in this study) more similar than they would be on other texts. The chart in Appendix B shows how this is true. The small sample size is another possibility (i.e., only one reading), though that was true all of the other texts as well. Another correlation that stands out is the strong relationship between the graded reader text and the college textbook text ( $r = .95$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BCa CI [.82, .98]). Because the texts themselves were of two very different vocabulary levels, styles, and topics, one interesting explanation for the high correlation could be the fact that, of all the other types of texts, they were the only two given during the same class session. Could the close temporal proximity in which the texts were read have led to a consistency in speed? This question is beyond the scope of the small data set in this paper, but it might be plausible that something such as reading speed requires a certain rhythm and focus that is connected to each reading session as much as it is to the type of reading involved. Reading speed training clearly requires learners to push themselves to read at a faster rate. It is easy to imagine that on some occasions learners are more adept at this than others. In other words, more than the text, it might be affective variables that most strongly influence a reader's rhythm in these kinds of exercises.

In any case, as mentioned, reading speeds of participants on other texts generally correlated with the reading rate training materials. However, with comprehension, this is not as clearly the case. When comprehension is considered along with reading speed to create the reading factor variables for the *More Reading Power* texts and the other texts, the correlation has significance, but the large confidence intervals suggest a questionable effect size ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% BCa CI [.05, .80]). Furthermore, there were other problems seen with comprehension in this study. First of all, comprehension scores on the 20 *More Reading Power* texts, measured by the average of the first three scores minus the average of the last three scores, did not increase. In fact, there was a mean decrease of -.30 overall. There are various plausible explanations for decreases in comprehension, including possible unreliability in the comprehension tests in the *More Reading Power* text. It is notable that comprehension scores on the *More Reading Power* texts were below the average of what has been considered a desirable threshold for reading rate training for fluency, which is 70% (Anderson, 1999; Nation, 2008). The average comprehension score was 5.04/8, i.e., 63%, with only five out of twenty-three students comprehending at the 70% correct threshold. Nevertheless, these comprehension results follow a similar trend of no significant growth in comprehension found in other recent reading rate training course research (Chang 2010; Crawford, 2008; Underwood et al., 2012). Likewise, mean comprehension levels below the 70% threshold were also found in certain studies (e.g., Chang, 2012; Weigle & Jenson, 1996). Since reading speed without comprehension is a somewhat meaningless measure, comprehension in reading rate training deserves a closer look in future research. While some L1 studies have found that reading under time pressure can aid comprehension (e.g., Breznitz & Share, 1992; Walczyk, Kelly, Meche, & Braud, 1999) there is no L2 reading rate training research to date which has strongly supported such a notion (but see Chang, 2012, p. 77-78 for results and discussion of comprehension).

## Conclusion

This study found that gains in reading rate training were generally carried over when reading other types of texts not in the training program. Pedagogically speaking, this adds to the support other studies have given for reading rate training as a worthwhile activity in ESL/EFL reading curriculums for improving learners' reading speeds. On the other hand, this study also shows that comprehension's relationship with reading rate training increases is not always positive. This suggests that instructors should make thoughtful decisions about what the comprehension goals are for reading rate training texts, and what should be done for learners who are reading fast but not comprehending. This probably will require an instructor's intervention with individual learners who have trouble maintaining or increasing comprehension (see Chung, 2010). Still, the instructor must consider at what point intervention is needed. Reading rate training is just that – a type of training – learner trajectories will

differ by nature. Most importantly, learners should understand that the purpose of the training is their overall development as readers, not just as a method to increase their reading speeds.

The limitations of this study are important to note, and hopefully they can be improved upon by future researchers looking at reading speed and comprehension across texts. First of all, the sample size was relatively small and involved a non-random sample of learners. While finding a truly random sample is beyond the means of most researchers (but see Underwood et al., 2012), at least conducting research with a larger group of learners with diverse levels could lead to more generalizable conclusions. Another limitation was that only one transfer text of each type was used to check for carry-over effects of reading rate training. Future research might focus on fewer types of transfer texts but more samples of each type. Researchers may even want to include transfer texts at both the beginning and end of their studies in order to gather evidence of reading gains as well as carry-over effect measures (e.g., Weigle & Jenson, 1996; Macalister, 2010; Tran, 2012). Finally, another way to consider transfer of reading speed abilities would be to look at different texts in terms of their reading level (i.e., vocabulary coverage) rather than the type of text. In this study, four of the transfer texts were characterized by having less frequent vocabulary, while the graded reader text resembled the vocabulary level of the reading rate training texts. A future study might gather all readings, for example, from different levels of extensive readers in order to achieve a more vocabulary-centered approach to the transfer of learning.

With regard to the important consideration of reading comprehension, the validity and reliability of reading rate training texts with multiple choice questions must be addressed. Without valid and reliable multiple choice questions, the degree of error judging a reader's comprehension of a reading will notably increase, a point also made by Atkins (2010). In this study, the texts used to judge transfer of reading speed abilities varied in both the number of questions as well as the designer of those questions; some were designed by the textbook authors and some were designed by the researcher. In general, it would be difficult to completely validate such tests because of the time and effort needed to do so, but at least minimizing problems through pilot testing is strongly suggested.

Reading speed research will also be improved by the analysis of more qualitative data. Chung (2010) found that by encouraging slow readers *during* a reading rate training course, all of the learners increased their reading speed (Nation, 2008, p. 72 also suggests the importance of this). In all other studies to date reporting on individuals' performance, including this one, at least a few learners have shown decreased reading rates at the end of the course. Determining the causes of this (e.g., decreased motivation, fatigue, etc.) is important. Other researchers have similarly called for more qualitative investigation, but research to date has only peripherally incorporated qualitative open-ended survey data. Observing and talking with learners continuously during a reading speed program might not only help learners succeed, but could also offer insight into the agency that individual learners bring to the activity. Especially, more light could be shed on the murky question of comprehension, and more information could be gathered on how reading rate training works from a theoretical perspective.

Despite this study's limitations, the author hopes that this research has contributed to an understanding of how a reading rate training course's effects might be reflected in other texts that students will likely encounter in their English studies. As reading rate training is such an accessible and affordable practice in reading pedagogy, its continued refinement is in the interest of all in the ESL/EFL field.



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**Appendix A**  
**Reading Rate Table: TOEIC Reading**

| Reading Time | Rate | Reading Time | Rate |
|--------------|------|--------------|------|
| 1:00         | 267  | 3:00         | 89   |
| 1:05         | 247  | 3:05         | 87   |
| 1:10         | 229  | 3:10         | 85   |
| 1:15         | 214  | 3:15         | 82   |
| 1:20         | 200  | 3:20         | 80   |
| 1:25         | 189  | 3:25         | 78   |
| 1:30         | 178  | 3:30         | 77   |
| 1:35         | 169  | 3:35         | 75   |
| 1:40         | 160  | 3:40         | 73   |
| 1:45         | 153  | 3:45         | 71   |
| 1:50         | 146  | 3:50         | 70   |
| 1:55         | 140  | 3:55         | 68   |
| 2:00         | 134  | 4:00         | 67   |
| 2:05         | 128  | 4:05         | 66   |
| 2:10         | 123  | 4:10         | 64   |
| 2:15         | 119  | 4:15         | 63   |
| 2:20         | 115  | 4:20         | 62   |
| 2:25         | 111  | 4:25         | 61   |
| 2:30         | 107  | 4:30         | 60   |
| 2:35         | 104  | 4:35         | 58   |
| 2:40         | 100  | 4:40         | 57   |
| 2:45         | 97   | 4:45         | 56   |
| 2:50         | 94   | 4:50         | 55   |
| 2:55         | 92   | 4:55         | 54   |
|              |      | 5:00         | 54   |

**Appendix B**  
**Mean Reading Factors for *More Reading Power* and Other Text Types**

| Participant | Mean Reading Factor<br><i>More Reading Power</i> | Mean Reading Factor (adjusted)<br>five other texts |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1           | 6.76   | 5.61   |
| 2           | 6.78   | 5.30   |
| 3           | 7.59   | 5.19   |
| 4           | 8.72   | 4.81   |
| 5           | 8.37   | 7.46   |
| 6           | 6.46   | 4.77   |
| 7           | 10.92  | 9.79   |
| 8           | 6.54   | 4.94   |
| 9           | 6.80   | 5.68   |
| 10          | 7.93   | 6.03   |
| 11          | 6.73   | 5.93   |
| 12          | 5.88   | 3.74   |
| 13          | 6.89   | 6.36   |
| 14          | 7.99   | 4.69   |
| 15          | 9.42   | 9.39   |
| 16          | 11.91  | 7.92   |
| 17          | 7.17   | 6.22   |
| 18          | 10.01  | 6.36   |
| 19          | 5.24   | 4.61   |
| 20          | 6.52   | 8.23   |
| 21          | 8.03   | 4.74   |
| 22          | 8.86   | 4.51   |
| 23          | 7.02   | 8.10   |

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## Understanding the Interplay between Context and Agency in a South Korean High School English Classroom

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### Abstract

This paper aims to understand the relationship between context and agency in the context of a South Korean high school teacher's English classroom pedagogy. This was explored through two semi-structured interviews with the teacher, which was transcribed and analyzed using the principles of grounded theory in order to obtain a bottom-up, empirically grounded understanding of the relationship. This approach identified a strong contextual influence in the form of Korea's national university entrance examination, which is a constraint on both the teacher and students, resulting in a high focus on receptive skills, and thus shaping both agents' own respective choices in English language teaching and learning with the end-goal of students' success on the exam. 'Passive agency' emerged as a theory to describe this insight. The paper concludes with a discussion about the implications of 'passive agency' for the possible future trajectories of students.

**Keywords:** agency, context, grounded theory, neoliberalism, South Korea, transitions

### Introduction

I am an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) language instructor at Seoul National University where I encounter freshmen students who have transitioned through the South Korean high school system where the focus is geared towards maximizing students' performances on the '*Suneung*'—South Korea's university entrance exam (Roh, 2010; S.C.S., 2013). Internationally, the exam is known as the Korean Scholastic Ability Test (KSAT). In the case of testing English, to maintain objectivity in marking (Lee & Winke, 2013), the KSAT focuses solely on testing receptive skills, and as preparation for this, the teacher-centered grammar translation approach seems to be the favored pedagogy of English high school teachers as the teaching of productive skills, as preparation for the test, does not occur in state-funded education (Chung & Choi, 2015). Focusing primarily on receptive skills suggests that students may have less agency in English as their ability to focus on productive skills is being compromised (Jeon, 2010). As a result, it seems that South Korean high school students enter higher education with a shortage of skill foci that warrants further investigation.

Universities' pursuit of internationalization, which is occurring as a broad trend across various East Asian higher education contexts (see Altbach, 2006; Kam, 2006; Kimura, n.d.; Mok, 2008), results in South Korean freshman students focusing more on productive skills when they enter higher education (Nam, 2005). Therefore, as universities compete for world-ranking status (see Byun & Kim, 2011 for further discussion) and open more English medium courses, improving English academic competency, including productive skills, is becoming more important (Park, 2009). Nevertheless, I witness my students struggling with this shift in skill focus. As students transition from high school to higher education it seems they are often unable to take an active role in independently developing all four skills equally because they have experienced a lack of productive skill foci and have not been trained in autonomous language learning development in their high schooling (Li, 1998).

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Therefore, this experience of past agentic opportunities feeds into the students' current contextual settings as the concept of agency is also what you bring with you as an individual moving through time (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). In this paper my aim is to consider the context/agency interplay to further understand the role both concepts play in shaping KSAT graduates' preparedness for higher education. My understanding is based upon the perceptions of a South Korean English high school teacher as gaining access to South Korean high school students proved difficult.

Agency can be shaped by context and context can be shaped by agency, and together they are able to establish a positive dynamic for growth and development, so it follows that some type of 'imbalance' between them may constrain growth and development (Williams, 2013). By employing grounded theory, this study seeks to understand how contextual factors influence the South Korean high school learning environment, and based upon the perceptions of the teacher, the effects they have upon students' agency when they are given freedom to be independent in their higher education English learning.

With these goals in mind, my research questions for this paper are:

1. What contextual factors influence the styles of teaching used by a South Korean high school English teacher?
2. How do these factors influence students' agency for future success in the context of a South Korean University's English classroom?

The literature review, which follows, aims to contextualize my understanding of 'context' and 'agency' in relation to the English as a foreign language (EFL) setting where the research takes place.

## **Context and Agency**

### **Context in EFL**

Gao (2010) views context from a sociocultural perspective as interactions happening within "different layers of contextual reality [which encompasses the macro-social to the micro-institutional level as] a combination of culture, discourses, social agents and material resources or artefacts" (p. 153) that result in a multifaceted concept.

Oxford (2003) offers a more specific overview of what these 'different layers' encompass by providing five perspectives to increase our understanding of a context's multifaceted components: (1) as a literal setting; (2) as generalized conditions (e.g., EFL or ESL [English taught as a second language]); (3) as the interactions of learners within a particular cultural setting; (4) as a community of practice within a large social and cultural environment; and (5) as the role which ideological thinking transpires in interactions within a setting. From this we can see that Oxford views the components of contexts in EFL as tangible settings, as learner traits, and as sociocultural interactions, which also include political considerations.

Kennedy (1988) offers a more succinct perspective, which seems more accessible than the previous descriptions, by describing a context as consisting of six intertwined systems operating in a hierarchy. In order of dominance, this can be visualized as follows:

cultural → political → administrative → educational → institutional → classroom

This simple visualization enables us to understand how these systems influence each other. For example, if a context is viewed as a systematic interconnected hierarchy, this implies that the systems that are at the lower end of the hierarchy may be constrained by dominating influences from the upper systems. Tudor (1996) articulates this interrelation for us by using the term "macro-social pressures" (p. 137) to describe these constraints. On account of this, in the hierarchical system, institutional change and classroom innovation become limited. Rothery (2001) views context in a slightly different way to the previous hierarchical descriptions by describing it

as an ecological system whereby the organisms shape and are shaped by each other as this is a system that is “inherently transactional in nature” (p. 69). Returning to Tudor’s (1996) interpretation provides a greater foundation on which to build our understanding of context specifically in EFL and is described pithily as an “educational framework [which is] shaped by the socioeconomic conditions of [a student’s] home community and which will also reflect the attitudes, beliefs and traditions of this community” (p. 128).

In consideration of the above findings from the literature, the concept of a context in EFL may be described as an ‘interconnected, systematic, layered, community’, whereby the conditions within this community shape the factors that determine the physical setting where language is taught. To further understand how this occurs in the South Korean context, an overview of the attitudes, beliefs, and traditions in this EFL context is described in the following sections.

### ***The South Korean EFL Context***

The context I teach in is situated within the TESEP (tertiary, secondary, and primary) English language education sector, an acronym that comes from Holliday’s (1994a) classification of the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession into two main sectors; the other sector is BANA (Britain, Australasia, and North America). Despite the geographical classification of the latter, within South Korean Universities, the promotion of communicative language teaching, and the growing presence of foreign instructors have resulted in BANA methodologies being the main frame of reference (Jambor, 2007). Holliday (1994a) provides further insight for why this happens:

Because of the hegemony of the received BANA English language teaching methodology, and because there are few examples of high-status methodologies grown from the TESEP sector, the latter sector automatically becomes second-class in that it is forced to make difficult adaptations of methodologies which do not really suit. (pp. 12–13)

From this, we turn to consider the differences between higher education and high school English learning methodologies in the South Korean context.

High school English teaching is focused upon passing the KSAT (Choi, 2008; Hyams, 2015). Cultural values and traditions have shaped the dynamic in which students are tested in their university entrance exams. Due to a Confucian heritage a great deal of value is placed on self-discipline and the ability to absorb knowledge; therefore, testing dominates the educational system (Carless, 2011). In contrast, encouraging the development of critical thinking skills and personal self-reflection is also central within this heritage (Kim, 2003). Nonetheless, it is the former paradigm that seems to dominate the preparation for the KSAT, and within it the teacher is viewed as a figure of authority (see Littlewood, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2003), and/or as a disseminator rather than a facilitator of knowledge. Accordingly, there are differences between higher education and high school English teaching methodologies; in the latter English is usually taught in large classes (Holliday, 1994b) through a teacher-centered grammar translation approach (Chung & Choi, 2015). With this methodological contrast, students’ agency may differ between the two settings. To explore this, we first need to understand the notion of agency as a broader concept in EFL.

### **Agency in EFL**

Oxford (2003) defines agency as “the quality of being an active force in producing an effect” (p. 80). In EFL, it seems this agency is evidenced as learners show autonomy in their additional language acquisition process. The author further states that it is the intentionality of the learners that makes them agents. However, Oxford also outlines the challenges in helping learners to develop their agency, as it cannot be construed as a gift to be given to learners. For instance, if learners are suddenly given full freedom to act independently in their learning, they may not know how to exercise this freedom as they have not been taught the skill-set to intentionally cope with this level of control. Therefore, the notion of agency concerns ‘how a person acts’ rather than ‘having the ability



to act' as it denotes "behavior rather than property" (Van Lier, 2008, p. 171), and within the context/agency interplay, 'how a person acts' is mediated by contextual factors.

Palfreyman (2003) provides a comprehensive explanation for 'how' learners encounter agency by stating that often the literature on autonomy presents a contrast between background culture and individual agency and that through a sociocultural lens both merge, allowing learners to capitalize upon, or decline the opportunities that are presented to them in their social context. This view is supported by Van Lier (2008) who asserts "agency is not simply an individual character trait or activity, but a contextually enacted way of being in the world" (p. 163). The author further extends our understanding of a sociocultural perspective on agency, by categorizing it as: (1) learner/group self-regulation (or initiative); (2) interdependence through interactions in the sociocultural context; and (3) an awareness of the degree of responsibility to assume within the situation of the social context. Returning to Gao's (2010) sociocultural interpretation of a context, learners within it are described as "social agents [possessing a] sociocultural capacity [which involves their] micro-political competence in manipulating contextual conditions and social processes within particular contexts to create a facilitative learning environment, negotiate access to language competences and pursue self-assertion" (p. 26). The author further states that learners' willingness and their understanding of the conditions within the context are prerequisites for this undertaking.

By considering Palfreyman's (2003) 'encountering opportunities' perspective, Van Lier's (2008) 'self-regulation/awareness perspective', and Gao's (2010) 'negotiating access' perspective of agency we may summarize these as sociocultural interpretations of agency that involve a learner's will and capacity to make decisions, and therefore the essence of agency is learner choice. By exercising this choice, learners can show a degree of autonomy in their learning as they take responsibility for their studies, which, according to Cotterall (2000) is the foundation of learner autonomy; thereby, learners are often motivated to exercise their choice because of learning goals. Tudor (1996) examines the interplay of context within this choice by questioning the role of contextual constraints within these learning goals and speculating on whether learners' goals are self-motivated, or whether they are a by-product of the constraints within the context. In the discussion section below a more comprehensive understanding of the literature's description of agency in EFL emerges.

Based upon my findings from the literature, I understand 'context' to denote the realities and resources of a certain setting that operate in a social hierarchy, and 'agency' to denote an opportunity for students to achieve learning goals within this social setting. Accordingly, this understanding of the two concepts is my theoretical perspective for this research; with it, my aim is to understand the context/agency interplay, from the perceptions of an English teacher, within the sociocultural dynamics of a South Korean high school setting that my students are exposed to and the learning opportunities they are presented with in this pre-higher education context.

### Methodology

My methodology was based on the principles of grounded theory, which through empirical research enabled the conceptualization of a core category that explained what is happening in the setting I was investigating. The core category was arrived at through a process of constantly comparing every component (emerging codes and categories) of the data to find similarities and differences. Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory, but they disagreed on how the theory should be applied after its initial conceptualization. The Straussian paradigm promotes a systematic three-stage coding process (open, axial, and selective) using deduction and validation. In contrast, the Glaserian paradigm is a two-stage coding process (substantive and theoretical) using induction and verification (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

I used an amalgamation of both paradigms to become familiar with the intricacies of the methodology. This involved the three-stage coding Straussian approach, but the analysis within these stages was inductive as opposed to deductive. By combining both paradigms, I aimed to limit my experiences and knowledge from shaping the emerging theory. However, my *a priori* theoretical perspective of context and agency resulted in an interpretive analysis approach as I positioned myself reflectively in the analysis; consequently, this method leaned



towards a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). The intricacies of the social context were another factor relating to the adaptation of the amalgamated methodology as the conditions in the South Korean context being researched differed to the conditions in which Glaser and Strauss first developed grounded theory as a research method (Charmaz, 2014).

Initially, it was my intention to interview high school students. Attempts were made to gain access to learners, but busy schedules in preparing for the KSAT meant that students had no time to participate. Access to higher education freshmen would have been feasible; however, I had decided not to recruit as I felt their experiences of tertiary education could potentially compromise the full extent of their high school experiences. My engagement with the literature (Ewald, 2003; Exley, 2005; Ohata, 2005; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) suggested that teachers are in a position to provide an account of the behaviors and attitudes their students present in the classroom (this is discussed in more detail below). It was this insight that resulted in a teacher-participant being recruited.

My data sets emerged from two interview sessions with one South Korean all-girls high school teacher by using a semi-structured approach (see appendix A and B for details about the specific question schemes). The first data set was the initial interview, and the second was a follow-up interview to seek clarification and conduct further in-depth probing. Both of the interviews were recorded. The first lasted 66 minutes and comprised 689 lines of data, and the second lasted 61 minutes and comprised 501 lines of data. The first interview was conducted in person, and the second was conducted via speakerphone. To prepare the data sets for analysis both were transcribed. In this process, attention was given to the content of what was spoken rather than to the details of delivery because a grounded theory approach is more concerned with ‘what is happening?’ (Glaser, 1998) in the data. In focusing on the content, both interviews were transcribed verbatim with each turn occurring sequentially. By doing this the transcription conventions were simplistic as they involved including pauses and overlapping symbols, but symbols to represent pronunciation, intonation, and non-verbal utterances were not used. This was a response to the way I intended to use the data sets in line with my methodology; in other words, it was my intention to reflectively interpret the contents (Roberts, 2016). When completed, the transcripts were given to the teacher to read and to confirm that they were an accurate representation of what was said, which gave validity to the transcription process. This proved to be effective in the second interview as the transcript from the initial interview was given to the teacher to use to reflect upon the sections from the first interview that were being further explored.

The open coding process was empirically derived from the data, which limited theoretical constructs being imposed on the data that could potentially compromise the grounded process at this early stage. Even though a constructivist framework was being used, which promoted a reflective stance, awareness of my own preconceptions that could also affect the research was an integral part of the reflective process (Charmaz, 2006). Bazeley (2007) describes the empirical process as the data being able to ‘speak’ for itself. As the process ensued, operational definitions of the contained feature(s) in each code were clarified. This was done to reduce ambiguity and provide consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1984). These descriptions were logged into a codebook along with two examples of each code. As this process developed the codes were grouped into sets. The writing of memos was useful in creating these sets as they enabled me to reflect on emerging patterns in the codebook and to interpret the analytical process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that was under development.

Using the CAQDAS package, NVivo, facilitated simplicity in analysis as it made the data more accessible and transparent. Being able to see the categories established during the open coding process in this way enabled me to begin the axial coding stage of analysis. The manner in which the data was able to ‘speak’ for itself enabled me to see what was happening in the data. In other words, the constant comparisons of the categories first enabled the seeing of occurrences in the open coding process, and then through encoding, links could be seen between emerging and already established patterns, which was the beginning of the axial coding process. Therefore, during the axial coding stage, connections were being established between the ranges of categories identified in the open coding process as the codes were being merged together (Kendall, 1999). This led to the creation of new broader categories; the descriptions of which captured the shared features of the codes

contained in each category. During this stage, memos also enabled reflection on how the categories related to each other and assisted with the interpretation of the analytical process as a whole.

The paramount criterion that merge together to make a category acceptable for analysis are articulated by Richards (2003) as the conceptual coherence, analytical usefulness, practical applicability, and empirical relevancy of each individual category. By going through the above processes in my methodology, I believe that my categories were inclusive of these criteria. The ranges of axial coded categories were grouped together where shared commonalities were identified. This led to the development of new codes to label categories as belonging to a particular broader set, which led to the emergence of further insights that were approaching a core category.

### Results

The results presented are based on the teacher's accounts of how the students behave in the classroom. Students' language anxiety (Ohata, 2005) and learner characteristics (Exley, 2005) have been obtained indirectly from teachers' accounts in past research, which inspired the use of the current methodology due to difficulty in accessing South Korean high school students to conduct interviews with, as outlined above. Depicted in Table 1 is a basic representation of how an excerpt of data developed through the three-stage coding process.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Table 1

#### *Representation of Data Excerpt Development*

| Coded Excerpt  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>(I) ... Do you think that erm .. your students .. do they have the ability to be independent .. what I mean by this is do they have the like knowledge and the skills to be independent learners?</p> <p>(R) Skills? .. err I think .. they .. just don't have experience to be independent learners .. but I think they have ability to be independent learners if they experience more skills or knowledge about independent study.</p> |  |  |
| Open Coding  | Axial Coding   | Selective Coding   |
| Student Agency   | Student Potential to Act   | Potential Shaped   |
| Memo: The above infers that students have the capacity to become independent learners, but there is something that is preventing them from accessing this experience and thus fully developing their agency.   | Memo: Several categories have emerged in the open coding process that denote students as agents and having the potential to act. This potential often appears to be constrained by other prevailing factors. | Memo: The agents (the teacher and students) exercise their potential in quite a passive way as they are shaped by the prevailing constraints in the environment. |

What is captured in the above example is how each stage helped me to reach the core category. It can be seen above that in the open coding stage the memo had a descriptive function. In the axial coding stage, the memo was used to reflect on emerging connections and patterns. Finally, an interpretation of what is happening in the data with regards to my research area emerged in the selective coding stage. It must be noted that parts of the above data excerpt were also labeled with other codes in the open coding process and that the axial code label, 'student potential to act' and the selective code label, 'potential shaped' included a wide range of other codes and categories. Both labels have been included in the above example to show how they related to the initial

open coding of ‘student agency’ and to give a simple example of how the methodology developed through the three stages.

When it emerged from the data that the teacher and students were being shaped in their potential to act by the prevailing constraints within the environment, I then coded both data sets with the codes of ‘potential shaped’ and ‘potential to shape.’ The former captured references to the potential to act that were shaped by the prevailing constraints in the high school environment whereas the latter captured references to the potential to act that aimed to challenge or change the prevailing contextual constraints. Seventy-seven references were coded as ‘potential shaped’ that comprised 18.66% of the first interview and 35.57% coverage in the second interview. In contrast, ‘potential to shape’ included twelve references with 2.09% and 2.04% of the first and second interview respectively. What follows (Table 2) are sample excerpts from each code to present how the core category was arrived at through data analysis.

Table 2

*A Depiction of ‘Potential to Shape’ Excerpts*

---

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 1. | I think school is trying to change the environment but the change is very slow little by little .. so it seems that it doesn’t change ...        |
| 2. | They [students] have the willingness ..  |
| 3. | I think after they graduate high school they can improve their skills more than based on what they learned in the old days when they were young. |
| 4. | (I) So you have .. you have a lot of flexibility in your .. you can do what you want effectively in the class?<br>(R) Yeah.                      |
| 5. | (I) Do you feel pressured by your government policies?<br>(R) No.  |

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Due to space limitations, as I describe the emerging insights, I will discuss data excerpts that fit my core category. As mentioned above, I did not have access to students’ voices, however, within the teacher/student dynamic, in past research, the teacher’s agency has been shown to be quite influential upon students (Ewald, 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Nevertheless, within the scope of my research, based on one teacher’s perspective, there is limited data to state that the results of the analysis are generalizable for students as well. Therefore, the results presented and discussed are based solely on the perceptions of the interviewee.

In the five excerpts presented in Table 2, we see examples of how the potential to be active agents is described in the data. This means that the agents have the potential to use their agency to change or challenge the prevailing environmental constraints. In Excerpt 1, the school seems to struggle with this potential. Excerpt 2 increases our understanding of the students’ will to exercise this potential, yet from Excerpt 3 the teacher seems to believe that students will not fully exercise their potential until they graduate from high school. From the final two excerpts it seems that the teacher believes that teachers also have the ability to exercise this potential, which suggests that the teacher feels the means to control the students. What is presented in Excerpts 4 and 5 above was the full extent of the insights into this belief from the teacher. Nevertheless, insights that seem to contradict this broad potential to shape the context emerge when we explore the excerpts presented in Table 3.

Evidenced in the extracts in Table 3 are some of the prevailing constraints within the environment that limit the teacher from exercising the potential to act. It seems that the teacher feels that the students need a more communicative focus to succeed in the future (Excerpt 6). This excerpt also provides us with an interesting insight of the teacher expressing a somewhat neoliberal understanding of language education. Additionally, the teacher places value on a student-centered approach to learning (Excerpt 7) which makes one a better teacher (Excerpt 8). Nevertheless, what seems to be dominating the approach to learning, in the teacher’s perception of the high school context, is a focus on preparing for and passing the KSAT exam (Excerpts 6, 9, and 10), and because of

this the students do not get speaking opportunities (Excerpts 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13). However, it should be noted that other researchers (Li, 1998; Liu, Ahn, Baek, & Han, 2004) observe that opportunities to practice speaking in the target language are not entirely excluded as South Korean high school students study English.

Table 3

*A Depiction of 'Potential Shaped' Excerpts*


---

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 6.  | Students are preparing for <i>Suneung</i> exam .. but they also have the need to communicate in English in the society .. nowadays the society needs global talent, global ability .. I mean .. so they need mass medias, internet, magazines, newspapers .. say English are the most important skills .. English is the most important skills succeeding in the society .. to get great career in the society .. so I think students their first aim is to get good points in <i>Suneung</i> exam .. I think they have the need to communicate in English well in the future .. |
| 7.  | Nowadays ... in real class I think authority role is bigger than supporter's role .. but supporter's role is ... in ... more important I think in the class ..   |
| 8.  | I show .. show myself a lot in class as a authority figure .. but I think I'm ... I want to be a .. I'm better for the supportive roles .. I think I .. I'm .. I'm .. I can do better when I'm in a supportive role than .. rather than authority ..   |
| 9.  | .. they [students] are not given many chances or a good environment for speaking English and as I said before their first goal is <i>Suneung</i> exam ..   |
| 10. | .. preparing for the <i>Suneung</i> exam is the first goal in the class in high school .. so we just read the English text and then explain grammar in Korean, so I don't need to speak English in .. I don't need to speak English more of the time in class I just use English when I give short directions or when I read text in English ..  |
| 11. | <i>Suneung</i> exam needs the ability to solve a problem in a short time .. and for the <i>Suneung</i> exam we don't need to practice speaking or communicating each other .. so I think a teacher-centered class is more effective for the <i>Suneung</i> .. explaining and solving a problem and finding the fault and to make students get the right answers in a short time .. so they don't need communicative in <i>Suneung</i> ..   |
| 12. | They have to get good points in <i>Suneung</i> to enter the university they want .. so as I said <i>Suneung</i> is different from speaking skills. The goal of <i>Suneung</i> is not speaking test ..  |
| 13. | I think high school has less pressure about using English in class because there is a big goal of <i>Suneung</i>   |
| 14. | (I) .. does it [teacher-centered approach] match the students' needs?<br>(R) mm some of the ... some of the students .. don't like it, but most of them .. are ...<br>most students follow the class well .. it's necessary for their future exam ..   |
| 15. | I think some students think a teacher based class is more effective especially for <i>Suneung</i> ..   |

---

The teacher describes the high school context as not “a good environment for speaking English” (Excerpt 9), yet, despite this realization, they seem to be influenced in the potential to act by relying on a teacher-centered approach to learning, as it’s “more effective for the *Suneung*” (Excerpt 11). Additionally, according to the teacher’s account, the students seem to share a similar perspective, as some of them appear to resist the teacher-centered approach (Excerpt 14), yet they seem to exercise their agency in using the approach to help them achieve their goal of entering university (Excerpt 15). When I asked why some students show resistance to the teacher-centered approach, the teacher stated the following (Excerpt 16):

Excerpt 16:

- (R) .. they look bored a lot ... even they ... some of them .. sleep during the class ..  
 (I) .. right, right, right .. so they're not motivated with the approach?  
 (R) .. yeah ... yeah ... yeah .. yeah ... so I can notice it easily ..

There is an implication in this extract that teacher-centered methods are inadequate in high school as it demotivates the students. Moreover, we may infer that the lack of motivation suggested in the above excerpt may be limiting their potential to act and change the prevailing constraints within the environment. It is important to note that their lack of motivation may not be solely based on the teaching approach; it could be due to other factors as well. However, irrespective of the cause for this, the clear indication is they have limited acting potential. As a result, what emerges from the data is an understanding of how both agents' (the teacher and the students) potential to act is shaped by the prevailing constraints in the high school environment. The main constraint that is presented in the data is a focus on passing the KSAT exam. Its domination was also quantified in the data through an Nvivo word frequency search (only words with a minimum length of 3 letters were included in the results). The word *Suneung* appeared 58 times, was the 15<sup>th</sup> most frequent word used, and comprised 0.55% of the total discourse coverage in both data sets combined.

The core-category resulting from the data analysis can be summarized as follows. The testing of receptive skills on the KSAT influences the acting potential of the teacher to use the teacher-centered approach, even though it is not favored as a methodology. Nevertheless, the teacher considers the student-centered approach as being impractical for the KSAT as "it takes more time to go to the goal."<sup>3</sup> As a result, the teacher's action potential to be an active agent and challenge the prevailing constraints is clearly limited as it is being shaped by the focus on the KSAT. Similarly, in the case of the students' potential to act, according to the teacher's account, some show resistance to the teacher-centered approach. Be that as it may, they seem to accept it as a methodology that will help them to succeed in the KSAT, and in this case their potential to act is being shaped by the prevailing constraints. Thus, both parties' potential to be active agents is limited. Instead, they are exercising their agency in a relatively passive way as they are shaped by other 'upper systems' (e.g., cultural, political, and administrative). In other words, the constraints are telling them to act in a certain way. The term 'passive agency' is the core-category that has emerged from the analysis to theorize the above findings. Further discussion about the intricacies of this theory is provided below by drawing on how the literature discusses traits that may be applicable to South Korean tertiary level students' exercise of agency.

### Discussion

To reflect upon the first question, "What contextual factors influence the styles of teaching used by a South Korean high school English teacher?", I return to Kennedy's (1988) description of a context in EFL as six intertwined systems operating in a hierarchy that was presented in the literature review section:

cultural → political → administrative → educational → institutional → classroom

Within this system, culture is depicted as the dominant hierarchy, and it was evidenced in shaping the theory of 'passive agency' in the analysis. The teacher uses the teacher-centered approach because "it's familiar"<sup>3</sup> and "kind of the traditional way"<sup>3</sup> (see Gray, 1998 for further discussion). This supports the perception of the South Korean teacher as a figure of authority, which was also outlined in the literature review section. Additionally, the data revealed how the TESEP setting also influences the teacher-centered style of learning. For instance, classes located within it tend to be large (Holliday, 1994b), and the teacher also commented that, "there's a big gap in the students' levels"<sup>3</sup>, which seems to indicate that social inequality persists within the setting (Byun & Kim, 2010). Accordingly, the teacher feels that a teacher-centered approach is the most effective approach to deal with these conditions as seen by Excerpt 17:

Excerpt 17:

.. I think teacher-centered class is more effective in large class .. it's one of the reasons why I think teacher's based class is more effective .. a lot of students in one classroom ..

What also emerged from the analysis was an insight into political influences behind the way the exam is formatted. It is multiple choice, which solely focuses on testing receptive skills as achieving objectivity is an important consideration in the sense that testing speaking and writing would have a more subjective nature as they would be “difficult to evaluate.”<sup>3</sup> However, if students were tested in this way, they could potentially struggle, as “speaking and writing is their weakest skills.”<sup>3</sup> There may be further reasons for this: the students may dislike writing; they may be inattentive in the class; the teacher may be unqualified to teach writing skills; etc. Nevertheless, these possibilities would require additional research to verify. Additionally, it seems that the objective standardization was implemented to eradicate corruption problems that had previously existed in the admission system (Lee, 2009). Nevertheless, as Lee and Kim (2013) indicate, testing students objectively through transparent measures means the focus in high school is on developing multiple choice test taking proficiency rather than autonomous approaches to learning. Despite using and focusing on the former, the teacher seems to place greater value on the latter and feels that “.. the necessity of expressing themselves is .. becomes more important nowadays.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the data analysis the teacher demonstrates awareness that promoting learner autonomy is more beneficial for students' futures, which seems to be related to the neoliberal understanding of education (Carter, 2010; Moltó Egea, 2014). Piller and Cho (2013) identify this understanding as being an “illusion of meritocracy” (p. 39) in South Korea. Park (2011) also supports this view of ‘the promise of English’ (i.e., the guarantee of a good career) as a fallacy, as English skills are not evaluated in their social context in the South Korean job market; instead, ‘the promise’ results in social distress and stifles the development of critical thinking skills (Piller & Cho, 2013), which may have the potential to limit students' future agency.

The teacher's potential to choose a student-centered style of learning and expose students to it is being hampered because all of the focus of high school English education needs to be channeled into enabling students to achieve success on the KSAT exam, and because of this the teacher seems to have little experience in teaching with a communicative methodology as captured by the following excerpt:

Excerpt 18:

.. first students are preparing for the big exam *Suneung*, and secondly I think teacher, me, I, is not .. I'm not prepared for using English in the everyday lives ... it's very difficulty to plan the class for the communicatively environment ..

The KSAT has been subject to some criticism (Lee & Larson, 2000; Seth, 2002; Sorensen, 1994). One of the problems outlined with the tests is that “language teaching is simply another subject on the curriculum, and must therefore work within the material and logistical possibilities available in the educational system as a whole” (Tudor, 1996, p. 131). The above may be viewed as a constraint as it limits the teaching methodology that can be adopted. However, Tudor (1996) suggests it forms part of the students' cultural identity within their home culture, and consequently students favor a teacher-centered methodological approach in their high schooling, as it is conducive to their purposes of passing the entrance examinations. However, in the analysis, the teacher has expressed some experience of students showing a degree of resistance to this approach. This resistance may be an indication of students exercising their agency within their social context as they feel the approach is not a part of their cultural identity. Benson, Chik, and Lim (2003) offer further insight into this by extending our sociocultural understanding of agency in EFL by describing it as learners exercising choice within their “situated experiences” (p. 58) of the social interactions of their communities. Accordingly, this aids our understanding of their exercise of agency as being “socially oriented” (Benson et al., 2003, p. 59). Therefore, we need to consider what comprises this ‘socially oriented’ agency.

The data has shown that the students have not been able to make many choices in the ‘situated experiences’ of their high school. Therefore, we may infer that they have no training to make choices that they may face in their future learning. In other words, their past contexts can affect their future experiences. Accordingly, by considering the historicity of the individual students we may deduce that it also matters what their previous experiences have been, and this may constrain their agency as well. For that reason, by focusing on the KSAT route this agency constraint remains with them as they transition into higher education. Thus, it does not seem to be the fact that it is their exposure to the grammar translation approach as preparation for the KSAT that has sole responsibility for their ‘passive agency’ as this might still be present even if their English acquisition had more of a communicative focus. Rather, the greater responsibility lies with the wider educational system (i.e., the macro context) as a whole. Moreover, within this macro context the neoliberal concept of education shapes the students’ experiences. Kim and Lee (2010) provide an interesting insight into this by stating that in the past South Korean parents’ spending on private tutoring has equaled the government’s spending on primary and secondary education. On account of this market guided educational pursuit, we may deduce that students (encouraged by their parents) are making choices in their high schools to better themselves for the KSAT exam. With this in mind, we need to consider whether South Korean students exercise choice in other aspects of their educational pursuits. To explore this, we return to the literature to identify factors that may be applicable to South Korean higher education students’ exercise of agency.

As mentioned above, the teacher claims to have experienced some students showing resistance to the teacher-centered approach. To understand additional causes for why they may resist, I compared my findings to the literature’s understanding of the concept of ‘agency’ concerning students located in East Asia. To begin this comparison, a further explanation of the core-concept of ‘passive agency’ follows.

‘Passive agency’ is predetermined acting in the sense that it is determined by contextual shaping. In the South Korean high school context, the classroom agents (the teacher and students) have the potential to act; moreover, they have the potential to forge a new path, but it may involve some risk taking. Consequently, students are given pre-determined action possibilities, which are set in advance by the operating past constraints within ‘upper systems’ of the environment and not by the present classroom agents. If they act based on these pre-determined action possibilities, they are acting passively as they are not changing anything. South Korean high school students act by focusing on one path, which is to pass the KSAT. Whether or not this interferes with the future trajectory of their English education needs further consideration. If high school students decide to continue their education at the tertiary level, with the rapid growth of English-medium classes being offered in their majors, they are exposed to a more communicative focused classroom, which exposes them to tasks that they may not have been exposed to in their high schools (Buyn et al., 2011). Based on my experiences as a higher education EAP instructor, it seems that a focus on more productive skills does not encourage students to forge new paths and become active agents as their assessment is based on pre-determined criteria that they strive towards. Therefore, it would appear that students learn passively in both the higher education and high school contexts. To understand if this innately reflects the students’ agency I will present my further understanding of this concept based on my engagement with the literature.

In many past studies, a stereotypical view of East Asian learners has emerged labeling them as being reticent and passive, thus one might argue that they have been accepting of the ways in which they have been taught and tested as preparation for higher education. Nevertheless, Cheng (2000) argues that this label is a “groundless myth” (p. 438), as we need to look at the individuals within the culture rather than the culture itself (see also Guest, 2002; Horowitz, McLendon, Bresslau, Yu, & Dryden, 1997; Littlewood, 1999). Moreover, with this passive label, many generalize that Asian learners absorb knowledge from the teacher (Yook, 2013). However, Liu and Littlewood (1997) argue that they engage in an active, self-regulatory role in their pursuit of knowledge. They base this on their analysis of the two Chinese characters for knowledge, rooted within Confucian teaching, which denote ‘learn’ and ‘ask’. Thus, due to South Korea having its educational heritage emanating from Chinese Confucianism, it could be argued that active agency, in the guise of acquiring knowledge, is a central principle of this heritage.



Cheng (2000) further states that the passive and reticent label of East Asian students is “situation-specific” (p. 435) as it could be caused by a lack of language proficiency, or exposure to a certain teaching methodology. Moreover, Littlewood (2000) observes that South Korean students (homologous to other students located in East Asia) have no “inherent dispositions” (p. 33) to nurture a passive role as societies conform to passivity rather than the individuals. The author further adds that being a member of one culture does not mean an automatic acceptance of its values, “it may simply mean bowing to them as unavoidable facts of life” (Littlewood, 1999, p. 80). From my observations as an EAP instructor, I am inclined to agree with Liu and Littlewood (1997) that under the current university entrance examination system, due to a lack of language proficiency, South Korean students have a “sense of unease [and a] self-perception of their own competence” (p. 376) with regards to their English skills after entering university. One of the causes of this was further highlighted in Excerpt 19:

Excerpt 19:

- (R) .. some students are afraid of taking a more communicative *Suneung* ..
- (I) The students are afraid?
- (R) Mmmmm ..
- (I) Why do you think they are afraid?
- (R) They are not much trained in speaking or speaking English in their life and their classroom ..

It seems to me that this sense of unease is caused by the prevailing contextual constraints that influence the students to have a rigid focus on their receptive skills as preparation for the KSAT. With this understanding, if context and agency are viewed from a sociocultural perspective, it is questionable whether the notion of a potential to change or challenge the prevailing constraints exists in the repertoire of the South Korean English language high school learner. Instead, they are encouraged to show responsibility for their learning through a dependency upon their social context (see Van Lier, 2008 for further discussion). Nevertheless, the literature findings above suggest that the students would be capable agents if they could freely exercise their potential to shape their social context. Accordingly, we need to consider what the implications will be for students if current practices continue unabated. Based on the outcomes of this research and my experiences as an EAP higher education instructor, it seems to me that high school students who enter higher education do not experience a significant shift in teaching methodology, despite a shift in skill focus, as they still follow pre-determined English-focused paths. As students who enter higher education continue to learn in this way, it may hamper their creative potential to becoming autonomous in their studies, which seems to be a greater focus of academic pursuits in East Asian universities (Chang, 2006; Park, 1997). Therefore, South Korean universities that offer more English language acquisition classes and English medium classes to compete for world ranking status should address this issue.

The data analysis has revealed that the South Korean English language high school teacher involved in this research has been exposed to student-centered learning methodology when training to become a teacher, yet this learning style is ineffective in preparing students for the KSAT. Moreover, it seems that a change of skill focus in high school English language classes is some time away as plans to implement the National English Ability Test (NEAT), which proposed a focus on testing the four skills of English, have been permanently shelved (National English Ability Test, n.d.). In consequence, it would appear that the appropriateness of testing receptive skills through the KSAT will continue to be questioned for some time, and students may have no choice but to accept them as “unavoidable facts of life” (Littlewood, 1999, p. 80). Expanding the skill-set focus for the KSAT may prepare high school students for the challenges of productive skills in higher education. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily give them more choices to be active agents because their assessment would still be based on pre-determined criteria that they strive towards.



### Conclusion

This research has provided an understanding of how the concepts of agency and context are interdependent as they shape and can be shaped by each other. Due to a focus on the KSAT, the classroom agents are unable to manipulate contextual conditions, or pursue self-assertion, which has a negative impact on their potential to act as it is being restricted through sociocultural conditions that are collectively reinforcing one trajectory that everyone follows.

The emergence of the core category of 'passive agency' implied that, social and cultural factors shape the conditions of the teaching environment and in turn influence the teacher's and the students' agency. From a sociocultural perspective, in the interplay between context and agency, the fact that the students' agency is constrained denotes imbalance, and thus the students become passive, and the passive aspect of agency is being shaped by the context. The constraints are external in the social context and internal in their experiences. Within this dynamic, the important question that needs to be addressed is whether students can break free from their experiences to become more active agents provided the context allows for it to happen. The answer to this question remains to be seen.

As previously mentioned, the outcomes of this research are based on the perceptions of one high school teacher, and the data was coded by only one researcher, which could potentially raise questions about the validity of the findings. To strengthen validity, future research could be conducted with an increased sample size (i.e., more high school teachers and the inclusion of data from higher education students), which would assist with the triangulation of the findings from this current research and could therefore give a stronger foundation to my theory. Data coding could also be verified by some measurement of inter-rater reliability. Nevertheless, the validity of the outcomes of this study, based on data from one teacher, needs to be considered. Within the teacher/student dynamic the teacher's agency is likely to be quite influential upon the students. For example, Skinner and Belmont (1993) discovered that teachers can influence student motivation, and Ewald (2003) observed teachers influencing students' moral behaviors. Therefore, if teachers' agency influences students, the teachers are likely to have an awareness of the outcomes of their influence. Thus, they are going to be in a position to provide an account of the behaviors and attitudes those students present in the classroom. It could also be argued that the teacher I interviewed shared commonalities and similar experiences to other high school teachers and therefore could be considered a representative (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) of other teachers teaching English in South Korean high schools.

I hope that the understanding gained from this exploratory research will also benefit other East Asian contexts, such as China, Japan, and Taiwan, where there is a dichotomy between the receptive English skills which students focus upon as preparation for their country's university entrance examinations to the detriment of a focus upon productive English skills. In conducting this research, I believe that the findings have implications for these other contexts where the university entrance examinations dominate high school pedagogy (The Transition from Secondary Education to Higher Education, 2015). In China, Japan, and Taiwan the university entrance examinations have acted as a constraint against the implementation of a communicative focus into their curriculums, which is washback to the teaching approach that is being used as preparation for the examinations (see Hiramatsu, 2005; Luxia, 2005; O'Donnell, 2005; Sakui, 2004; Shea, 2009 for further discussion). It may well be the case that 'passive agency' theory also plays a part in this washback.

This research indicates that to create more active agents, it is neither a case of teaching all four skills together, nor of focusing on more communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches. Instead, it is a matter of allowing for individual trajectories. With pre-determined criteria that students strive towards, one is not going to get individual trajectories. Without these trajectories, 'passive agency' as determined in this study, will likely prevail.

## Endnotes

1. The parenthesized letter (I) denotes interviewer and the letter (R) denotes responding participant.
2. In the data extracts, 3 period markers (...) refers to a section extracted from a turn and 2 period markers (..) refers to a pause of roughly 2 seconds.
3. These are verbatim data extracts. As they are quoted in their original form, some include grammatical errors.

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## Appendix A – The Question Structure for the First Interview

1. Based on your experiences, what teacher centered learning and what student centered learning is happening in (high school /institutes)?
- In your classes would you describe your students as teacher or learner centered? (1)
2. Can you talk a little bit about what experiences of teacher centered learning you've had?
- TEACHER CENTERED
- has your main focus been prepping for the university entrance exam? (1.A)  
 — do you think this prepares students for their future English language needs? (1)
- have you been using the grammar translation approach? (1.B)  
 — was this the methodological focus of your teacher education? (1)  
 — how does this approach suit your teaching style? (2)  
 — how does this approach match the students' needs? (3)
- is teacher centered learning culture influenced? (1.C)  
 — what is the educational philosophy of most Koreans? (1)  
 — do Confucian values mean a teacher centered approach is to be used? (2)  
 — is this approach what parents expect to be the norm in high school? (3)
3. Can you talk a little bit about what experiences of student centered learning you've had?
- STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING
- in what ways do classes have a communicative focus? (1.A)  
 — what is your experience of teaching English in English? (1)  
 — do teachers have the ability to facilitate the approach? (2)  
 — are you provided with enough training to provide this approach? (3)  
 — do you feel pressured by governmental policies? (4)
- in what ways does this approach match your students needs? (1.B)  
 — does this approach prepare them to be university students? (1)  
 — does this approach make them better English speakers? (2)  
 — is this the ultimate goal of the parents? (3)  
 — are students motivated by this factor? (4)  
 — is this the main focus of where they study (5)
4. Based on your experiences of the teacher and learner centered learning styles that we've previously discussed do your students show an independent attitude within each learning style?
- do they have opportunities to enquire into their learning in your classroom? (1)  
 — do they have the ability - i.e. the knowledge & skills to be independent? (2)  
 — do they have the willingness - i.e. the confidence & motivation to be independent? (3)  
 — does the role of the teacher (authority vs facilitator) help them to be independent? (4)  
 — do teachers have the ability to carry out a student centered approach? (5)
5. What is your experience of students using English in / outside the class?
- ENGLISH
- is it used for teacher instruction? (1)  
 — is it used for productive output? (2)  
 — is it made through an autonomous choice? (3)  
 — are they forced to use it? (4)
6. What is your experience of students using Korean in / outside the class?
- KOREAN
- is it used for teacher instruction? (1)  
 — is it used by students to articulate themselves? (2)  
 — is it used to question / explain difficult concepts by either the teacher or students? (3)  
 — is it used for negotiating form by students doing pair / group work tasks? (4)  
 — is it used for negotiating meaning by students doing pair / group work tasks? (5)

**KEY:** P = prompted S = spontaneous



## Appendix B – The Question Structure for the Second Interview

1. In the first interview you stated that in high school it is more difficult to plan for the communicative environment and it takes more time to reach your goal with a student centered approach. Can you explain your experience in relation to this statement?
  - Is the approach difficult to incorporate based on your students' abilities? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Does a *Suneung* focus prevent the implementation of this approach from being effective? [ P ] [ S ]
2. You also stated that confidence and free expression are more important in today's society rather than following instructions from other people. Can you explain why you feel this way and which of these do you mostly experience with your students?
  - Do Korean students have the confidence to freely express themselves? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Do Korean students have the ability and knowledge to freely express themselves? [ P ] [ S ]
3. Can you share your experiences for the reasons why your school has not yet adapted to a student centered style of learning even though you mentioned that in Korea there is a preference for this style of learning?
  - Is the *Suneung* focus in the way of this implementation? [ P ] [ S ]
4. Can you share your experiences for the reasons why you believe a teacher centered approach is better for the *Suneung* exam?
  - Will this change in the future with the implementation of the proposed NEAT test? [ P ] [ S ]
5. You stated it's more difficult to have students speak in the class. Can you share your experiences in relation to this statement?
  - Is *chae-myeon* a factor? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Are students grouped based on their levels? [ P ] [ S ]
6. You stated that when comparing the authority / expert role of the teacher against the supporter role of the teacher, you feel that the supportive role is more important. Can you share your experiences for the reasons why you have this belief?
  - Is this based on your own belief, or the outcomes of your training? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Is this based on what you feel your students need? [ P ] [ S ]
7. You also stated that you believe that you can do better when you are in a supportive role. Can you share your experiences for the reasons why you have this belief?
  - Do you think that this approach will motivate students more? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Are students bored with the current approach? [ P ] [ S ]
8. You also stated that you speak English for 5 - 10% of the class. Can you share your experiences for the reasons why this occurs?
  - Does your role involve explaining grammar points most of the time? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Is it hard for students to follow English? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Do you feel more comfortable in speaking Korean? [ P ] [ S ]
9. Can you share your experiences for the reasons why students rely heavily on their Korean when they are doing oral pair-work tasks?
  - Is it because they see their teacher using it often? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Do they use it to ask questions about the given task to each other? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Do they use it because speaking in English is their weakest skill? [ P ] [ S ]
10. You stated in the last interview that more and more students have the chances of practicing English when they are young. Based on your experiences why do you think this is so?
  - Were you referring to the skill of speaking English specifically? [ P ] [ S ]
  - Why don't they have these chances when they are in high school? [ P ] [ S ]

**KEY:** P = prompted S = spontaneous

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## Taiwanese College Teachers of English as Cultural Mediators

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### Abstract

In light of the discrepancies between theories, primarily developed in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) contexts, and classroom practice, situated in the Taiwanese English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) context, this study employed curriculum implementation theory as a framework for investigating how local college teachers of English perceived their experiences of adapting communicative method-based teaching in Taiwanese classrooms. A preliminary survey of 71 English teachers who earned their degrees abroad and were familiar with both local and ESL contexts showed they practiced this approach to various degrees, implying adaptation in response to local expectations and needs. A follow-up interview of 20 instructors confirmed that, in addition to students' English proficiency levels, the traditional ways of learning and expectations of teachers' roles in the sociocultural context affected their willingness to engage in communicative activities. The results emphasize the importance of teachers acting as cultural mediators to build teacher-student rapport, lower students' psychological barriers, and construct a socioculturally appropriate environment for communicative teaching.

**Keywords:** communicative approach, cultural mediator, curriculum implementation, college English

### Introduction

Current second language acquisition (SLA) theories and teaching methodologies have been developed in ESL contexts, mainly in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia (Holliday, 1994; Prabhu, 1987). To increase credibility as legitimate English teaching professionals (Golombek & Jordan, 2005), as many as 70% of EFL pre-service teachers enroll in teacher preparation programs in the above English-speaking countries (Kamhi-Stein, 1999) to learn TESOL orthodoxy (Pennycook, 1989).

Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, and Riazi (2002) argue that researchers and teacher educators are increasingly aware that to be considered *good*, pedagogy must be informed by a socioculturally situated perspective. As indicated by Canagarajah (1999), "pedagogies are not received in their own terms, but appropriated to different degrees in terms of the needs and values of the local communities" (pp. 121-122). Therefore, the knowledge base of TESOL education should provide the tools to explore cross-cultural variation in language teaching and learning (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2006) and to enact "locally appropriate response[s]" (Johnson, 2009, p. 115) in teaching practices. To this end, research is needed to explore how local practitioners adapt teaching approaches developed in ESL contexts and enact socioculturally appropriate English language teaching in their home contexts.

Nonetheless, although relevant studies exploring the effectiveness of TESOL theories and methodologies agree that approaches developed in ESL contexts cannot be fully adopted in EFL contexts (Li, 1998; Sato, 2002; Su, 2002), the current literature does not elucidate the extent to which local teachers use communicative language teaching (CLT). Only a few case studies have been conducted to explore obstacles local teachers encounter, and a scant number of studies clarify how they can modify an instructor's role to adapt the approach

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to local contexts. The common challenges include insufficient teacher communicative competence and preparation; large class size and limited class time; testing concerns; student resistance because of low English proficiency, low motivation, and unwillingness to participate; and antithetical classroom practices such as text-boundedness, all-in-English instruction, focus on form rather than meaning, and emphasis on product rather than process (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Kuo, 1995; Li, 1998; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008; Major & Yamashiro, 2004; Miller, 1998; Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Rao, 1996, 2002; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Su, 2002; Sugiyama, 2003; Wang, 2002). Some researchers have suggested ways to modify communicative based teaching, for example, by incorporating some elements of traditional pedagogy such as some explicit grammar teaching and applying grammar rules in context, balancing linguistic competence and communicative competence, and using both textbooks and authentic materials (Rao, 2002; Saengboon, 2002; Su, 2002). Other suggestions include allowing enough opportunity for repetition and accurate reproduction and creating chances for interaction and meaning negotiation. To overcome students' resistance to speaking in class, teachers can build their confidence by avoiding intrusive corrections and providing a supportive atmosphere; and to dispel students' anxieties, teachers can offer clear directions for doing tasks and encourage cooperative learning. That is, by balancing teacher-centered and student-centered approaches, teachers might re-orient students to take a positive look at CLT (Gao, 2006; Miller, 1998; Mitchell & Lee, 2003; Rao, 1996, 2002). However, these suggestions have been largely formulated by researchers based on the results of case studies of instructors who had textbook knowledge of how a theory had been practiced in ESL classrooms without necessarily having experiences studying abroad.

Therefore, to fill this gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to investigate how 71 college EFL teachers who completed their master's or doctoral degrees in an ESL context practiced CLT in Taiwan, what their concerns were, and how they addressed these concerns. The findings represent a relatively large group of teachers' experiences and may be informative to other Asian EFL teachers and TESOL teacher educators.

### **Curriculum Implementation Theory**

This study is grounded in curriculum implementation theory, which includes three perspectives: fidelity, mutual adaptation, and enactment (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). The main intent of a fidelity perspective is "to determine the degree of implementation of an innovation in terms of the extent to which actual use of the innovation corresponds to intended or planned use" (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977, p. 340). In the fidelity perspective, the curriculum innovation is designed by experts outside the classroom. Implementation is evaluated based on the degree to which the teachers carry out the innovation. Therefore, the properties of the innovation need to be clearly identified when researchers develop a checklist or a scale to examine to what extent each characteristic has been implemented. Following this, factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation as planned are also investigated as a reference for future improvement (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Based on the fidelity perspective, in the present study, five major CLT principles drawn from the literature are used as a scale, in response to which the participants are asked to rate the degree to which they have implemented each of the principles. The barriers identified in related studies are listed for the participants to rate as major, potential, or non-existent problems in their situation.

Researchers who hold the perspectives of mutual adaptation and curriculum enactment claim that it is impossible to implement a curriculum identical to the prescribed curriculum because the latter is an abstract document, and actual implementation is a real life re-creation (Marsh & Willis, 2007). From the perspective of mutual adaptation, innovation should not focus on technological change only; organizational change, such as changes in the structure of the institutional setting, the culture of the school, educational technology, and teachers' behaviors, should not be ignored (McLaughlin, 2004). As McLaughlin (2004) has observed, implementation is not just adopting a model, but rather "a process of mutual adaptation in which project goals and methods are modified to suit the needs and interests of participants and in which participants change to meet the requirements of the project" (p. 172). Mutual adaptation researchers are concerned with what has happened in a given context and what kinds of support adopters need for implementation with intensive,

descriptive data about the problems of education being sought (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Therefore, the participants in this study were asked to delineate the adaptation process and how they modified their teaching to address problems they encountered.

Marsh and Willis (2007) view curriculum implementation as analogous to an actual production of the text of a play, in which teachers are like directors and actors. Although the planned curriculum is there for them, they still need to enact it. From the enactment perspective, Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt (1992) characterize curriculum as “the educational experiences jointly created by student and teacher. The externally created curricular materials and programmed instructional strategies...are seen as tools for students and teacher to use as they construct the enacted experience of the classroom” (p. 418). The educational experiences that students and teachers undergo are emphasized in this perspective (Marsh & Willis, 2007). Curriculum enactment researchers attempt to discover the enacted experiences and the effects that outside factors have on curriculum as enacted (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Accordingly, an attempt is made to uncover the effects of each inhibitive or facilitative factor indicated and their underlying reasons.

### Research Questions

Following the themes of the three perspectives, the present study starts from the fidelity perspective by looking at the current implementation of each CLT principle as well as factors that facilitate or inhibit implementation, followed by the perspective of mutual adaptation, from which, ways CLT has been adapted in Taiwanese EFL contexts are explored. Finally, the enactment approach is applied to look closely at how those factors identified influence the implementation and why the decision for the adaption has been made. The analysis sought to answer the following research questions according to the teacher participants' perceptions.

1. How have Taiwanese university teachers of English practiced CLT?
2. What are instructors' concerns when practicing CLT?
3. How do the instructors address these concerns and why?

### Methodology

#### Participants

The targeted participants in the present study were Taiwanese EFL teachers who completed their master's or doctoral degrees in the field of English teaching in teacher preparation programs in ESL contexts such as North America, Great Britain, and Australia. These Taiwanese teachers were selected because they were more likely to have communicative competence to conduct CLT classrooms and to be familiar with TESOL theories, classroom cultures in ESL contexts, and local EFL contexts.

Table 1  
*Participants' Demographic Information*

| <u>Education</u> |           | <u>School</u> |            | <u>Class</u>  |                   |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Master's         | Doctorate | Public        | Private    | English Major | Non-English Major |
| 49 (69%)         | 22 (31%)  | 30 (42.3%)    | 41 (57.7%) | 18 (25.4%)    | 53 (74.6%)        |

To better represent the general situation in Taiwan, a systematic sampling was utilized (Creswell, 2005). Out of 158 postsecondary schools listed by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, every fourth was selected, so 39 schools were chosen. Based on the staff information posted on the school websites, 383 teachers were identified

as meeting the criteria for participation in the study and were sent the survey with a request to send back their course syllabi along with the completed questionnaire. The response rate was 19%, resulting in 71 teachers recruited from 20 different universities. The demographic information of the participants is described in Table 1.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection included two stages. First, a preliminary survey of the overall practice of CLT was conducted (see Appendix A for the questionnaire). In the questionnaire, the participants were requested to provide basic demographic information, rate their practice of five CLT principles from 1 (rarely practice) to 5 (fully practice), and indicate their difficulties. The five principles included communicative objective, communicative role, four-skill integration, authentic material, and communicative-function evaluation, which are commonly mentioned in the literature on CLT (Canale & Swain, 1980; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Littlewood, 1981; Richards, 1986; Savignon, 1997, 2001; Thompson, 1996).

The second stage was to conduct semi-structured follow-up interviews with 20 participants, during which they were asked to narrate their learning of CLT, experiences with CLT practice, current CLT classroom practices, adaptation processes, challenges encountered, and concerns about adaptation (see Appendix B for the interview questions). The syllabi provided blueprints of the participants' classrooms. Some interview questions were generated based on the syllabi to delve into how each instructor processed CLT in their classes. The interviews, which lasted 40 to 90 minutes, were conducted in Mandarin Chinese to elicit more information from the participants. All of the interview data were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. In sum, the data sources include 71 questionnaires, 71 syllabi, and 20 interview transcripts.

### **Analytical Procedure**

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics were employed to tabulate the mean scores and percentages of the quantitative data. The contents of the syllabi were coded based on the five CLT principles. The interview data were coded based on the themes of the three perspectives of classroom implementation theory. The codes included Practice of Principles 1-5 (fidelity), Concerns, Adaptation (mutual adaptation), and Reasons for Adaptation (enactment). Themes that emerged from coding were identified. For trustworthiness, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Language Education at Indiana University, with college teaching experience in Taiwan, served as a second rater. To answer the first research question, Item 10 of the questionnaire, syllabi, and interview data were used. To answer the second research question, Item 11 of the questionnaire and interview data were used. The answer to the third research question was based on interview data.

## **Findings**

### **How Have Taiwanese University Teachers of English Practiced CLT?**

As an indication of the extent to which CLT is implemented in Taiwan, of the 71 respondents to the survey, 56 (79%) claimed to be practicing CLT to some extent, whereas 15 (21%) said they were not. Only two (2.6%) claimed to be implementing it fully. As Table 2 shows, the mean level of implementation among the practicing group was 3.54/5 or approximately 70%.

These results suggest that according to the teachers, although CLT is not practiced to its fullest extent, teachers make efforts to adhere to its principles. The following representative excerpts from the interviews show that instructors were aware that this Western theory could not be adopted unchanged in Taiwanese classrooms but must be adapted in ways that respond to local realities and expectations.

If more than half of the students are really low achievers, you might need to combine Grammar Translation and communicative approach. Sometimes you can't just use it only because the theory is good. (T6 Interview)

Because our culture is different, of course we need to adjust. And it's impossible that one of the American patterns can be used 100% in Taiwan. (T9 Interview)

Table 2

*The Extent of Practicing CLT Principles*

|                                   | Mean | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|------|------------|
| Communicative Objective           | 3.68 | 73%        |
| Communicative Role                | 3.41 | 70%        |
| Four-Skill Integration            | 3.41 | 70%        |
| Authentic Material                | 3.75 | 75%        |
| Communicative-function Evaluation | 3.46 | 70%        |
| Average                           | 3.54 | 70%        |

Note. (N=56)

**What Are Instructors' Concerns When Practicing CLT?**

Item 11 in the questionnaire and the third interview question were used to explore factors that inhibit CLT implementation and their effects, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Inhibitive Factors*

| <u>Questionnaire</u> |                                       |              | <u>Interview</u> |  |             |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--|-------------|
| Ranking              | Inhibitive Factors                    | Coded Scores | Ranking          | Inhibitive Factors                     | Instructors |
| 1.                   | low proficiency                       | 297          | 1.               | low proficiency                        | 14 Ts       |
| 2.                   | large class size                      | 287          | 1.               | large class size                       | 14 Ts       |
| 3.                   | low motivation                        | 271          | 3.               | resistance to class participation      | 12 Ts       |
| 4.                   | limited time for developing materials | 240          | 4.               | low motivation                         | 11 Ts       |
| 5.                   | resistance to class participation     | 231          | 5.               | fixed curriculum/unified exam          | 6 Ts        |
| 6.                   | teachers as knowledge transmitters    | 229          | 6.               | traditional concepts of learning       | 5 Ts        |
| 7.                   | insufficient funding/facilities       | 223          | 7.               | traditional concepts of teachers' role | 3 Ts        |
| 8.                   | fixed curriculum/schedule             | 217          | 7.               | difficult to tell effects              | 3 Ts        |
| 9.                   | heterogeneous class groups            | 209          | 7.               | heterogeneous class groups             | 3 Ts        |
| 10.                  | teachers' in-service training         | 207          | 10.              | limited time for developing materials  | 2 Ts        |

Item 11 asks what difficulties the participants have perceived and encountered. The coding criteria were MP (major problem) coded as 5, PP (potential problem) as 3, and NP (non-existent problem) as 1. These codes were represented as points, which were calculated to produce scores and ranked. The same issue was addressed in the third interview question. The numbers of the instructors who indicated the same inhibitive factors in the

interview were also calculated and ranked in Table 3. Of the top 10 inhibitive factors in the two data sets, eight appeared in both and were therefore considered as major concerns, which include students' low proficiency, large class size, students' low motivation for developing communicative competence, students' resistance to class participation, teachers' limited time for developing materials, the traditional concept of teachers as knowledge transmitters, fixed curriculum/schedule, and heterogeneous class constituencies. In the following section, the teachers' perceptions of the effects of each factor on CLT implementation and classroom practice will be discussed.

In interviews, the instructors explained that in general they realized that some administrative policies, such as unified exams and textbooks, class size, and degree of teacher autonomy, were incompatible with CLT principles but beyond teachers' control. What they were realistically able to do involved mainly their own teaching strategies and student requirements, so their top concerns included students' low proficiency levels, low motivation due to low acceptance of CLT, and reluctance to participate in class. The following section delineates how these local teachers chose to address these concerns and why.

### **How Do the Instructors Address These Concerns and Why?**

#### ***Proficiency level***

Students' English proficiency was the critical basis on which the teachers decided the extent to which CLT should be practiced and how much of their instruction should be in English. As T5 put it, "high level students adapt to the new environment. As for lower level students, I can tell they have felt pain all these four years." While CLT urges use of the target language in class as much as possible, one of the consequences is that students with insufficient English proficiency cannot understand all of their teacher's speech. Another CLT principle is to involve students in interactive activities, but students with limited English may not have the necessary language resources to participate in activities or discussions.

After experiencing frustration with such issues, the instructors realized that this approach does not fit all situations. They needed to proceed cautiously and practice CLT incrementally, modifying their instruction and use of English based on students' proficiency levels, designing different types of activities, and focusing on different aspects of students' language production. A common modification was to adjust the percentage of English used in instruction in accordance with students' proficiencies, as mentioned by T8. The survey revealed that 72% of the participants used English 80% of the time with English majors whereas only 17% used the same percentage of English with non-English majors. When using English, T18 tried to talk slowly and pause between phrases and found that students started to answer questions when they understood. T12 started with simplified English and used L1 if needed. T16 explained instructions for activities in Chinese.

Another modification was to use structured activities with lower level students, whose proficiency levels might not be advanced enough for them to elaborate on their opinions, and open-ended discussion questions or free activities with higher-level students. For example, T16 used activities based on the Total Physical Response method with beginners. When learning prepositions, T16's students followed such commands as "Put the pen on the dictionary," performing the actions and taking turns to give their own commands. On the other hand, T10's students were English majors at a top-ranked public university, so the activities T10 used were much more challenging, as shown in the activities below.

#### **Presentation: Job Interview**

A group of three students conduct a job interview, including two interviewers and one interviewee. The jobs may be that of clerk, secretary, assistant, teacher, manager, engineer, salesperson, and so on. You can include the interview questions on page 74 in the textbook and those from the handout. There will be seven groups with 8-10 minutes for the interview.

**Presentation: Role Play (Impromptu)**

With only 3 minutes for preparation, two students choose one of the situations from the handout and conduct a 3-minute role play. (T10 Syllabus)

Third, these instructors proposed that fluency should have priority for lower level students. Only after a basic level of fluency is acquired should the focus be on accuracy and exposure. Lower level students confront psychological as well as linguistic barriers in language production, so the initial step for teachers should be to convince students that getting meaning across is the most important task when learning a language. Teachers in this study helped students build a foundation by gradually integrating grammar instruction and also adding reading, so students would have something to say and be more willing to talk. T13 used the foundation of a building as a metaphor to emphasize that grammar knowledge should be developed.

In the beginning, in order to increase communication, I encouraged them to talk a lot. I don't emphasize grammar....Afterwards, I find that with solely communicative teaching, if you don't give them basic materials, it's like you don't give bricks and cement when you build a house....They say whatever they want, but they don't improve. They need guidance. When the foundation is correct, at least I know the living room is here and the dining room is there. We can work on decoration of the living room later. This is the difference of my teaching process....The purpose is to encourage students to talk in the beginning, so I won't correct their errors. (T13 Interview)

In contrast to non-English majors and lower level students, T2 found some English majors tried to talk fast to show their fluency and excellent pronunciation, but their English output was full of errors and lacked content, suggesting that accuracy should be required of these higher-level students. To improve their content, T2 provided English majors with a large amount of input and constantly challenged them to learn by assigning higher-level readings or tasks.

***Acceptance of CLT***

Prior to college, the majority of students in Taiwan experience Chinese traditional ways of learning that emphasize rote memorization and knowledge accumulation, so they learn English by studying grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary, and translating sentences. T1 reported that when asked to do open-ended interactive activities, some students felt "they were not learning anything. It was different from the intensive drills and exercises they had done before." T4 characterized their thinking as, "I am this old, and you are still telling me to play games?" T3 confirmed this observation, saying that "they absolutely couldn't accept this."

It is noteworthy, however, that not all comments reported resistance on the part of students. In T1's and T18's classes, these communicative activities created a pleasant atmosphere and motivated students. T4, in addition to observing negative attitudes, also reported, "students who fell asleep woke up" and "would be less afraid to speak English." T7 was glad to see "every student had a smiley face and looked like they were ready to talk" in communicative classrooms, unlike teacher-centered, lecture-based classrooms, in which "students lowered their heads and did their own stuff."

This dramatic contrast between negative and positive student perceptions suggests that instructors should be alert to the need to introduce the purpose of this approach to students before putting it into practice. T2 and T6 emphasized the importance of familiarizing students as to effective ways to learn a language by introducing the new approach at the beginning of the semester, continuing to communicate its purposes, and gradually letting students try interactive activities. Also, to persuade students that doing activities was not just for fun, T19 always kept a specific objective in mind when designing an activity and informed students about its purpose beforehand.



Students reject playing games, because the games don't have goals, themes, or purposes. I learned this from my experience. I play games when there is a purpose. I never use game-playing to kill time. Because of this goal, ...we have a lot more interactive activities. For example, I provided some questions, so they could practice critical thinking, and then I gave them feedback. Instead of just delivering content, ...we had real interaction, and this interaction was purposeful. (T19 Interview)

### ***Resistance to class participation***

These teachers' experiences suggest that Taiwanese students, regardless of their English levels, are inclined to withdraw from class participation due to their predisposition to be shy, their fear of losing face, and their general exposure to traditional ways of learning (Bowers, 2005; Liu, 2001). As T2 pointed out, students in Taiwan choose to keep silent because "in other classrooms or in the society, our (Chinese) culture still proposes the less you talk, the fewer mistakes you will make," which is unlike the generally held idea of American culture, where diverse perspectives are often encouraged. T12's students were also reluctant to talk in front of others for fear of losing face. Some of T14's students hesitated to talk because they had experienced being laughed at for pronouncing English with Taiwanese accents. "They feel that to have Taiwanese accents is a shame. They'd rather die than speak English."

To reduce students' fear of making mistakes, these instructors made great efforts to create a comfort zone by building teacher-student rapport, cultivating a supportive classroom culture, designing collaborative group work, and allowing students to get ready before speaking English in class. According to the instructors, students in Taiwan still hold the idea of teachers as authorities and believe that teachers should be central in classrooms and dominate the talk, which contradicts the tenets of a learner-centered CLT classroom and creates a gap to be bridged. To facilitate students' willingness to participate in discussions and activities, several participants emphasized that teachers should "lower their status" (T7) to be students' friends, stand in students' shoes (T2), and build rapport with them.

This sense of support can also be provided by students' peers. Group work was recommended by several teachers. T10 let students work with others they were familiar with, which helped them overcome their psychological resistance to talking to the whole class. Also, allowing time for students to get ready for presentations decreased their anxiety about losing face in front of others. T20 commented on the cultural issues involved, especially the Chinese emphasis on conformity rather than uniqueness, which can be better overcome in small groups.

We emphasize group work, not individual work, more. Students abroad focus more on individualism. They think every individual is unique. I think in the education system in Taiwan, unique students are not treated fairly. Don't you think so? If you have some unique behaviors, teachers think you are a weirdo. Classmates think you are a weirdo, too. So students think they had better be the same as others. That is safer. This is the special characteristic in our culture. (T20 Interview)

Along with providing a supportive classroom, adequate degrees of regulation, monitoring, and guidance were recommended by several instructors, who believed that a combination of creating a comfort zone and exerting discipline produced better effects for their students. T18 found that when they got used to the relaxed atmosphere in a CLT classroom, some students became too laid back and lazy to participate. T18's adaptation was to regulate participation by taking roll regularly and calling on students to talk. T10 and T12 purposefully called on passive students who were competent but did not talk voluntarily. Several instructors gave bonus credits to trigger students' instrumental motivation.

To recap the results, the experiences of the Taiwanese college teachers in this study reveal that accommodating learners' English proficiency levels should be the primary concern. For lower level students, CLT should be practiced to a lesser extent with more teacher control and a focus on encouraging fluency, providing structured activities, and building a foundation of English knowledge. As students progress along the

proficiency continuum to higher levels, the emphasis on CLT practices, such as student centeredness, attention to accuracy, free activities, and extensive input, can be gradually increased. Throughout the whole process, adequate encouragement, incentives, guidance, monitoring, and regulation are recommended to motivate students as well as to maintain their accountability.

### **Discussion**

The present study provides evidence that it is quite unlikely to adopt CLT in Taiwanese classrooms without modification. The fidelity model of appropriation fails for a number of reasons, including its lack of accommodation for students' with low language proficiency in EFL settings and its neglect of cultural mediation. As a form of resistance to these shortcomings, adaptation helps teachers cope with the social and linguistic realities of their classrooms, leading to an enactment model, which brings into focus the importance of student/teacher relationships and the influence of students' values on instruction. Thus, in addition to modification of their teaching approaches, the ways in which teachers address students' traditional ways of thinking and learning are critical. The following is a brief discussion about how local teachers can act as cultural mediators to co-construct a contextually appropriate English classroom with students.

#### **Stubborn Tradition Is Still Stubborn**

The findings of this study show that a major obstacle to success in a communicative classroom in Taiwan is students' reluctance to speak up and participate in activities. These local educators' observations and perceptions are in accordance with Liu's (2001) study of 20 Asian students' classroom behaviors in a U.S. university. Liu indicated that this group of students' silence in class was partially related to their concepts of politeness and face-saving. The students refrained from expressing opinions that might be different from those of their teachers and from asking questions to avoid wasting class time and making mistakes. Taiwanese students frame their learning, at least at first, within their Asian "culture of learning" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006), often categorized as a collectivistic, high-uncertainty-avoidance, and high-power-distance culture in contrast to American culture, identified as an individualistic, low-uncertainty-avoidance, and low-power-distance culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

If English teachers adopt an ESL pedagogical theory without adaptation and situate their students in this cultural paradox, they not only ignore students' cultures, traditions, and past experiences but also indirectly endorse the cultures found in ESL contexts and promote cultural imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999). As Bowers (2005) argues, the colonial nature of modern Western constructivism, with which CLT shares several similarities, imposes a "Western model of a global monoculture" (p. 78) and judges tradition as "backwardness and thus an impediment to progress" (p. 5). Constructivism's assumption that knowledge cannot be transmitted but must be constructed corresponds to the CLT idea that students learn to speak simply by trying to communicate. This promotion of individual autonomy and self-directed learning, albeit in a social context, supports individualism and justifies the teacher's role as facilitator. However, the findings in this study indicate that students, especially lower level students, still consider teachers as authorities central to their learning and upon whose continuous guidance and monitoring they rely to help build a language foundation. Students' cultural orientations should not be ignored, but taken into account and used as a basis for new knowledge. After all, "stubborn tradition" (Sale, 1995) is still stubborn.

#### **Teachers Can Act as Cultural Mediators**

Instead of being considered conservative and retrogressive, tradition can be used as a source of empowerment. Toward this goal, local teachers with academic experience in ESL contexts act as cultural mediators, who understand what Bowers (2005) describes as "the inter-play of the social context of learning, the students' interest and level of background knowledge, what represents the most appropriate approach to learning, and the cultural patterns that the teachers need to make explicit" (p. 110). Ideally situated to fulfill the mediating role, the

participants in this study demonstrated their awareness of sociocultural differences between the Taiwanese EFL and ESL contexts and constantly compared the two cultures to explain the necessity of adaptation. They are aware that TESOL theories developed in ESL contexts should not be the only legitimate way of learning.

To mediate between different cultures, these teachers determined what differences should be made explicit in the process of primary socialization (Bowers, 2005). At the beginning of the semester, they explained to their students that absorbing knowledge from lectures was not the only way of learning. Students were encouraged to express their opinions and assured that making mistakes was acceptable in English class. They were also informed that the purpose of interactive activities was not just playing but another way to learn. In this way, the teachers expanded students' concepts of learning while honoring their cultural value of learning as a serious process.

By taking students' traditions into account when making pedagogical decisions, cultural mediators determine what should be conserved and what should be changed (Bowers, 2005). While this degree of teacher-control might seem to challenge the idea of a teacher's role as facilitator in a communicative classroom, these teachers understood that, having long viewed their role as that of knowledge recipient rather than creator, students could not abruptly change their orientation. If the teacher's role as authority is discarded all at once, students are unlikely to be able to regulate their learning autonomously. Therefore, these teachers still play authoritative roles to guide and monitor student learning as well as use grades, which are regarded as the primary measurement of academic achievement in Taiwanese classrooms, as incentives to motivate students.

At the same time, face-saving needs to be carefully protected to provide students a comfort zone in which they are willing to express themselves and participate in class. For instance, these teachers suggested such strategies as allowing students to practice in small groups, giving them sufficient time to prepare for presentations, and not asking students to respond unexpectedly, which might make them anxious about losing face and discourage them from taking risks. These measures gradually bring students into the role of knowledge-makers without disturbing their sense of security in a teacher-directed classroom.

### **Authority Can Be Used to Minimize Authority**

While suggesting that CLT practice should begin at the learners' end of the cultural continuum, this study also proposes a deliberate process of implementation that gradually moves toward the other end of the continuum to emphasize learner-centeredness and the learner's role as communicator. This movement does not mean undermining learners' home culture and romanticizing the culture of the target language (Bowers, 2005), but rather, developing learners' ability to adapt to another culture while maintaining their traditional values and ways of thinking (Liu, 2001). Littlewood (2000) compared perceptions and attitudes of a group of Asian and European learners of English and concluded that "the stereotype of Asian students as 'obedient listeners'...does not reflect the role they would like to adopt in class" (p. 33) even though they might behave so. In Littlewood's study, some students expressed appreciation that their instructors called on them and gave them a chance to speak in class. Learners' passivity and reticence to speak might be a result of too much teacher control and the absence of opportunities for interaction (Xie, 2009). If language teachers continue to accept these student behaviors, they are co-constructing students' silence (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009).

To overcome students' reticence, teachers can use their central position to expand students' ideas about appropriate ways of learning, ensure that activities are seen as purposeful, encourage expression of opinions, and assure students it is all right to make mistakes. After all, in other courses students are still experiencing traditional one-way communication in which teachers impart knowledge to receptive students (Su, 2002). Paradoxically, to make English class a space where students can feel free to talk, instructors first need to negotiate their own authority (Chowdhury, 2003) as scaffolding for building teacher-student relationships that support communicative activities. In other words, by using authority to minimize authority, instructors are more likely to help learners go through the process of adaptive cultural transformation, in which, as Liu (2001) described, "one constantly adjusts one's cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors to those of the target culture and gradually develops multiple identities" (p. 221).

### Conclusion

The findings here demonstrate that these local practitioners, except in some extreme situations, have adapted and enacted many of the principles of CLT in ways that respond to local realities. They have accommodated theory and practice in a socioculturally appropriate way that echoes Lin and Luk's (2002) statement that "progressive liberalism and cultural relativism have their essentializing and absolutizing tendencies, and both share a lack of attention to concrete, local, socio-historical contexts where classroom participants are situated" (p. 15). The study suggests that to successfully practice a TESOL approach in a local EFL context, teachers of English have to adapt this approach based on Taiwanese college students' proficiency levels, readiness of acceptance to the approach, and traditional ideas about learning.

This study has several limitations. First, although random sampling was done to recruit the participants in this study, the total number of participants (N=71) was limited compared to the total university EFL instructor population. To better represent the current implementation of CLT in Taiwan, a larger scale study could be done. Second, to get a detailed picture of classroom practices, a more complete collection of course-related documents, such as activity sheets and evaluation sheets, could be compiled, and these could be supplemented with classroom observations. Third, the findings drawn in this study were based upon teachers' points of view. Students' perceptions could be included to compare with those of teachers and add another dimension to extend our understanding of this issue. Policymakers' and school administrators' opinions could also be explored and compared with those of other stakeholders, including teachers and students. Furthermore, the perceptions of teachers who have attended teacher preparation programs in ESL contexts could be compared with those of teachers trained locally. Such findings would help teacher preparation programs in both settings better prepare teachers to teach in their local contexts.

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## Appendix A Questionnaire

### I. Background information

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender: \_\_\_\_male \_\_\_\_female
4. Years of Experience Teaching English After Obtaining Your Highest Degree \_\_\_\_\_
5. Level of Education: Bachelors' degree \_\_\_\_ Master's degree \_\_\_\_ Doctorate \_\_\_\_
6. Which group of students are you teaching? English major \_\_\_\_ English non-major \_\_\_\_  
(If you are teaching both, please select one that your answers will be based on.)
7. What courses are you currently teaching?

### II. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching places a high value actually using oral and written language for authentic communication and purposes as a means for students to learn. This approach has been advocated by Western Foreign Language teaching programs for many years and is now also being advocated by several Asian countries. Please indicate experiences you have had in learning about and/or using aspects of CLT in your English teaching.

8. Did you learn about CLT in your teacher education program in Western countries?  
\_\_\_\_yes  
\_\_\_\_no
9. Have you tried CLT?  
\_\_\_\_Yes, and I am still using it now.  
\_\_\_\_Yes, but I am not using it now.  
\_\_\_\_No, never (Skip to item 11 if you answered "No")
10. On the scale of 1 to 5, where would you place your current implementation of each principle of CLT?  
(fully practice 5 4 3 2 1 rarely practice)  
\_\_\_\_The objective is to develop students' communicative competence. Activities have communicative intent and involve social interaction.  
(Students use English appropriate in relation to a context or a listener. Example activities include games, role play, problem-solving tasks, information gap, and paired or group activities.)  
\_\_\_\_The role of the student is a communicator.  
(Students engage in negotiating meanings and try to make them understood and understand others.)  
\_\_\_\_Four skills are integrated. Both form and meaning are emphasized. Language functions are over forms. Fluency might be over accuracy.  
(Students focus on expressing themselves clearly than focusing on grammar analysis or punctuation.  
However, it is encouraged to teach grammar in context.)  
\_\_\_\_Instructional materials may include thematic development materials, task-based materials, and



authentic, real life materials.

\_\_\_Students are evaluated both fluency and accuracy by being asked to perform a real communicative function.

(i.e., To assess students' writing skill, they are asked to write a letter to a friend.)

11. The following are some difficulties that other EFL teachers had in adopting CLT. Did you come across these difficulties or do you think they might be difficulties for you in adopting CLT in Taiwan? MP = Major Problem, PP = Potential Problem, and NP = Not a Problem

#### Teacher Insufficient Communicative Competence/Teacher Preparation

- |  |       |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 1) Teachers' limited proficiency in spoken English                   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 2) Teachers' limited sociolinguistic/cultural competence             | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 3) Teachers' lack of training in CLT                                 | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 4) Teachers' having few opportunities for in-service training in CLT | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |

#### Time, Resources, Support and Class Size Concerns

- |  |       |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 5) Teachers' having little time for developing materials for CLT classes | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 6) Lack of authentic teaching materials                                  | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 7) Large classes   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 8) Fixed curriculum/schedule   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 9) Insufficient funding, school facilities                               | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 10) Lack of support from colleagues and administrators                   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |

#### Testing and Teaching Philosophy Concerns

- |                                   |       |       |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 11) Grammar-based examinations    | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 12) Lack of assessing instruments | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |

### Student Resistance

- |   |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 13) Students' low English proficiency   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 14) Students' lack of motivation for developing communicative competence  | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 15) Students' resistance to class participation   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 16) Students' resistance because of the concept of Chinese culture about teacher as central and knowledge transmitter | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 17) Students' resistance because of the traditional concept that learning should be serious, not playing games.       | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |

### Classroom Practice Concerns

- |  |       |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 18) The conflict of using textbooks or not                         | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 19) The conflict of using English to teach English                 | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 20) The conflict of emphasizing process or product                 | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 21) The conflict of doing grammar explanation and error correction | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 22) The conflict of focusing on rote memorization and repetition   | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |
| 23) Concerns about heterogeneous grouping and students' needs      | MP___ | PP___ | NP___ |

**Other concerns \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)**

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

1. Could you walk me through the process how you learned CLT, your initial practice, and current practice? When you practiced CLT at the beginning stage, was it different from what you are practicing now? Do you make any adjustment when you implement CLT in your classroom? If so, how do you adapt CLT in your classroom? Why do you make this adaptation?
2. Could you explain your syllabus? Please describe how you practice CLT in your class. Could you give some examples?
3. What problems have you encountered? How do they influence your practice of CLT? How do you address the problems? Which problem do you find most difficult to address? Are there any other factors that influence your practice of CLT?
4. What makes CLT successful in your classrooms? What components do you consider essential in your CLT classrooms? Why is that?
5. Could we do the last part of interview in English? How do you think your previous training experiences in Western countries help you practice CLT? What kind of professional development will be helpful to your current practice of CLT?

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## Teachers' Stated Beliefs on Coded Unfocused Corrective Feedback in EFL Writing at a Saudi University

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### Abstract

This paper reports on a study exploring English language teachers' stated beliefs on coded unfocused corrective feedback in improving learners' writing accuracy at King Abdulaziz University (KAU). A questionnaire with both closed and open ended items was taken by ten participants. The results of the study indicate that many participants in the study believe that coded unfocused corrective feedback, currently employed at KAU, is comparatively effective in improving learners' writing accuracy, and that it is more suitable for high level learners who are motivated enough to deal with all errors. Also, this study reveals that unfocused corrective feedback is useful to produce a better second draft; however, some learners' errors still recur in new writing despite the continuous corrections offered by teachers. Participants in this study further believe that using codes to mark learners' errors is not as beneficial as it should be, and it would be more effective if used selectively.

**Keywords:** teachers' beliefs, coded unfocused corrective feedback, EFL writing

### Introduction

This study explored English language teachers' stated beliefs regarding the effectiveness of coded unfocused written corrective feedback in improving learners' writing accuracy at an English language institute.

Coded feedback is defined by Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) as the strategy of identifying the exact location of errors with codes and using the codes to indicate the type of error, for example, using *SP* to indicate issues with spelling. In addition, unfocused feedback is defined by Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) as the correction of all learners' errors in a piece of writing.

When all errors in a piece of writing are marked, then the label unfocused feedback is used, which is different from correcting only one or two types of errors, which is called focused feedback. Focused feedback is sometimes called selective feedback and unfocused feedback is also referred to as comprehensive feedback. Both types of feedback are the main categories for written corrective feedback, yet some strategies can be used within both focused and unfocused feedback, such as indirect corrections, e.g., only indicting an error place or using codes. Another strategy used with both focused and unfocused corrective feedback is direct corrections where an error is indicated and corrected. This study focuses on coded unfocused feedback as it is the type of feedback utilized in the context in which the study took place, and which might resonate with similar practices pertinent to written corrective feedback in other international contexts.

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Since coded unfocused corrective feedback (see Figure 1) has been implemented in the ELI at King Abdulaziz University, thousands of learners and hundreds of teachers have been affected by it; a considerable number of teachers have constantly discussed and questioned its effectiveness. Due to this discourse, I selected teachers' beliefs regarding corrective feedback to be the focus of my study in order to gain a greater understanding of coded unfocused corrective feedback through teachers' own voices and experiences.

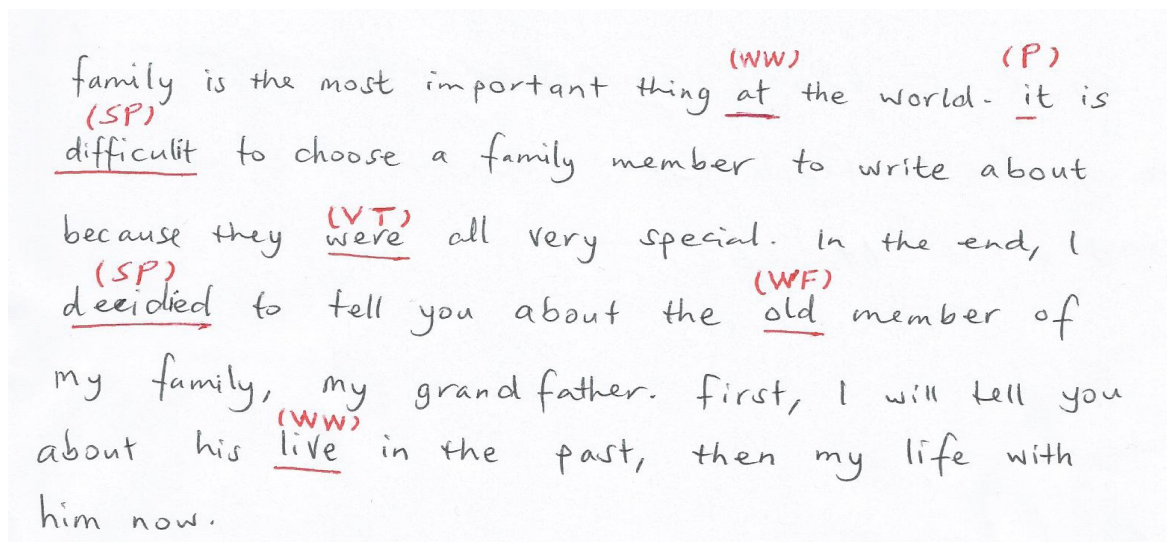


Figure 1. A Sample of Using Coded Unfocused Corrective Feedback

### The Role of Teacher's Beliefs in Language Teaching

Teachers' beliefs are notoriously difficult to define because they are "a messy construct" (p. 307) as noted by Pajares (1992). Borg (2011) defines teacher beliefs as "propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action and are resistant to change" (p. 370). Here, Borg emphasizes many aspects of beliefs such as their implicitness, evaluative and emotional nature, and tendency to become fossilized.

Pajares (1992) states that the findings of research pertinent to teachers' beliefs reveal that there is a strong correlation between teachers' beliefs, their educational decisions, planning, and most importantly their practices. In a similar vein, Fang (1996) argues that teachers' beliefs might be represented in what teachers anticipate about learners' performance and their personal theories regarding different educational areas, and therefore teachers' beliefs can influence learning and teaching in different ways.

Because of the significant role teachers' beliefs play in learning and teaching, a great deal of literature has addressed teachers' beliefs in regards to a considerable number of educational issues. However, very little attention has been paid to teachers' beliefs on corrective feedback in second language writing (e.g., Lee, 2009; Schulz, 1996). Lee (2009) for example, compares teachers' practices regarding different types of corrective feedback and their stated beliefs. The study reveals ten discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs and practices. One of these mismatches is that teachers believe that focused corrective feedback is suitable for their learners, but their actual practices did not reflect that as they tended to use unfocused corrective feedback. Teachers justified this by saying they were following the policies of their institutions in this regard, even though it went against their beliefs. The rationale provided by these teachers affirms Borg's (2006) argument that teachers who are required to do tasks which are not in harmony with their educational beliefs will experience a tension between what they believe and what they are required to do, which may lead to poor practice. On the other hand, I contend that it is difficult for decision makers to consider all teachers' preferences based on their educational beliefs; however, new initiatives and tasks should be negotiated with teachers, and reshaped where possible, according to what most teachers believe as suitable for a certain context.

Despite the fact that written corrective feedback is practised widely in EFL and ESL classrooms, its

effectiveness has been questioned and challenged by some researchers (e.g., Kepner, 1991; Truscott, 1996, 2007). Truscott (1996) for instance, claims that written corrective feedback is not effective because it does not consider the nature of learning, i.e., the developmental stages of learning. However, several other researchers (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Ferris, 1999; Ferris & Robert, 2001) are in favor of corrective feedback and do not accept Truscott's claims.

Looking at corrective feedback in L2 writing from practitioners' perspectives, Evans, Hartshorn, and Allen (2010) conducted a survey which was taken by 1,053 teachers from 96 countries focusing on what extent teachers provide corrective feedback in L2 writing. The study also tackled the reasons that teachers gave for giving corrective feedback as well as the rationales provided by teachers who choose not to give corrective feedback. The findings of the study showed that corrective feedback in second language writing is extensively utilized by the majority of participants. Furthermore, according to the study in question, the main reasons teachers gave for providing feedback were that corrective feedback is important to assist learners in improving their writing, and also that learners need it. On the other hand, the few teachers who do not give feedback provided two reasons: First, they think that rhetoric, content, and organization are more significant than corrective feedback, and second, learners should take care of their own errors.

As a language practitioner, I believe that providing learners with corrective feedback is pivotal. Nevertheless, if a teacher aims to help learners improve their writing fluency, i.e., their ability to convey their thoughts effectively, they might delay focusing on grammatical and form errors.

In their study on whether correcting all learners' errors or only some errors in a piece of writing is more effective, Ellis et al. (2008) compared focused corrective feedback to unfocused corrective feedback using an experimental study whose respondents were 49 Japanese learners. One of the main findings was that learners' writings exposed to both focused and unfocused corrective feedback show that both are effective. However, Ellis et al. add that this area requires more research.

In a similar vein, Sheen (2007) investigated the effectiveness of selective or focused corrective feedback. Ninety-one adult learners of different first language backgrounds took part in this study in which their writing accuracy was examined focusing on the definite article (the) and the indefinite article (a). The study had three groups: a group which was provided with direct corrections, a second group which was given meta-linguistic or coded feedback, and a control group. The effectiveness of the provided feedback was measured by pre-tests, post-tests, and delayed post-tests. This study concluded with the finding that the two groups which were provided with direct corrections and coded corrections selectively, i.e., focusing only on some errors, performed much more competently than the control group.

Building on the above study and attempting to compare focused corrective feedback with unfocused corrective feedback, Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) conducted a study in an American college which offers an English language programme to international and immigrant students. Eighty of the students had their writing examined focusing on the impact of the focused and unfocused feedback on their writing accuracy. The articles, verb (to be), regular and irregular past tense, and propositions were selected for the focused corrective feedback. Participants were divided into four groups: a focused corrective feedback group, an unfocused corrective feedback group, a writing practice group, and a control group. The study in question revealed that the focused, or selective, corrective feedback group scored the highest accuracy results for articles alongside the other grammatical structures. Consequently, the study reached the conclusion that focused corrective feedback is much more effective than unfocused corrective feedback in improving learners' accuracy in second language writing. However, it can be argued that such a finding cannot be generalised as there are intricate complexities within different contexts and, therefore, teachers as decision makers should be granted the opportunity to decide which kind of corrective feedback is 'suitable' for their learners based on a context analysis.

### **Research Questions**

This study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do the English language teachers at the ELI see the effectiveness of marking all learners' errors in a piece of writing to improve learners' writing accuracy?

2. What do the English language teachers at the ELI think of using codes to indicate learners' errors in a piece of writing?
3. What strategies would teachers use if they had the choice when marking learners' writing based on their educational beliefs?

## **Methodology**

### **The Context of the Study**

The study was conducted in the ELI at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. The ELI offers an intensive English language program which is taken by thousands of Saudi undergraduate learners and taught by a large number of teachers from different parts of the world. Four supplementary level tailored writing booklets are taught over one academic year where learners are required to write short compositions following a process writing approach twice per week. All the English language teachers are required to mark learners' errors using coded unfocused corrective feedback.

### **The Participants of the Study**

Ten English language teachers took part in this study; four of them are native speakers of English. Of these four, two hold BA degrees while the other two have master's degrees. The other six teachers are non-native speakers and all of them are MA holders. Three out of ten have been teaching less than five years and the rest have been teaching English language for more than five years.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study is mainly qualitative. I selected a questionnaire with open-ended and closed items to be the research method for my study. I devised a questionnaire with three sections: the first part consists of seven Likert scale items with five options; part two with three open questions; and part three with three closed biographical questions (see Appendix 1 for a sample of the questionnaire used in this study).

I piloted my questionnaire by sending it to two ELI colleagues via email. Their answers to the questionnaire questions gave me insights about some pitfalls with the design of the questionnaire, and more importantly the content. The second part of my questionnaire consists of three open ended questions and the aim behind it was to give teachers a space to elaborate on some of their given choices on Likert scale items and more importantly to state their beliefs regarding coded unfocused corrective feedback.

The administration of the questionnaire was as follows: I contacted the academic coordination unit head at the ELI and sought their approval for disseminating my questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to fifty teachers via email, and only three of the teachers who were teaching during summer school completed the questionnaire. After sending a follow-up email to teachers, I received seven additional completed questionnaires.

In an effort to address my research questions for the current study, I have made the research questions the benchmarks for my decision making throughout the process of the study. Given that teachers' beliefs are tacit, any research method used would not have been completely sufficient to give comprehensive, high quality data. Borg, in a published interview with Birello (2012), pointed out that:

Methodologically the challenges have been for us to find ways of eliciting beliefs and the only way to do this is by getting teachers to tell us what their beliefs are, or to produce work in which their beliefs are implied. (p. 89)

Realizing that any research method has its merits and limitations, I selected a questionnaire with closed and open items to explore teachers' stated beliefs. Dornyei and Taguchi (2010) state that the use of questionnaires might culminate with three kinds of data: factual, behavioural, and attitudinal, adding that attitudinal questionnaires cover a broad range of categories such as opinions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and interests.

However, other methods have been utilized by scholars to study teachers' beliefs more often than questionnaires, such as stimulated recall, observations, and interviews. Nonetheless, my goal was not to surface



teachers' beliefs by exploring the sources of their beliefs as this is a lengthy process which may have required other methods. Also, I did not compare teachers' stated beliefs to their practices as it was not feasible in my context because coded unfocused corrective feedback is a requirement of the program. Therefore, I selected a questionnaire to be my research method as questionnaires are among the research methods used in studying teachers' beliefs (e.g., Borg 2011; Lee 2009). Lee (2009), for example, used a questionnaire in addition to follow up interviews and text analysis to compare teachers' beliefs to their practices regarding corrective feedback.

Additionally, I selected a questionnaire with closed and open ended items with the assumption that it would be taken by English language professionals, and therefore they would provide thoughtful responses, particularly because the questionnaire is short and straightforward and there is space to rationalize their responses. I believe that the participants in this study gave thoughtful responses which helped me to gain useful data. However, one of the disadvantages of using questionnaires is that participants' responses might carry some kind of generalization as is argued by Dornyei and Taguchi (2010); one of the disadvantages of questionnaires is the 'halo effect' where we as human beings have an inclination to generalize, e.g., if we have a general positive view regarding something, we might tend to consider everything related to it positively, or just the opposite (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010).

For ethical purposes, my questionnaire structure starts with a short introduction to the goal of my research and for whom I am conducting it, and more importantly informing the participants that taking part in the questionnaire is voluntary and highly confidential. I started with Likert scale questions because starting with open ended questions might put off some participants since they require more concentrated thinking. In the last part of my questionnaire, I only asked participants about three pieces of biographical information, namely teaching experience, native language, and their highest qualification. I only utilized the responses to the biographical items to give an introduction to the participants in my research report.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

For processing data obtained from Likert scale questions, numbers from 1 to 5 were used as codes. For example, number one represents strongly disagree, two represents disagree, three stands for unsure, four represents agree, and five represents strongly agree. Using spreadsheet software, I obtained the frequency of responses for each item.

When it came to processing the data gained from the open ended questions, I followed the technique of using my research questions, which are closely represented by the questionnaire's open ended questions, as a predetermined category under which the responses of all participants were synthesized; word processing software was used for this process. I analyzed the data deductively, where themes based on the questionnaire questions were used, e.g., the effectiveness of unfocused corrective feedback, and inductively using emergent themes from the data as sub-categories, such as learners' levels of proficiency and learners' motivations. I synthesized similar responses together using numbers, e.g., 6 out of 10, to show the trends for each category or subcategory.

I implemented two strategies to describe the analyzed data. I used my own wording to convey the main idea for each category or subcategory when responses were similar and in some cases I quoted participants' responses when they provided more vivid representations of their beliefs through their original voices.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

As indicated earlier in this paper, this study is an attempt to explore and gain an understanding of what the English language teachers in the ELI at King Abdulaziz University think about the effectiveness of coded unfocused corrective feedback following an interpretative approach in which I do not aim to generalize the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the role of qualitative researchers is to provide rich and detailed descriptions of their research, and not to propose generalisations. Instead, readers of a qualitative piece of research should reach their own verdicts about the transferability of qualitative research.

Thus, the trustworthiness and credibility of this study have been considered by giving the details for the process of data collection, and also by means of transparent descriptions of data analysis procedures and the methods used to reach the results. In addition, I have provided a sample of the questionnaire used in this study (see Appendix) as well as a description of the context of the study. Shenton (2004) states that "thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny...can be an important provision for promoting credibility as it helps to

convey the actual situations that have been investigated and, to an extent, the contexts that surround them” (p. 69).

### Results and Discussion

In this section I analyze, interpret, and present the results of the analyzed data starting with the Likert scale data sets, using a table for ease of reference, followed by short descriptions and analysis of each statement. The Likert scale items are meant to give an overview of teachers’ stated beliefs. In analyzing the data for Likert scale items, options like strongly disagree and disagree have been combined to mean disagree and agree and strongly agree have also been merged into one category. Afterwards, data gathered from open ended questions were analyzed.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that participants’ stated beliefs in the first part of the analysis represent their beliefs about coded unfocused corrective feedback with no reference to the ELI context. However, the analysis of the qualitative data refers directly to the ELI context. In doing so, I had the opportunity to compare and synthesize participants’ stated beliefs about coded unfocused corrective feedback and their beliefs about its suitability in relation to the context in question.

Table 1

*An Overview of the English Language Teachers’ Stated Beliefs on Coded Unfocused Corrective Feedback*

| Statement   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|--------|-------|----------------|
| 1. Marking all learners’ errors will help learners avoid making similar errors in future writing. | 1                 | 2        | 2      | 5     | 0              |
| 2. Marking all learners’ errors will only help learners produce a better second draft.            | 0                 | 3        | 1      | 5     | 1              |
| 3. Marking learners’ errors using error codes, e.g., SP for spelling mistake is useful.           | 0                 | 1        | 0      | 7     | 2              |
| 4. Using error codes are not suitable for all learners’ levels of proficiency.                    | 0                 | 2        | 0      | 4     | 4              |
| 5. Some types of errors still recur despite the continuous corrections provided by teachers.      | 0                 | 0        | 1      | 4     | 5              |
| 6. It is useful to indicate errors but without identifying the type of error.                     | 1                 | 2        | 2      | 5     | 0              |
| 7. It is useful to indicate learners’ errors and correct them directly.                           | 1                 | 3        | 2      | 2     | 2              |

*Note.* N=10

Table 1 shows teachers’ views on coded unfocused corrective feedback based on their responses to the Likert scale items. Overall, most of the participants who took part in this study think that unfocused corrective feedback, marking all errors in a piece of writing, in additional language writing is useful; however, in their responses to the open ended questions they provided more clarification. Likewise, participants initially think that

using codes to mark learners' written errors is beneficial. A few participants revealed that coded unfocused corrective feedback is not appropriate for their learners. Moreover, some participants took a neutral position -by selecting (unsure) with regards to some Likert items- and that is understood to mean that other options did not reflect their beliefs.

As can be seen in Table 1, five participants believe that marking all learners' errors in a piece of writing will help learners avoid making similar errors in future writing. Three participants, however, did not share the same belief, and two participants were unsure. Six participants were in agreement with the statement that marking all learners' errors will only help learners produce a better second draft, yet, three participants did not agree with that statement. One participant was unsure.

In their responses to the third Likert scale item, nine participants thought that marking learners' errors using error codes was useful. Only one participant did not think so. Teachers' beliefs that using codes is effective when marking learners' errors is in line with Harmer's (2007) perspective that using codes "makes correction look less damaging" (p. 121). On the other hand, participants saw using error codes, e.g., SP for spelling, as not suitable for all learners' proficiency levels. Conversely, two participants deemed them adequate for all learners' proficiency levels.

Nine participants hold the belief that some types of errors still recur despite the continuous corrections provided by participants. One participant was not sure. Five participants indicated that a more implicit strategy for dealing with learners' errors would be useful, however, three participants do not believe so, and two were undecided. Four participants think that indicating learners' errors and correcting them directly is ineffective. On the other hand, four participants saw this strategy as effective and two were neutral.

At this point I present the insights arrived at based on the analysis of the qualitative data regarding teachers' stated beliefs on the coded unfocused corrective feedback approach. As you can see below, the research questions were used as the main themes under which the insights were arrived at.

### **Q1-How do the English language teachers at the ELI see the effectiveness of marking all learners' errors in a piece of writing to improve learners' writing accuracy?**

Teachers stated their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of correcting all learners' errors in improving learners' writing accuracy in different ways. Six participants believe that correcting all learners' errors is partially effective in improving learners' writing accuracy, but they think two factors are important to consider, namely learners' motivation and learners' proficiency levels. One teacher noted the following:

That depends on the learner's motivation. If the learner is only interested in completing the writing task and is not really bothered about improving his English, then NO. This method does not necessarily improve the learner's writing accuracy. However, I have had students that were eager to improve their writing accuracy and found this method very helpful. The students wrote again and did not make the same mistakes. I think this is totally down to the learner's motivation and the reason for their acquiring the English language.

In a study conducted in Hong Kong, Lee (2005) investigated the perspectives of 320 learners on corrective feedback. Interestingly, one of the findings of Lee's study was that the majority of learners (82.9%) showed interest in obtaining comprehensive or unfocused corrective feedback from their teachers and they preferred receiving codes to indicate their errors.

Nevertheless, three participants assertively think that correcting all learners' errors in a piece of writing is not effective. One said, "I believe that a learner can only focus on improving in one or two areas at a time. If a student has a piece of writing with several mistakes, he doesn't know which one he should work on improving and this only leads to demotivation."

It can be seen that the responses for the Likert and open ended items about the effectiveness of unfocused corrective feedback reflect that motivation is an overarching factor in the perceived usefulness of unfocused corrective feedback in improving learners' writing accuracy. Many participants feel that only motivated learners are capable of making use of unfocused corrective feedback. In contrast, only a few teachers believe that unfocused corrective feedback is the reason behind learners' demotivation as a result of it being too difficult for

them to handle all errors.

I argue that learners would prefer to receive comprehensive corrective feedback on their writing from their teachers, and in doing so, teachers might motivate their learners to exert more effort to improve their writing accuracy. What is more, marking all learners' errors in their writing may give them an indication that their teachers are very keen on their learning, and consequently this can create a level of motivation on the part of learners. Feedback could be paired with positive comments on learners' writing to mitigate the impact of indicating all learners' errors. However, I think the challenge lies in creating a balance between what learners prefer and what teachers believe is appropriate within a certain context.

### **Q2-What do the English language teachers at the ELI think of using codes to indicate learners' errors in a piece of writing?**

In analysing and interpreting teachers' beliefs towards the effectiveness of using codes, the data shows that four participants believe using codes to mark learners' errors is useful. One teacher put it this way, "they allow the teacher and the learner to be able to identify which type of error the student is making and the frequency of it", yet, they believe that it would be more useful if the quantity of codes were minimized.

On the other hand, the other six participants consider codes to only be useful for high level learners as low level learners cannot understand the codes and they cannot correct their errors because their language is limited. A teacher expressed their belief about this issue by pointing out, "In my experience only the stronger ELI L104 [Intermediate level] learners are able to even understand the error codes. L101-L103 [beginner and elementary level learners] don't really benefit from them."

In considering participants' responses to the third Likert scale item, we find that nine participants agree that using codes is useful. Similarly, they expressed the same belief in their responses to this open ended item, but with more clarification. I believe that learners' levels of proficiency should play a role in determining what kind of feedback is used, and therefore, this is an area where teachers can use their understanding of their learners' needs and their contexts. As Ferris (2004) points out, "providing error feedback that will help students and not distract them or discourage them involves some decision making on the part of the teacher which considers the students' needs and background" (p. 59).

### **Q3-What strategies would teachers use if they had the choice when marking learners' writing based on their educational beliefs?**

Only two participants would use unfocused corrective feedback if it was not standardized. One teacher points out that, "I think it is helpful. Many learners benefit from being made aware of their errors and take considerable time to reflect on the teacher's marking and try to avoid repeating the same errors in the future." A third teacher would use unfocused corrective feedback only with high level learners.

Six participants would only correct some errors and two of those would use strategies like peer-editing and marking some errors and then allowing learners to look for similar errors. Teachers' preferences in this regard are justified as teachers' cognition is influenced by many factors, such as schooling, experience, professional education, and context (Borg, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In closing, most of the English language teachers who took part in this study believe that correcting all learners' errors is suitable for motivated and high level learners. Further, many teachers believe that using codes to indicate learners' errors is more useful for high level learners. Some see coded corrective feedback as effective only if used selectively, i.e., marking only some types of errors. These beliefs about the effectiveness of selective corrective feedback are in line with the findings of studies conducted by Sheen (2007) and Sheen et al. (2009), which were cited earlier in this paper. Also, a study conducted in a Colombian university Sampson (2012) demonstrates the effectiveness of selective corrective feedback by comparing it to comprehensive feedback: "corrective feedback should be...selective, depending on [a] learners' stage of inter-language, since comprehensive feedback may risk demotivating learners" (p. 501). On the other hand, Lee (2005) strongly stated that comprehensive corrective feedback was preferred by the learners who participated in their study. Therefore, I think that different contexts

and learners' needs should be considered when selecting a corrective feedback strategy; teachers should be given the opportunity to choose an appropriate corrective feedback strategy based on their understanding of their contexts.

To sum up, although the number of participants in this study is not large, this study may still provide researchers and practitioners with some insights into the importance of exploring English language teachers' beliefs about what they do on a daily basis in the classroom, such as giving written corrective feedback.

More studies are needed to examine different contexts and focus on what teachers believe, think, and practice, regarding different types of corrective feedback. These studies may help to reveal the relationship between what teachers believe and what they practice, which can inform teacher training programs, policy makers, and curriculum designers. Moreover, teachers' voices based on their educational beliefs regarding their corrective feedback practices can be shared with other teachers in similar international contexts. Finally, and most importantly, teachers should be empowered by being given some freedom to implement practices that are in line with their educational beliefs with regards to the appropriate corrective feedback approach for their contexts. Studies tackling this area will help raise awareness towards the crucial importance of considering teachers' educational beliefs.

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## Appendix

### English language teachers' stated beliefs regarding the effectiveness of unfocused corrective feedback in FL writing

The below questionnaire will be utilized for the purpose of collecting some data for a study which aims to explore the English language teachers' beliefs in the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University about the viability of the currently employed unfocused corrective feedback in improving learners' writing accuracy. Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and it is highly appreciated. The obtained data will be anonymous and confidential. If you agree to take this questionnaire, please proceed to answer the following questions.

The below questionnaire consists of three parts and it contains both open-ended and closed items and it will take you about 20 minutes to complete it. Thank you very much!

#### Part. 1

In this part, please indicate whether you strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, or strongly agree with the following statements:

| Strongly disagree  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly agree |   |          |   |
|--|----------|--------|-------|----------------|---|----------|---|
| 1  | 2        | 3      | 4     | 5              |   |          |   |
| (Example) If you agree with this statement, choose this: |          |        |       |                |   |          |   |
| Swimming is my favourite sport.                          |          |        | 1     | 2              | 3 | <u>4</u> | 5 |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Marking all learners' errors will help learners avoid making similar errors in future writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Marking all learners' errors will only help learners produce a better second draft.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Marking learners' errors using error codes, e.g., SP for spelling mistake is useful.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Using error codes are not suitable for all learners' levels of proficiency.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Some types of errors still recur despite the continuous corrections provided by teachers.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. It is useful to indicate errors but without identifying the type of error.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. It is useful to indicate learners' errors and correct them directly.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



**Part.2**

1. Do you think that the currently employed strategy of marking all learners' errors in a piece of writing in the ELI is helping learners to improve their writing accuracy? Why do you think so?

2. Do you believe in the usefulness of using codes to signal the types of learners' errors as it used in the ELI? Why or why not?

3. If the strategy of marking all learners' errors were not standardized in the ELI, would you use the same strategy of marking all learners' errors? What is your personal theory behind that?

**Part 3.**

1. How long have you been teaching the English language?

A) 1- 5                      B) 6 - 10                      C) 11 -15                      D) 16-20                      E) 20+

2. Is the English language your first language?

A) YES                      B) NO

3. What is your highest qualification?

A) Bachelors'                      B) Masters'                      C) Doctorate                      D) Others

Thank you very much for taking the time to respond!

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## Language Functions in ESL Textbooks

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### Abstract

Language functions are often used as fundamental guiding principles in ESL (English as a Second Language) textbooks especially now that focus on meaning has become crucial to ESL teaching and learning. This paper identifies general and specific language functions used in five beginner ESL textbooks to provide baseline data that will guide instructional material developers and teachers. It also examines language function content in relation to the objectives of each textbook to aide teachers in appropriately selecting materials for their students. Finally, the study analyzes the language function content of ESL textbooks *vis-à-vis* the needs of beginner ESL learners.

**Keywords:** language functions, instructional material development, ESL textbooks, content analysis

### Introduction

For effective language use and acquisition, Chomsky (1957, 1965) argues the importance of linguistic competence as the goal of language learning. Such a notion puts emphasis on learning the form, structure, and grammatical content of the target language. Hymes (1967, 1972), on the other hand, asserts that development of communicative competence should be the goal in language learning. This concept takes into account both the linguistic aspect of the target language and the importance of context in language acquisition. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a significant shift from a linguistic to communicative approach to language teaching had occurred (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Widdowson, 2000). This shift paved the way for Hymes' terminology, perspective, and notion of communicative competence to be adopted in the teaching approaches and development of new teaching materials by language teachers and applied linguists (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Several studies have noted the need for a dual focus in language teaching – a focus on form (FoF) and a focus on meaning (FoM) (Baleghizadeh, 2010; Long, 2000; Shang, 2007). This suggests that learning a language is never an isolated study of its linguistic form, but rather a complex process which also includes knowledge of the language context. This is crucial in understanding the message communicated by the speaker and to enable appropriate responses from other interlocutors. This view of language learning is becoming more popular as a greater number of English as Second Language (ESL) textbook publishers adopt language functions as the core of their instructional materials (Peppard, 2010). Jiang (2006) noted that the trend is primarily because of concerns over learners' language needs, which is paving the way towards making connections between language functions and forms. This has been further intensified by an emphasis on the increasing role of pragmatics in English

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language instruction which draws on natural conversations to be integrated into commercially available English-language learning materials (Bardovi-Harling, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991). Considering these practices, it is crucial that the language function contents of existing ESL textbooks be assessed and evaluated. This is to provide sufficient information to material developers and ESL teachers whose tasks include designing, continuously modifying, and upgrading instructional materials to suit and address the needs of ESL students.

### Language Functions

One significant aspect of communicative competence is learning to use language for a variety of functions (Pien, 1985). Such functions include: *asking for information*, *explaining*, *making a request*, etc. Learners' knowledge of language functions has been noted to provide various advantages to students (Hughes & Lavery, 2004; Kinsella, 2010). Accordingly, this knowledge enables students to interpret and react appropriately to what others say. Moreover, it enables them to put their ideas together in a wide range of ways; internalize the patterns needed to express their ideas; identify the language demands of specific tasks and content concepts; and ultimately increase their use of complex sentence structures (Kinsella, 2010).

Various definitions have been accorded to the term *language functions*. Cook (1985), for one, defines language functions as the purposes for which people use language; Thomas (2009) considers language functions as the communicative functions involved in an oral, interactive, or discursive interchange; Soto-Hinman and Hetzel (2009) perceive them as the various tasks accomplished by means of language; while Green (2012) asserts that language functions are social actions that people intend to accomplish through the use of language. Proponents of language functions may have defined the term in various ways, however, every definition asserts an active concept that makes language useful and purposeful.

One of the most notable works on language functions has been provided by Van Ek and Trim in their *Threshold* series: *Breakthrough*, *Waystage*, *Threshold*, and *Vantage* level (Trim, 2001; Van Ek & Trim, 1990; Van Ek & Trim, 1991; Van Ek & Trim, 2001). The project yielded an exhaustive and comprehensive list of the classifications of language functions noted in the field of language education (Table 1). Moreover, it has also pioneered the function-oriented approach used in various instructional materials and syllabi (Harrison & Barker, 2015).

A distinct characteristic of the *Threshold* series is its classification of language functions into general and specific categories. The working definition for general language functions include the six broad categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991): (1) *imparting and seeking factual information*; (2) *expressing and finding out attitudes*; (3) *deciding on courses of action-suasion*; (4) *socialising*; (5) *structuring discourse*; and (6) *communication repair*; while the working definition for specific language functions includes the list of functions under each broad category heading. For instance, under the major language function of *imparting and seeking factual information* are more specific sub-categories such as: *identifying and defining*; *reporting/describing and narrating*; *correcting*; and *asking and answering questions*.

This study, therefore, aims to identify the general and specific language functions used in several beginner ESL textbooks. Identifying and classifying language functions, in general, has been helpful in identifying topics, activities, and language exponents (vocabulary, structures, and grammatical content) which learners should be exposed to and are expected to acquire (Canale & Swain, 1980; Green, 2012). Such data provides for a range of meanings or meaning potential appropriate for beginner ESL learners (Halliday, 1975).

Table 1

*Specifications of Language Functions in Threshold 1990 (van Ek & Trim, 1991)*


---

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Imparting and seeking factual information<br>Identifying/defining; reporting (describing and narrating); correcting; asking; answering questions   |
| 2 | Expressing and finding out attitudes<br><i>Factual agreement</i> : Expressing agreement with a statement; expressing disagreement with a statement; enquiring about agreement and disagreement; denying something<br><i>Factual knowledge</i> : Stating or enquiring whether one knows or does not know a person, thing, or fact; stating or enquiring whether one remembers or has forgotten a person, thing or fact or action; expressing or enquiring degrees of probability; necessity; certainty<br><i>Factual modality</i> : Expressing or enquiring about obligation; ability and inability to do something; something is or is not permitted; granting permission; withholding permission<br><i>Volitional</i> : Expressing and enquiring wants; desires; intentions; preferences<br><i>Emotional</i> : Expressing, reporting, or enquiring about pleasure; displeasure; happiness; unhappiness; dislike; satisfaction; dissatisfaction; interest; lack of interest; surprise; lack of surprise; hope; disappointment; fear; reassurance; worries; gratitude; apologies; moral obligation; approval; disapproval; regret; sympathy |
| 3 | Deciding on courses of action (Suasion)<br>Suggesting course of action; agreeing to a suggestion; requesting others to do something; advising; warning; encouraging; instructing; directing; requesting or offering assistance; giving, accepting, or declining an invitation; asking someone for something  |
| 4 | Socialising<br>Attracting attention; greeting people; responding to greetings; addressing people; introducing someone; reacting to being introduced; congratulating someone; proposing a toast; taking a leave   |
| 5 | Structuring discourse<br>Opening a conversation; expressing hesitation; introducing a theme; expressing an opinion; enumerating; exemplifying; emphasizing; summarizing; changing the theme; following a discourse; interrupting; asking someone to be silent; going over the floor; indicating a wish to continue; encouraging someone to continue; indicating that one is coming to an end; using the telephone; letters   |
| 6 | Communication repair<br>Signaling non-understanding; asking for repetition; asking for repetition; asking for clarification; asking for confirmation of understanding; asking for or spelling a word; asking for something to be written down; expressing ignorance of an expression; appealing for assistance; asking a speaker to slow down; paraphrasing; repeating what one has said; asking if you have been understood; supplying a word or expression   |

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### Research Questions

In this study, a total of five beginner ESL textbooks—two South Korean published and three internationally published—were analyzed. The analysis sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What language functions are used in beginner ESL textbooks?
2. How do language functions relate to beginner ESL learners' learning needs?

## Methodology

This study consisted of two steps: 1) textbook selection, and 2) content analysis of existing English language learning textbooks.

### Textbook Selection

An informal survey was conducted at local language institutes in Baguio City, Philippines. These language institutes cater to various ESL learners from countries such as Korea, China, and the Middle East. Administrators, ESL teachers, and students were asked for the titles of the books that they use in their classes. From the responses, the five most commonly used ESL textbooks were chosen: *Speed Up English* (Yang & Hong, 2005), *Click English* (Hong & Cho, 1999), *Side by Side* (Molinsky & Bliss, 2000), *Exploring English* (Harris & Rowe, 1995), and *Expressways* (Molinsky & Bliss, 1996).

*Speed up English* is a conversational textbook for English learners (Yang & Hong, 2005). The lessons and activities are geared towards giving learners opportunities to understand the basics of English structure and to become familiar with English vocabulary and expressions. It also aims to build a strong foundation in the fundamentals of conversational English and to help students develop their speaking skills. It contains twenty units with each unit consisting of the following sub-sections: *Getting Ready*, *Focus*, *Talk 1*, *Talk 2*, *Activity 1*, and *Activity 2*. *Getting Ready* introduces relevant vocabulary items and expressions; *Focus* provides the target structures of the English language for each unit; *Talk 1* is a short dialogue that includes the target structures of each unit; *Talk 2* provides a more challenging conversation script with additional expressions; *Activity 1* is designed to stimulate learners to practice conversation with their peers; and *Activity 2* provides authentic materials and cloze quizzes.

*Click English* is a conversational English course for adult and young adult learners of English (Hong & Cho, 1999). It aims to develop communication skills, especially speaking skills, and to encourage accuracy and fluency. The book is designed to provide ESL students with opportunities to practice and develop their speaking skills. It provides various strategies for students to be effective independent learners. The book contains 30 units with each unit consisting of the following subsections: *Warm up*, *Focus*, *Follow Along*, *Look Again*, *Activity*, and *Follow up*. *Warm up* introduces new vocabulary and goals for the lesson; *Focus* provides an overview of specific language functions and grammatical structures; *Follow Along* helps students learn to use the language with accuracy; *Look Again* provides additional practice through less controlled and more challenging exercises; *Activity* provides various forms of task-based speaking activities for effective use of the language; and *Follow up* is an extension of the *Activity* section which wraps up the lesson.

*Side by Side* is a standard and grammar-based English language textbook for adults and young-adult learners (Molinsky & Bliss, 2000). As a standard-based textbook, the topics are rooted in competency-based approaches to language instruction including national, state, and local standard-based curricula. The grammar, on the other hand, is graduated based upon students' increasing ability levels. Also, it is a four-skill textbook that integrates conversation practice, reading, writing, and listening. Other features of the book include: *Vocabulary Preview* sections in every chapter to introduce key words in picture dictionary form; *How to Say It* lessons highlight communication strategies; and *Pronunciation Exercises* which provide models for practicing pronunciation, stress, and intonation.

*Exploring English* is a textbook that teaches all four language skills and gives students opportunities to practice what they have learned (Harris & Rowe, 1995). It is designed for communicative practice and uses student-centered activities to enable students to engage in meaningful communication. Basic competencies are taught in context: asking directions, taking a bus, buying food, etc. It also has grammar sections which are presented inductively in context in both reading and conversation activities. By encountering the target grammatical structures in a variety of contexts, students are able to make reliable and useful generalizations about the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

*Expressways* integrates life-skills topics, functions, and grammar to engage students in learning English with the aid of simulated contexts (Molinsky & Bliss, 1996). The book is set up with a highway motif using various

activities for each unit. The *Guided Conversations* activity offers meaningful and lively communication practice; *Cross Talk* and *Cultural Intersections* provide activities that help students to relate lesson content to their own lives and to discuss cross-cultural issues; *Reflections* and *Community Connections* provide opportunities for self-assessment, critical thinking, problem solving, and task-based activities involving community resources; *Interactions* and *Interview* activities engage students in role playing and cooperative learning; *Constructions Ahead* and *Listen* exercises provide reinforcement of grammar and intensive listening comprehension practice; finally, *Reading Passages* and *Your Turn* activities provide students with reading and writing opportunities based on the themes of each chapter.

### Content Analysis of ESL Textbooks

Content analysis was employed to determine the language functions used in the ESL textbooks. Content analysis has been defined as the study of recorded human communications including books, magazines, web-pages, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, etc. (Babbie, 2010). It is a method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from texts and makes them easier to classify into more relevant and manageable data (Weber, 1990). Krippendorff (2013) noted three distinguishing characteristics of a contemporary content analysis:

- a) Content analysis is an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent; b) Content analysis transcends traditional notions of symbols, contents, and intents; c) Contemporary content analysis has been forced to develop a methodology of its own, one that enables researchers to plan, execute, communicate, reproduce, and critically evaluate their analyses whatever the particular results. (pp. 1-4)

To address Research Question 1 on the language function content of ESL textbooks, close attention was paid to language items in each unit of the textbook for the purpose of language functions analysis. The first author conducted the initial coding of the language functions. It was then followed by a series of consultation with the second author until both authors agreed on 90% of the coding made on the language function content of the five ESL materials. As each chapter of every textbook was subdivided further into various sections, only the main lessons were analyzed. Utterances and dialogues were abstracted to understand the context of the discourse. Language functions were classified into general and specific language functions as noted in the *Threshold 1990* specifications of language functions by Van Ek and Trim (1991). The choice to use *Threshold 1990* specifications, as opposed to *Breakthrough* or *Waystage* specifications, which are both geared towards beginner learners, was intended primarily to provide a more comprehensive list of language functions in the event that some textbooks deviate from the expected content; using *Threshold 1990* was also intended to yield more detailed and specific information on the language functions used in current ESL textbooks.

To address Research Question 2 on how language functions relate to beginner learners' learning needs, the list of language functions from the five English language learning textbooks and their exponents were compared and contrasted to the recommended language functions and exponents noted in *Breakthrough* and *Waystage* specifications for beginner ESL learners. Exponents are expressions, utterances, or linguistic forms used to achieve the intended language functions. For instance, *Waystage* recommends the following exponents in "imparting and seeking factual information" particularly on identifying or defining certain words:

- a) (With pointing gesture— this (one), that (one), these, those, me, you, him, her, us them
- b) (+N) + be + NP  
This is the bedroom.
- c) I, you, he, she, it, we, they + be + NP  
He is the owner of the restaurant.)

## Results

### What language functions are used in beginner ESL textbooks?

#### *Language Functions in Speed Up English*

Figure 1 shows the language functions used in this textbook. Of the six main categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), most of the language items from the textbook use “imparting and seeking factual information” (36.36%), followed by “expressing and finding out attitudes” (32.95%). “Suasion” comes third (22.73%); while “socialising” and “structuring discourse” are fourth (3.41%). “Communication repair” is the least frequently occurring (1.14%) of the major classifications of language functions used in the textbook. The findings show *Speed Up English* fulfilling its promise of providing sufficient opportunity for students to converse in the target language as can be seen from the various activities provided for “imparting and seeking factual information,” “expressing and finding out attitudes,” and “suasion.” Language items using the “imparting and seeking factual information” function focus on asking and answering inquiries about information; correcting statements (simple present and past tenses); expressing physical state; reporting (describing and narrating); and asking and answering about knowledge. The “expressing and finding out attitudes” function yields information on: emotional states, likes/dislikes, needs, future plans and activities, certainty, sympathy, surprise, health problems, obligation, permission, preferences, wants/desires/hopes/wishes, opinions, comparison of objects, ability/ inability, gratitude, possibilities, expressing agreement/disagreement and the cause of unhappiness/ disappointment. The “suasion” function is used in various situations such as inviting others to do something, offering and accepting or declining an invitation, requesting and offering assistance, asking and giving advice/suggestions/tips, asking for permission, booking a flight, making requests, refusing requests or favors, giving instructions, and asking for and giving directions. The “socialising” function renders actions including greetings and responding to greetings, offering congratulations, and wishing someone success. The “structuring discourse” function is used once in closing a conversation. Finally, the “communication repair” function is used to ask for confirmation of understanding. “Socialising,” “structuring discourse,” and “communication repair” have been integrated into dialogues and free conversation practices.

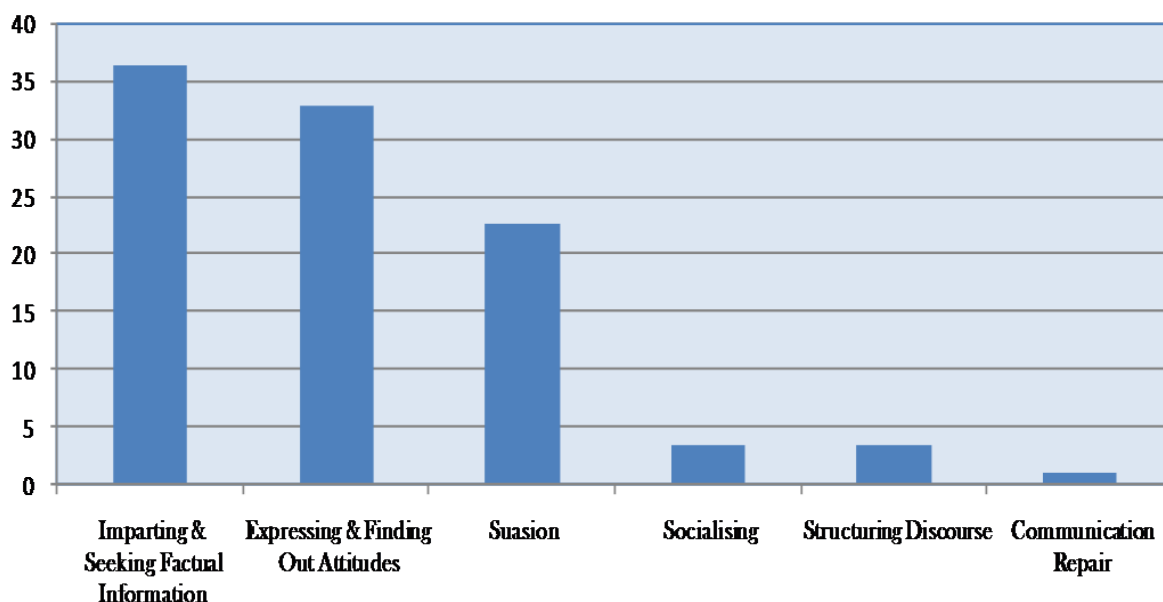


Figure 1. Language Functions in “Speed Up English”



*Speed Up English* also aims to familiarize students with beginner-level English vocabulary and expressions. The result of the analysis shows a vast amount of target vocabulary, expressions, and language functions used in various contexts (grocery shops, restaurants, tourist spots, hospitals, hotels, museums, libraries, parks, etc.) and situations (travelling, cooking, meeting people, watching movies, advertising, planning for special events, giving advice, giving instructions, understanding symbols, etc.).

### **Language Functions in Click English**

Figure 2 shows the language functions used in the textbook *Click English*. Of the six main categories of language functions identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (58.33%) with language items used in: seeking and answering identification, asking and answering for information (wh-questions: when, where, how do you, and how far), reporting (describing and narrating), asking for specifications, asking for confirmations, and making comparisons. “Expressing and finding out attitudes” ranks second (18.06%) with language items used in: inquiring and answering about health conditions and emotional states, expressing disagreement with a statement, asking about likes and dislikes, asking for and answering about the future, expressing ability and inability, inquiring about wants/desires, asking for and answering about possibilities, expressing concern, and seeking and giving permission to call someone. Ranked third is “socialising” (8.33%) and “structuring discourse” (8.33%). The “socialising” function focuses on introducing oneself, introducing others, replying to a greeting, and attracting attention. “Structuring discourse,” on the other hand, centers on expressing hesitation/looking for words, expressing an opinion, and closing a conversation or dialogue. Ranked fourth is “suasion” (5.56%) which concentrates on offering assistance in a grocery store and in a clothing store, asking for and giving directions, and giving advice on health problems. Ranked last is “communication repair” (1.39%) which focuses on asking for confirmation of understanding.

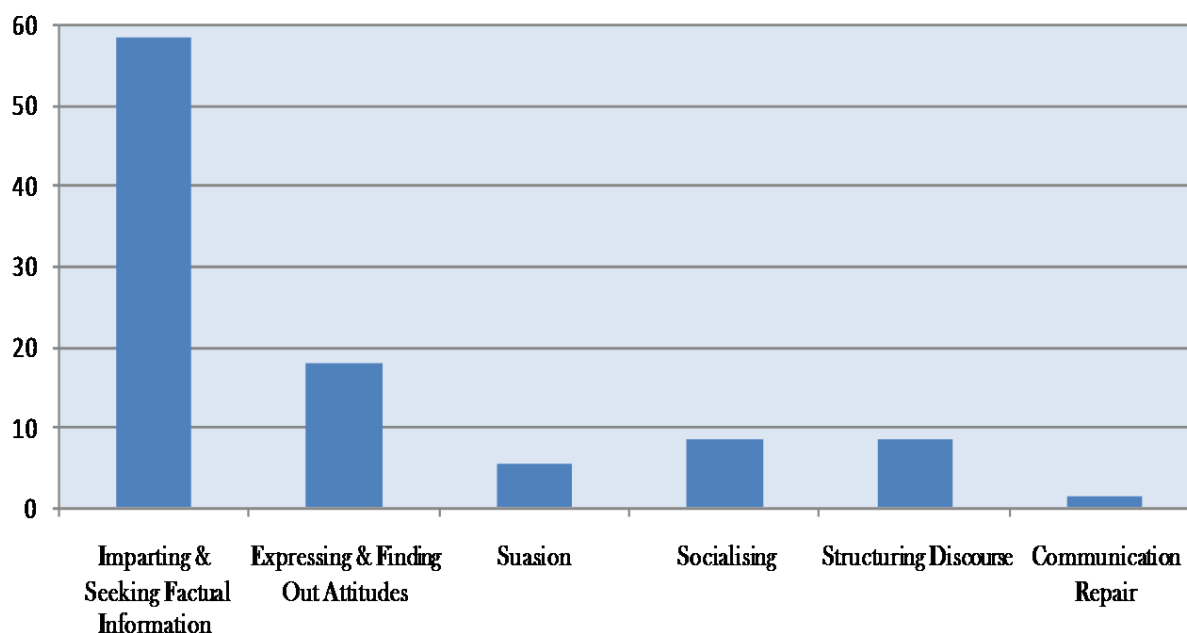


Figure 2. Language Functions in “Click English”

*Click English* aims to develop communication skills and encourage accuracy and fluency. To attain these goals, two techniques were employed: presenting language functions alongside its target grammatical structures and repetition techniques. For instance, Chapter 2 uses the theme *Jobs* with the specific language function “seeking and answering identification” and with the target grammatical structure “Who is/are + Pronoun?” as its foci. Moreover, the same language functions and grammatical structures are integrated in Chapter 3 with the theme *Family*. Accuracy and fluency is further emphasized with controlled practice on target structures, grammar, and vocabulary.

### **Language Functions in Side by Side**

Figure 3 shows the language functions used in the textbook *Side by Side*. Of the six main categories of language functions identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (50.57%) with emphasis on: asking and answering about personal information, asking and answering for confirmation, and reporting (describing and narrating). “Expressing and finding out attitudes” ranks second (24.14%) and focused on: expressing wants and desires (I like/I want), satisfaction, gratitude, surprise, obligation to do something, sympathy, complimenting, ability/inability, reacting to information, apologizing, asking, answering and expressing dissatisfaction/disappointment, inquiring and talking about future intentions, and certainties. The “structuring discourse” ranks third (11.49%) with language items highlighting situations such as: opening a telephone conversation, verifying a caller in a telephone conversation, opening and closing a conversation, responding to a call, expressing opinion, expressing hesitation/looking for words, and enumerating. The “socialising” function ranks fourth (8.05%) with language items highlighting: greeting people, responding to greetings, introducing someone, and attracting attention. “Suasion” ranks fifth (4.60%) with language items concentrating on: offering assistance, inviting others to do something, refusing an invitation, and recommending products. Ranked last is “communication repair” (1.15%) where language items center on asking someone to spell something and checking for understanding.

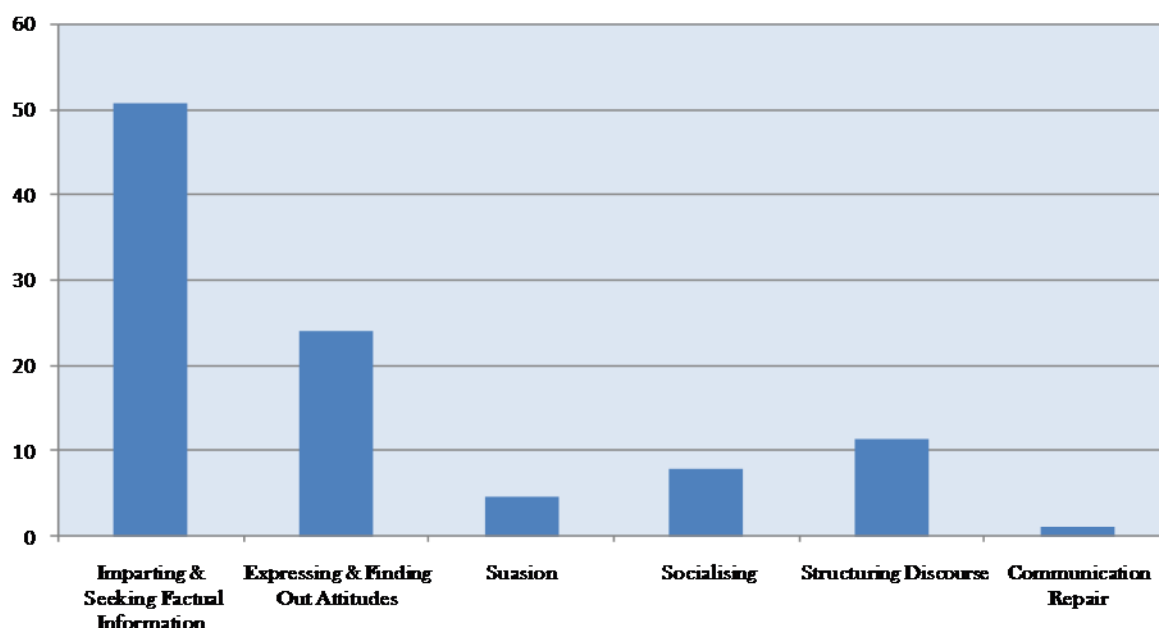


Figure 3. Language Functions in “Side by Side”

One of *Side by Side*'s main goals is to go beyond the textbook as students are expected to share and talk about their experiences. To achieve this objective, language functions focus on the past, present, and future experiences of beginner ESL learners. For example, the specific language function "asking and answering questions for information" emphasizes topics related to the past and future. Language functions on "expressing and finding out attitudes," on the other hand, draw on information about the present and highlight the present continuous tense and simple present tense as the grammar focus. Themes include: expressing likes and dislikes, satisfaction, ability and inability, etc. "Suasion," "socialising," and "structuring discourse" also provide more true to life tasks for exploring language functions, such as: attracting attention, opening and closing conversations, hesitating or looking for words, etc.

### **Language Functions in Exploring English**

Figure 4 shows the language functions used in the textbook *Exploring English*. Of the six main categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), "imparting and seeking factual information" ranks first (51.92%) with language items focusing on: asking and answering questions for information, asking and answering for confirmation, and recording (describing and narrating). "Expressing and finding out attitudes" ranks second (23.08%) with language functions highlighting topics on: giving compliments, inquiring about preferences, expressing needs/wants/desires/satisfaction/dissatisfaction, expressing likes/dislikes, inviting others/accepting/declining invitations, apologizing, and reminding. "Suasion" ranks third (11.54%) and emphasizes: giving and understanding commands, making requests, ordering food, and offering assistance. "Socialising" ranks fourth (9.61%) and focuses on: greeting people, introducing oneself, taking leave, and attracting attention. "Structuring discourse" ranks fifth (3.85%) which concentrates on: using a telephone and enumerating. "Communication repair" ranks sixth with no language item (0%) presented.

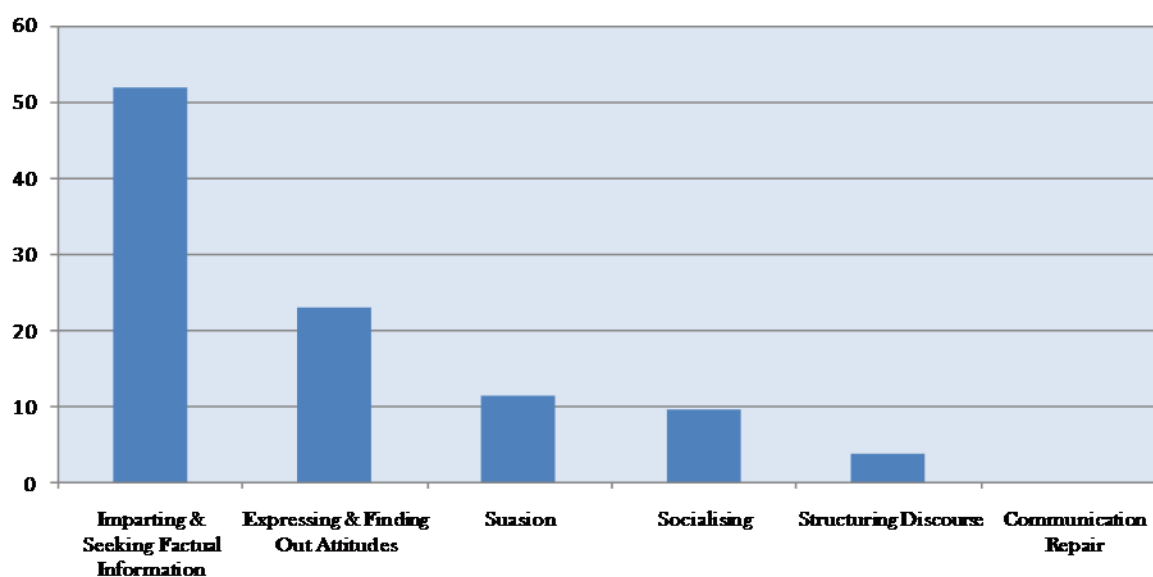


Figure 4. Language Functions in "Exploring English"

The two distinct goals of the book are to provide meaningful communication and to be student-centered. To attain these goals, specific language functions were used in various activities (guided conversations, discussions, pair work, role-plays, readings, etc.). They are also used for personal expression as students are encouraged to express their opinions and feelings through the text's free response section. Similarly, life situations

(food, clothing, transportation, housing, healthcare, etc.) that are important to students become the dominant themes for practicing the target language functions. A cast of characters is also incorporated in humorous illustrations, which the students can relate to as they discuss and talk about life problems in the classroom.

### **Language Functions in Expressways**

Figure 5 shows the language functions used in *Expressways*. Of the six main categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (41.07%) with language items used for: asking and answering for information, recording (describing and narrating), and asking and answering for confirmation. This is followed by “expressing and finding out attitudes” which ranked second (26.79%). Language items focused on: giving compliments, inquiring about preferences, expressing needs/wants/desires/satisfaction/likes/dislikes, giving/accepting/declining invitations, apologizing, and reminding someone about health concerns. “Socialising” ranks third (12.5%), highlighting dialogues on: greeting people, introducing oneself, taking leave, and attracting attention. Ranked fourth is “suasion” (10.71%) which emphasizes conversations on: giving and understanding commands, making requests, ordering food, and offering assistance. “Structuring discourse” ranks third (7.14%) and focuses on: using the telephone and enumerating. Ranked fifth is “communication repair” with (1.79%).

*Expressways* explicitly uses language functions as one of its core elements. This is evident as it enumerates target specific language functions early in each part of the chapter; then ends it with a checklist of *Can Do* statements involving tasks based on the target language’s functions and specific target vocabulary. Chapter 3, for instance, lists “asking for and reporting information” as one of its target specific language functions. At the end of the chapter, the *Can Do* checklist includes a statement that says *I can describe the locations of places in the community*.

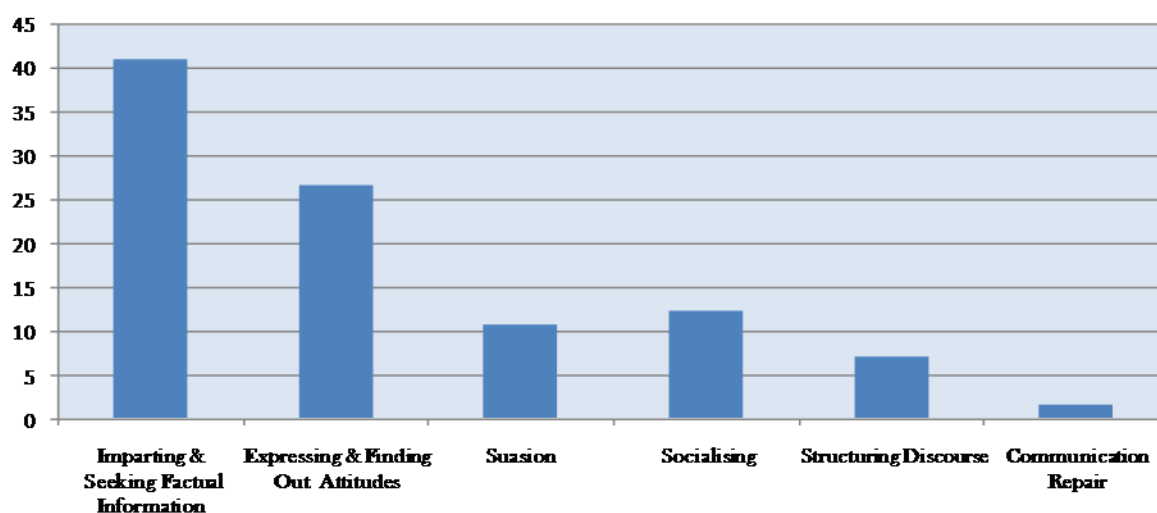


Figure 5. Language Functions in “Expressways”

The analysis of the language functions showed that general and specific language functions are used in all five ESL textbooks. Table 2 shows the summary of the language functions analyzed in this study. The textbooks primarily emphasize “imparting and seeking factual information” (47.32%), followed by “expressing and finding out attitudes” (25.35%). Ranked third is “suasion” (11.27%), and fourth is “socialising” (7.89%). Fifth is “structuring discourse” (7.04%), and finally, “communication repair” is ranked sixth (1.13%).

Most general language functions are presented alongside specific language functions. For instance, the major language function for “imparting and seeking factual information” in the textbook *Speed Up English* contains several specific language functions that include: “asking for and answering personal information”; “asking, answering, and expressing about the past”; “reporting physical state”; and “asking and answering about knowledge.” According to Van Ek and Trim (1991), the use of various specific language functions is significant in the development of sociolinguistic awareness among learners and ensures a variety of practice for more effective learning. For learners, this implies readiness to use the target language in various social contexts. They should develop respect and understanding towards cultural diversity as they are exposed to the norms and practices of the target language. Teachers, on the other hand, may need to become aware of the pragmatic use of varied utterances and be able to explain them clearly to their students. Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) demonstrated the importance of this notion in their study when ESL learners and teachers ranked pragmatic errors as more serious than grammatical errors. For instructional material developers, varied language functions may be used as a springboard upon which they can develop relevant topics appropriate for students. This is critical as the diversity of ESL students coming from different cultural backgrounds is increasing and the practice of random and intuition-based selection of lessons is prevalent among ESL teachers (Dornyei, 1994).

In all five ESL textbooks, the general categories of language functions are comprised of similar specific language functions. For instance, the general language function of “socialising” has for its specific language functions: greeting, introducing people, replying to greetings, etc. On the other hand, the specific language functions for “imparting and seeking factual information” are: asking and answering for information, identifying, and reporting in the form of description and narration. This result implies that the authors of the five language learning textbooks are very aware of the major and specific language functions of the English language.

Table 2  
*Summary of Language Functions Used in the Five ESL Textbooks*

| Language Functions                        | <i>Speed Up English</i> | <i>Click English</i> | <i>Side By Side</i> | <i>Exploring English</i> | <i>Expressways</i> | TOTAL | Percent |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| Imparting and seeking factual information | 32                      | 42                   | 44                  | 27                       | 23                 | 168   | 47.32%  |
| Expressing and finding out attitudes      | 29                      | 13                   | 21                  | 12                       | 15                 | 90    | 25.35%  |
| Suasion                                   | 20                      | 4                    | 4                   | 6                        | 6                  | 40    | 11.27%  |
| Socialising                               | 3                       | 6                    | 7                   | 5                        | 7                  | 28    | 7.89%   |
| Structuring discourse                     | 3                       | 6                    | 10                  | 2                        | 4                  | 25    | 7.04%   |
| Communication repair                      | 1                       | 1                    | 1                   | 0                        | 1                  | 4     | 1.13%   |
| TOTAL                                     | 88                      | 72                   | 87                  | 52                       | 56                 | 355   | 100%    |

There is, however, unequal coverage and representation of each type of language function. Both “imparting and seeking factual information” and “expressing and finding out attitudes” occupy a total of 73% percent of all the ESL textbooks analyzed in this study while the remaining types of language functions occupy less than 30%. “Communication repair” seems to lag behind all the major categories of language functions with 1.13% representation in all five texts. While no specific study has been conducted to highlight the significance of greater representation of each major language function, curriculum and instructional material developers seem to have a common understanding of the importance of integrating most if not all language functions into the various stages of language learning. This has been the case with the educational reform in teaching Latvian as a second language as noted by Salme (2006). Accordingly, a thorough examination of the linguistic content of textbooks used by different age groups was conducted prior to the development of Latvian as a second language to ensure that all function groups were represented throughout the various stages of language learning. This

resulted in the creation of distinct guidelines to further develop Latvian as a second language education. Taking Latvian as a second language as a model, future material developers may further improve the quality of ESL instructional materials. According to the literature, suggested strategies may include adopting implicit and explicit strategies in language function content, and the use of sequencing strategies to ensure sufficient amounts of each language function type are consolidated into the material (Murray, 1989; Willingham & Goedert-Eschmann, 1999).

### How Do Language Functions Relate to Beginner ESL Learners' Learning Needs?

*Breakthrough* and *Waystage* are the lower versions of *Threshold* and *Vantage* (Table 3). The higher the version, the more refined are the specific language functions used. Under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) language proficiency scale, *Breakthrough* is intended for A1 Level students; *Waystage* is for A2 Level students; *Threshold* is for B1 Level students; and *Vantage* is for B2 Level students. *A1 Level* addresses the needs of basic ESL learners; while B Level caters to independent ESL learners. The analysis showed that most specific language functions adhered more to *Breakthrough* and *Waystage* specifications; while a few language functions point to *Threshold* and *Vantage* specifications of language functions. For instance, specific language functions under communication repair identified in *Waystage* and *Breakthrough* as signaling for non-understanding/asking for repetition/clarification/asking for spelling/asking to write something down/expressing ignorance/appealing for assistance/and asking to slow down were frequently used in most of the five ESL textbooks; on the other hand, expanded categories of specific language functions under communication repair identified in *Threshold* and *Vantage* series as hesitation pauses/confirmation/substituting/ correcting/supplying words, etc. were used sparingly in few of the ESL textbooks analyzed. Hence, it can be concluded that the language functions used in the five ESL textbooks primarily correlate to the needs of beginner ESL learners. Publishers have taken great care to ensure that the materials they have developed cover language specifications relevant to the needs of beginner ESL learners.

Table 3  
CEFR L2 Proficiency Level

| Level Group | Level Group Name | Level | Level Name            |
|-------------|------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| A           | Basic User       | A1    | Breakthrough          |
|             |                  | A2    | Waystage 1990         |
| B           | Independent User | B1    | Threshold 1990        |
|             |                  | B2    | Vantage               |
| C           | Proficient User  | C1    | Effective Operational |
|             |                  | C2    | Mastery               |

As this study endeavors to establish the relation between language functions and beginner learner's needs, further analysis was conducted to investigate the exponents used to fulfill the different language functions. According to Green (2012), the progression of lessons will be more evident on the language exponents than through the functions as the same language functions recur from beginner to advanced level textbooks. Thus, a second analysis was performed to investigate recommended exponents alongside language functions in the five ESL textbooks analyzed. This is to determine whether language forms used in the textbooks are relevant to beginner ESL learner's needs. Samples of the exponents gathered from the five ESL textbooks are:

*Click English*: "Where is the magazine?" "Where does Helen usually go?" "Where did you wash your car?" "Where are they?" "How often does Joe go to the movies?" "How many toothbrushes are there on the shelf?" "How much do you want?" "How many do you want?"

*Exploring English:* “Where is Barbara?” “Where is the truck?” “Where are the cards?” “When is the next bus?” “Where is Sam going?” “How is your family?” “How many months are there in a year?” “Why does Mr. Pasto like the painting?” “Why is Nancy feeling good?”

*Expressways:* “How do I get to the City Hall?” “How much is the rent?” “Where do you want this sofa?” “How do the pants fit?” “Where is the elevator?” “Where are the restrooms?” “How do you want to send it?” “Where were you yesterday evening?”

*Side by Side 1:* “Where is Mr. Molina?” “Where are Mr. and Mrs. Sharp?” “Where is the school?” “Why is Amy happy there?” “Where does he live?” “How often do you wash your car? Why?” “What time is it?” “How does David feel?” “How did he get to the train station?” “How does Maria communicate with her friends?”

*Speed up English:* “When is your birthday?” “Where do you live?” “How many nights would you like to stay?” “How much is the Teddy bear?” “How big is it?” “How can I turn it off?” “How come?” “Why do you want to take him to the palace?”

Abstracted exponents were then compared and contrasted to the guidelines of exponents expected from beginner users as prescribed by *Threshold Series*. For instance, the specific language function of “asking *wh* questions” under the general language function of “imparting and seeking factual information” recommended the exponents shown in Table 4 as expected of CEFR levels A1, A2, B1, and B2. The results revealed that though general and specific language functions seem to correspond to the needs of beginner ESL students, most exponents are more representative of *Threshold* and *Vantage* specifications than they are of the *Breakthrough* or *Waystage* specifications. For instance, under the *Breakthrough* or *Waystage* specifications, asking *wh* questions consists primarily of a single word or a simple syntactical structure as exponents, such as: *Where? How many? Why?* etc. However, beginner ESL textbooks use longer and more complicated syntactical structures for their exponents such as: *Where did you wash your car? How many months are there in a year? Why does Mr. Pasto like the painting?* This finding suggests that while the language function specifications in the five language learning textbooks correlate to beginner ESL learners, the exponents used to achieve the target language functions do not. Most of the exponents are more suitable for independent rather than beginner learners. Alos (1992), in a study of syllabus design, emphasized the importance of selecting language exponents appropriate to the proficiency level of the target students. Accordingly, at lower levels of proficiency, students are expected to recognize and produce language exponents of isolated vocabulary items. More sophisticated exponents may be chosen as students progress to higher levels of proficiency. Hence, teachers and textbook developers should ensure that the exponents they choose match the level of their target learners appropriately. As there are a whole range of exponents to perform one language function, simple and less complicated language exponents may be chosen for beginner learners. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated inconsistencies between English textbook content and actual language use (Swales & Feak, 1994; Williams, 1988; Wilson, 2002).

Table 4

*Exponents Used in Asking Wh-Questions from Threshold Series*

| Breakthrough<br>(A1) | Waystage<br>(A2)                | Threshold<br>(B1)            | Vantage<br>(B2)   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| When?                | When?                           | When will the guests arrive? | Same exponents as used in <i>Threshold</i> but with the addition of the following:<br><br>When is it your train leaves ( <i>wh</i> + is it + complement clause) |
| Where?               | Where?                          | Where is my purse?           |   |
| How?                 | How?                            | How do you make an omelet?   |   |
|                      | How far/much/<br>long/hot/etc.? | How far is it to New York?   |   |
| Why?                 | Why?                            | Why did you say that?        |   |



### Discussion and Conclusion

All of the texts in this study have allotted a greater portion of their content to informative function. According to Pien (1985), the informative function is the most sophisticated and the final linguistic function to develop as it is dependent on the context. For teachers, this implies the need to provide sufficient scaffolding as they use these materials, especially for low beginner ESL learners. Teachers may also want to consider a variety of techniques or methods of teaching in order to facilitate learning of the target language. On the other hand, instructional materials developers may look into ways to effectively and clearly convey meanings, concepts, and ideas to learners. For instance, they may consider the use of pictures, drawings, and other visual representations or incorporate more creative activities like games, role playing, enrichment exercises, etc., as a way to facilitate learning despite focusing on more sophisticated language functions. Another way is for textbook designers to make use of students' prior knowledge when developing instructional materials to motivate and arouse interest among beginner learners. Attempts have also been made to present local culture in English language materials. Localization and cultural adaptation of ESL instructional materials are recent trends which may provide alternatives to material developers.

Both general and specific language functions play a crucial role in attaining the objectives of ESL textbooks and addressing beginner ESL learners' needs. On this account, a great challenge lies ahead for instructional material designers and ESL teachers to ensure a greater representation of language functions when developing ESL textbooks. The study also revealed that general language functions are less informative than specific language functions when analyzed in relation to textbook objectives and beginner learners' needs primarily because they tended to be repetitive throughout the analysis. Specific language functions, however, disclosed key elements in determining the themes, topics, strategies, and activities contained in instructional materials.

While language functions were correlated to beginner learners' needs as per *Threshold* series criteria, the result did not yield much data on the language forms contained in the textbooks. Language functions have to be examined alongside language exponents to determine syntactical structures, lexical, and grammatical content used in the textbooks. This finding reveals the salient relationship between language functions and language exponents.

Moreover, the multifunctional analysis conducted in this study reflected how language functions and their exponents provided data on both language forms (structures, words, and phrases) and language context. The use of language functions and exponents as a core component of ESL textbooks highlights both of these key features that have long divided the structural and communicative paradigms in language education.

As this study covered only five ESL textbooks, future researchers may expand their analysis to include more texts. Additionally, researchers may explore this concept further in textbooks aimed at higher learner levels.

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## Effects of Implementing Cooperative Learning Method (CLM) on Eleventh Graders' Paragraph Writing

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### Abstract

This quasi-experimental study probed the effects of implementing cooperative learning method (CLM) on paragraph writing in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. The participants of the study were grade 11 students at Yekatit 12 Preparatory School, Ethiopia. The CLM (experimental) group was taught paragraph writing skills in line with the principles of cooperative learning. The traditional learning method (control) group was not instructed to practice composing paragraphs using CLM. Pre- and post-tests were used on a paragraph writing task. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. In addition, the selected participants from the experimental group were interviewed. Their responses were video recorded and analysed qualitatively to learn their feelings about the effects of implementing CLM in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. The results of the study after the intervention indicated that the experimental group significantly outscored the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ) on a paragraph writing post-test with regard to content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. The focus group interview results also showed that the experimental group participants preferred to use CLM to traditional learning methods. Finally, it was concluded that implementing CLM in an EFL class helped the experimental group participants compose better paragraphs in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. On the basis of these findings and conclusions, a careful employment of CLM during paragraph writing stages was suggested as a pedagogical implication.

**Keywords:** cooperative learning method, writing skills, traditional learning, Ethiopia

### Introduction

Recent studies in the field of language teaching accentuate the importance of the learning process and the central role of students (Leila, 2010). This situation is realized, among other things, when students are provided opportunities to learn cooperatively. In this regard, Richards and Rodgers (2001) contend that traditional learning methods, which do not focus on the learning process and the central role of students, is a teacher-fronted approach that fosters competition rather than cooperation. This is because, 70% of class time is being used by the teacher while the students are sitting and listening passively (Cuban, 1983). Rutherford and Stuart (1978) showed that this kind of teaching can lead to a decrease in students' attention as lectures progress.

When there is a shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach, teacher talk is generally reduced by around 50%, and the extra time can be spent praising and aiding students in their exchange of ideas. Thus, in cooperative classrooms, students remain in charge of their own discoveries and can become truly excited about the learning process (Vermette, 1998).

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Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) argued that cooperative learning method (CLM) is clearly based on theory which has been validated by research and operationalized on the basis of the procedures that educators use. When students are motivated to help one another in the process of learning, a stage for cognitive development is created. In this regard, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that cooperation promotes learning because the process of cooperation during learning enables students to operate within one another's Zones of Proximal Development.

Working with peers has academic benefits because it enables students to comprehend things more easily than solely listening to an explanation given by a person at a different stage of development than the learners themselves. Similarly, Hirst and Sinclair (1989) explained that when students or tutees seek out peer help, they receive individualized instruction and more focused teaching; they may also respond better to their peers than their teachers, and they can build relationships with their tutors. Moreover, Krashen and Terrel (1983) indicated that input from CLM is likely to be comprehensible and contributes to second or first language learning as group members' language levels may be roughly equal. This, according to Krashen and Terrel, facilitates learning which results in higher levels of understanding and reasoning, the development of critical thinking, and a possible increase in the accuracy of long-term retention.

Students sometimes experience stabilization, i.e., incorrect linguistic features which become a permanent part of the way students speak or write a language despite further exposure or instruction. Aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and grammar may become fixed or stabilized in SL/FL learning. Stabilized features of pronunciation contribute to a student's unique accent that may differ from that of a native speaker of the target language. Some researchers are skeptical of the existence of true fossilization, which implies the impossibility of future change, and prefer the term stabilization (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). As a solution to the problem of fossilization, Santiago (2010) suggested that constant exposure to input, sufficient opportunities to use the target language, and the enhancing role of the teacher to guide and give corrective feedback are necessary; additionally, a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom can prevent or at least minimise fossilization. The solution suggested by Santiago seems to be realized when students are allowed to learn cooperatively. Bruner (1978) also added that if a task is beyond learners' levels of understanding that they should be provided with scaffolding as cognitive support by their teachers to help them solve tasks that they may not be able to solve while working on their own.

Recognizing the value of cooperative learning, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education issued the National Education Policy (1994), which require teachers to practice group work and student-centred teaching. Specifically, teachers are asked to implement the Learning Together Method (LTM) or One-to-Five Learning Method (OFLM). This is a type of cooperative learning or peer-collaboration method which engages students in working two to five heterogeneous member groups on a given task to accomplish mutual learning goals. Teammates work on academic and social tasks that involve them preparing a single team product to which all contribute and receive praise or rewards based on the group product. This method emphasizes team-building activities before students begin working together. As such, LTM/ OFLM includes the elements of Cooperative Learning. However, the appropriate implementation of LTM/ OFLM in classrooms in Ethiopia have encountered several problems, due mostly to teachers' lack of training. Ambaye (1999) found that many teachers in Ethiopia lack the critical determination of effective teaching; that is, they lack the pedagogical content knowledge and motivation although they are in the front line of education reform programmes. Ambaye further explained that teachers in the current training institutes of Ethiopia predominantly use conventional/traditional types of teaching methods that they are familiar to them perhaps even the ones that they themselves experienced when they were students at schools. Some studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of CLM in Ethiopia. For example, Seid (2012) investigated the effects of CLM on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading comprehension achievement and the social skills of tenth graders. Seifu (2005) assessed group activities in grade nine English textbooks whether or not they promoted cooperative learning focusing on speaking skills. To the best of my knowledge, no studies have been carried out to identify the effects of implementing CLM on eleventh graders' paragraph writing in line with content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. This

paper aims to fill this gap. Its results may be relevant to practical classroom application. Probing the issue may help students to fill a gap in paragraph writing skills and to help them skilfully juxtapose appropriate content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics in their compositions.

Specifically, the present study attempts to examine whether or not CLM could help the experimental group compose appropriate paragraphs in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. To this end, the researcher used pre- and post-tests on a paragraph writing task to measure learners' improvements in writing paragraphs before and after the interventions.

### CLM versus Traditional Learning Methods

Though some English language teachers believe that they use CLM in their classes, they may not find its implementation as simple as what the literature suggests. The secret lies in the differentiating features between CLM and traditional learning methods. Some distinguishing features adapted from Kessler (1992), Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991), and McDonnell (1992) are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*Differences between CLM and Traditional Learning Methods*

| CLM   | Traditional learning methods  |
|---|---|
| Teamwork skills are emphasized.   | Focus on practicing drills without team work.   |
| Members are taught collaborative skills and expected to use them.   | Few are appointed or put in charge of the group.  |
| Leadership is shared by all members.  |   |
| Structuring of the procedures and time for processing.  | Rare structuring of procedures and time for processing.   |
| Teachers are facilitators, observers, change agents, advisers and supporters.   | Teachers are controllers and authorities.   |
| Group as well as individual accomplishments are rewarded.   | Group members compete with each other and withhold information "If you succeed, I will lose". So, only individual accomplishments are rewarded. |
| Students analyse how well their groups are functioning; how well they are using the appropriate social skills, and how to improve the quality of their work together. | No processing of how well the groups is functioning or how to improve the quality of the work together.   |

### Effects of CLM on Writing Skills

Several studies have looked into the effects of CLM on students' writing skills (Chatupote, Nudée, & Teo, 2010; Kitchakarn, 2012; Najar, 2012). These studies indicate that students who learned writing through CLM achieved a higher level of writing ability than those who studied through traditional learning methods. Ismail and Maasum's (2009) research findings also showed that CLM could enhance writing performance in terms of form. The present study bears a resemblance to Ismail and Maasum's (2009) study, but differs significantly in context, methodology, and variables considered. These researchers studied low proficiency students in Malaysia while the participants of this study are preparatory students (grade 11) with diverse proficiency levels at Yekatit 12 in Ethiopia.

According to Li and Lam (2005), CLM may have the following effects: teachers can gain insights on the purposes of employing it in EFL classes; students who come from different English language backgrounds can learn to cooperate with one another, not only in EFL classrooms, but also in their daily lives; students can learn to understand the issues related to CLM that can have an impact on their writing achievements; policy and other

educational decision making authorities can create feasible policies that promote its implementation; and interested researchers can gain inspiration in studying the same or related topics further.

As education is a means of development and eradicating poverty in developing countries like Ethiopia, the needs of a society should be reflected in the educational objectives of a particular country (Ministry of Education, 2002). To this end, the New Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia has given due emphasis to active learning (Ministry of Education, 1994). Active learning is a learning strategy that provides students with opportunities for meaningful talking, listening, writing, reading, and reflection on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of an academic subject (Meyers & Jones, 1993). CLM, according to Johnson and Johnson (1990), focuses on active interactions among students while working together on a given task. Furthermore, Peter and Daniel (2002) argued that cooperative and collaborative learning are two approaches to active learning using groups or teams. So, it is possible to say that CLM is a subset of active learning.

### **Research Questions**

The aim of this study is to look into the effects of implementing CLM in English writing class on grade 11 students at Yekatit 12 Preparatory School. The main focus is to look into whether CLM can help students to write better paragraphs. Quasi-experimental research was conducted to achieve this goal. As mentioned above, this study examined intra- and inter-group comparisons between the control and experimental groups overall results in content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. Thus, the study endeavors to address the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on paragraph writing post-test in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics?
2. What are the students' perceptions about the effects of implementing CLM while writing assorted paragraphs in the EFL class?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

In Yekatit 12 Preparatory School, in the 2014 academic year, there were six EFL teachers teaching eleventh graders in 18 different sections. Of these EFL teachers, one was selected randomly and invited to participate in the research. The teacher taught two sections of eleventh graders and the participants in the two sections were given a paragraph writing pre-test. Out of these 96 students in these sections, only 86 students responded appropriately to the pre-test and thus only these were put into the experimental group and the control groups (43 in each group). Almost all the participants were between 17 and 19 years old. All had studied English for eleven years, beginning from the first year of schooling. They use English primarily for academic studies (particularly from grade seven) and learn it as a subject. The experiment was carried out with the agreement of the classroom teacher, students, and the school directors.

#### **Tasks and Materials**

##### ***For the Teacher***

The teacher that taught the selected sections was offered training on CLM as their awareness of the method might have an influence on the results of the quasi-experimental study. For a week prior to the intervention the teacher was provided training with the definition of cooperative learning (CL), elements of CLM, the necessity of teaching social skills, the formation of CL groups, types of CL groups, teachers' and students' roles in this type of EFL class, kinds of CLM, and the benefits and drawbacks of CLM. The researcher gave the training on the basis of their own knowledge of CLM from the literature and experiences teaching EFL classes. For the training, the researcher referred to the following books: *Cooperation and Competition: Theory and Research* by Johnson



& Johnson (1989); *What is Cooperative Learning?* by Johnson & Johnson (1990); *CL: Integrating Theory and Practices* by Gillies (2007); *A practical Guide to CL* by Slavin (1994); *Research on CL and Achievement: What we Know, What we Need to Know* by Slavin (1996); *Enhancing Teaching and Learning through CL* by Kirk (2005); *An Experimental Study to Evaluate the Effectiveness of CL versus Traditional Learning Methods* by Khan (2008); *Applying CL to English Teaching for EFL Students* by Xiaoshuang (2011); and *Ability Grouping* by Bainbridge (2014).

### **For the Students**

Tests which take many forms provide a way to assess participants' knowledge and capacity to apply this knowledge to new situations. They may require respondents to choose among alternatives, produce short answers, or write extended responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Considering Guba and Lincoln's (1981) ideas, the researcher administered pre- and post-tests for the experimental and control groups to gauge their paragraph writing skills. The paragraph writing tests were adapted from Brenda (1997). The tests were comprised of four different types of topics and the participants were asked to choose and write on any two topics. The paragraphs were marked based on content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. The reliability of the paragraph writing tests was calculated using the split-half method. The reliability coefficient was 0.81 for the pre-test and 0.77 for the post-test.

In the pre-test (see Appendix A), students were asked to compose a text on the following topics: narrating a joyful or painful event, describing their favourite relative, explaining their favourite TV show, and arguing against or for the implementation of capital punishment. The topics were assumed to be familiar with all the participants as they are related to the participants' day to day lives. Their papers were marked by the researcher. Learners who achieved similar results were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups in their intact classes.

After the pre-test, eight writing tasks meant for practice, in addition to the pre- and post-writing tests, were given to each group at different times. The participants in the experimental group were taught paragraph writing activities with the lesson plans prepared by the researcher based on the following:

- It involves the explicit teaching of social skills necessary for group functioning.
- It emphasises team-building activities before students begin working together.
- It should be continuous with the curriculum rather than an isolated add-on and engage students in exploring and applying the content currently being taught.
- Each group works on the same task simultaneously and pools its resources. Only one completed activity sheet is submitted from the group. Each student within the group makes his/her own verbal/written contribution to the given activity.
- Students are assigned specific roles (tasks) in order to facilitate the smooth running of the group work.
- Students are given the opportunity to reflect on and self-evaluate their own helpful and unhelpful behaviours during cooperative group work. (as cited in Kirk, 2005, p. 18)

Participants in the control group, on the other hand, were given the same writing activities via a traditional learning method, which was non-CL. The lesson plans were prepared by the subject teacher based on the course textbook and teacher guide. The time given for discussions and composing a paragraph to each group was equal, i.e., 25 minutes for discussions and 15 minutes for composing a paragraph.

The experiment was conducted over two months. After the treatment, a paragraph writing post-test (see Appendix B) was administered. The post-test also consisted of four items whose contents were similar to the issues raised in the pre-test and the participants were again asked to write on any two topics. The aim of the paragraph writing post-test was to weigh the possible effects on the experimental group's writing after the intervention.

Two teachers with MA degrees in English corrected each of the groups' compositions. They were asked to rate the students' paragraphs for content, vocabulary, layout, grammar and mechanics on a scale of 0–4 for each

category, making it a total of 20 points for each paragraph. After the two teachers had finished marking the students' papers, the researcher then compared the ratings given by the teachers to each student. When the ratings were similar, they were recorded as the final rating. When there were differences, the researcher took the average of the two ratings. The two teachers' ratings had a correlation of 0.81 for the pre-test. Since this indicated that their ratings had an acceptable degree of agreement, the same teachers were asked to rate the post-test paragraphs in the same procedure.

### Focus Group Interview

Six randomly selected participants (two high, two average, and two lower achievers) from the experimental group were interviewed by the researcher (see Appendix C). They were interviewed whether or not the effects of implementing CLM helped them improve their paragraph writing in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics; they were asked why they could say 'yes' or 'no' to the question posed. The final question that the researcher raised was if they encountered any problems while writing paragraphs through CLM and if their answer was 'yes', they were asked to suggest some solutions in connection with the problems. The focus group interviews were conducted for twenty minutes after the paragraph writing post-test had been administered and responses were video recorded to analyse the content validity.

### Analytical Procedure

The participants' paragraph writing pre- and post-test results were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for Windows, i.e., their inter- and intra-group comparisons were analysed through independent and paired samples t-tests respectively.

## Findings

To measure the participants' skills in paragraph writing in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics, the results from the pre-test and post-tests were compared. The effect size was measured using Cohen's d index of effect size formula to see how strong the relationship between the variables was (Cohen, 1988). Coe (2002) and Elis (2010) showed that the difference between two groups is calculated by subtracting the mean of one group from the other (M1-M2) and dividing the result by the standard deviation of the population from which the groups were sampled. In this study, Cohen (1988) showed the degrees of effect sizes as 0 - 0.20 = weak, 0.21 - 0.50 = modest, 0.51 - 1.00 = moderate and > 1.00 = strong. The results and analyses of the tests are provided in the next section.

Table 2

*Differences between the Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups on Paragraph Writing Pre-Test and Independent Samples T-Test for Equality of Means*

| Groups       | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Max | Min | Range | t     | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------|------|----------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|----|-----------------|
| Control      | 9.54 | 2.11           | .322            | 16  | 5   | 11    | -.389 | 84 | .698            |
| Experimental | 9.70 | 1.75           | .267            | 16  | 7   | 9     |       |    |                 |

*Notes.* alpha > 0.05 ; N = 86

Table 2 presents a comparison between the mean gain scores of the experimental and control groups on the paragraph writing pre-test. The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that the mean score of the control group on the paragraph writing pre-test was 9.54 and that of the experimental group was 9.70. The table also



shows that the standard deviation of paragraph writing scores for the control and experimental groups were 2.11 and 1.75 respectively. The maximum and minimum ranges for both groups were 11 and 9 respectively. The independent samples t-test reveals that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control and experimental groups on the paragraph writing pre-test at 0.05 alpha level. The effect size for this comparison was 0.08 which indicates that the difference that existed between the two groups paragraph writing pre-test scores was insignificant. This indicates that the participants in both groups were at the same level in paragraph writing skills at the onset of this research.

Table 3

*Differences between the Mean Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups on Paragraph Writing Post-Test and Independent Samples T-Test for Equality of Means*

| Groups       | Mean  | Std.<br>Deviation | Std. Error<br>Mean | Max | Min | Range | t      | df | Sig.<br>(2-tailed) |
|--------------|-------|-------------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|--------|----|--------------------|
| Control      | 9.72  | 2.44              | .373               | 17  | 5   | 12    |        |    |                    |
| Experimental | 11.63 | 2.13              | .324               | 17  | 9   | 8     | -3.860 | 84 | .000               |

*Notes.* Alpha < 0.05; N= 86

As can be seen in Table 3, the mean score of the control group is 9.72 (std. 2.44) whereas the mean score of the experimental group is greater, at 11.63 (std. 2.13). Their maximum and minimum ranges are also different. The independent samples t-test shows that the p value was .000 which was lower than the alpha value (0.05). Hence, the t-test for equality of means shows that there was a significant difference between the participants of the control and experimental groups on the paragraph writing post-test. The effect size, i.e., 1.03, shows that the extent of the difference between the two groups in achievement on the paragraph writing post-test was strong. Thus, it could be understood that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test. The difference may be a result of the treatment offered to the experimental group.

Next, I show the comparison between the control and experimental groups' paragraph writing pre- and post-tests in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics.

As demonstrated in Table 4, the mean scores of the students in the control group on composite paragraph writing pre-post tests were slightly different. Table 4 shows that the mean score for the composite pre-test was 9.54 whereas that of the composite post-test was 9.72. The standard deviation (SD) of the composite post-test for the participants in the control group was slightly higher than their own scores in the composite pre-test. This indicates that there were gaps in the participants' scores on the post-test. Table 4 also depicts a comparison of the means scored by the participants in the control group in terms of the content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics of the paragraph writing pre-and post-tests. The figures in the composite pre-post-test, i.e.,  $t=.928$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.358$  reveal that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control group on paragraph writing pre-post-tests in terms of the said components. The effect size between the composite pre- and post-tests of the control group was 0.07 which shows that the difference was trivial.

Table 5 reveals the mean scores of the paragraph writing pre-post-tests in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics of the experimental group. The experimental group mean scores on composite pre- and post-tests were 9.70 and 11.63. All components in the table reflect higher scores in the post-test than in the pre-test. The SD also indicates that the participants' post-test scores were mostly greater than that of the pre-test. Hence, the experimental group's paragraph writing pre-post mean scores were different. The table also shows a comparison of the means scored by the participants in the experimental group in line with the composite pre-post-tests and other components of paragraph writing pre-post-tests. The figures in the table, i.e.,  $t=-2.439$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.009$ ;  $t=-3.597$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.001$ ;  $t=-2.630$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.012$ ;  $t=-2.986$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.005$ ;  $t=-3.532$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.001$ ; and  $t=-10.521$ ,  $df=42$ ,  $p=.000$  reveal that there were statistically significant differences among the mean scores of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, mechanics, and composite pre-post-tests of the experimental

group respectively. The effect size of the composite paragraph writing pre-post-test was 1, which shows that the difference between the pre-post-tests was strong.

Table 4

*Differences between the Mean Scores of the Control Group Pre- and Post Tests and Paired Samples T-Test for Equality of Means*

| Variables  | Tests     | Mean | Std.<br>Deviation | Std.<br>Error Mean | t     | df | Sig.(2-<br>tailed) |
|------------|-----------|------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|----|--------------------|
| Content    | Pre-test  | 1.84 | .58               | .088               | -.725 | 42 | .472               |
|            | Post-test | 1.96 | .98               | .149               |       |    |                    |
| Vocabulary | Pre-test  | 2.02 | .831              | .127               | .206  | 42 | .838               |
|            | Post-test | 2.00 | .817              | .125               |       |    |                    |
| Layout     | Pre-test  | 1.93 | .55               | .084               | -.206 | 42 | .838               |
|            | Post-test | 1.95 | .69               | .105               |       |    |                    |
| Grammar    | Pre-test  | 1.98 | .51               | .093               | .172  | 42 | .864               |
|            | Post-test | 1.95 | .79               | .120               |       |    |                    |
| Mechanics  | Pre-test  | 1.77 | .61               | .093               | -.892 | 42 | .377               |
|            | Post-test | 1.86 | .74               | .113               |       |    |                    |
| Composite  | Pre-test  | 1.86 | .74               | .113               | -.928 | 42 | .358               |
|            | Post-test | 9.54 | 2.11              | .322               |       |    |                    |

Notes. alpha > 0.05; N=43

Table 5

*Differences between the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group on Content, Vocabulary, Layout, Grammar and Mechanics Pre- and Post Tests and Paired Samples T-Test for Equality of Means*

| Variables  | Tests     | Mean  | Std.<br>Deviation | Std.<br>Error Mean | T       | df | Sig.(2-tailed) |
|------------|-----------|-------|-------------------|--------------------|---------|----|----------------|
| Content    | Pre-test  | 1.88  | .70               | .106               | -2.439  | 42 | .019           |
|            | Post-test | 2.26  | .88               | .134               |         |    |                |
| Vocabulary | Pre-test  | 1.81  | .66               | .101               | -3.597  | 42 | .001           |
|            | Post-test | 2.23  | .68               | .104               |         |    |                |
| Layout     | Pre-test  | 2.07  | .67               | .102               | -2.630  | 42 | .012           |
|            | Post-test | 2.42  | .73               | .111               |         |    |                |
| Grammar    | Pre-test  | 1.98  | .51               | .078               | -2.986  | 42 | .005           |
|            | Post-test | 2.35  | .65               | .099               |         |    |                |
| Mechanics  | Pre-test  | 2.00  | .62               | .094               | -3.532  | 42 | .001           |
|            | Post-test | 2.37  | .58               | .088               |         |    |                |
| Composite  | Pre-test  | 9.70  | 1.75              | .267               | -10.521 | 42 | .000           |
|            | Post-test | 11.63 | 2.13              | .324               |         |    |                |

Notes. alpha < 0.05; N = 43

### **Participants' Views about the Effects of Implementing CL during Paragraph Writing Activities**

Six randomly selected participants (2 high, 2 average, and 2 lower achievers based on their post-test results from the experimental group) were asked whether or not the effects of implementing CLM helped them compose better paragraphs with a focus on content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. They were also asked to justify why they said 'yes' or 'no' to the question posed. In addition, they were asked if they encountered any problems while writing paragraphs through CLM and if their answer was 'yes', they were asked to suggest solutions to the problems.

All the interviewees unanimously agreed on the usefulness of CLM to practice writing assorted paragraphs because the method helped them exercise social skills and generate ideas better than the traditional learning method, which was non-CL. The respondents mentioned that they sometimes encountered problems while writing paragraphs cooperatively. The main problems that they raised were some students' dependency on more competent students, disagreements among members of the group and unfamiliarity with the method. As solutions to these problems, they suggested that elements of CL and a mixed ability grouping system had to be practiced appropriately. Moreover, the teacher intervened and offered support to the students who were writing paragraphs in their respective teams. This helped them to develop confidence that might, in turn, help them not to be dependent.

### **Discussion**

This study shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of both groups on the paragraph writing post-test in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics at 0.05 alpha level. This difference occurred possibly because the method used by the experimental group during the intervention was more effective than that of the control group in developing these skills. Students also seemed to have positive reaction to CLM, although they also pointed out some important issues that teachers can take into consideration when implementing CLM.

The study was limited to one preparatory school in which one grade level and only two sections of this grade were used for the study; so, generalizing the findings of this research to other settings may be difficult. In addition, during the data collection, the teacher and the students in the experimental and control groups were observed by the researcher, which may have affected the results. Finally, as the study was a quasi-experimental research design, it was challenging for the researcher to control all of the extraneous variables that potentially threatened the study's internal validity during the intervention.

Nonetheless, the findings show that CLM resulted in significantly positive outcomes after it had been implemented to teach paragraph writing skills. The participants in this study gained the benefits of the method and improved their paragraph writing skills. These findings are consistent with the previous research conducted by Adeyemi (2008), which revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in writing skills with the experimental group after implementing CLM in a writing class. Furthermore, the findings seem to be in agreement with Sirikhun (2000) and Ismail and Maasum (2009). Their studies show improvements in student achievement after learning writing skills through CLM. They indicate that the students performed better in the post-test as compared to the pre-test after the inclusion of CLM in the writing class.

The experimental group participants outperformed the control group participants on the paragraph writing post-test perhaps because they practiced composing different paragraphs via CLM. Furthermore, the method created more frequent interactive and supportive learning environments within which learners had the chance to ask questions, organize ideas, and decide the best concepts to help them produce better compositions. The interviewees in the experimental group witnessed that employing CLM was a great help for them in composing better paragraphs in terms of the investigated components. Their responses also support the statistical findings reported earlier.

Sociocultural theorists have suggested that when students perform a given task cooperatively, they can operate within one another's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The social interdependent theorist

Lewin (1948) also argued that the CLM encourages students to help their classmates succeed, contrary to competitive and individualistic learning methods. To this end, group members encourage other group members to exert a maximum amount of effort in their learning. This kind of learning among the participants in the experimental group enabled them to augment their paragraph writing skills in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics.

### Conclusion

As mentioned above, the policy to implement group work in Ethiopia has encountered some important problems. To alleviate or possibly circumvent these problems, CLM should be used because it provides the students with: (a) the opportunity for reviewing what they have written as peer criticism aids them sharpening their knowledge about paragraph structures and grammatical rules, (b) awareness of group formation systems and the elements of CL, and (c) the chance of evaluating their own work. This can help them to demonstrate more confidence in writing assorted paragraphs and help to decrease their apprehension towards learning writing skills. Thus, making traditional learning methods cooperative in EFL classes will be of great benefit to them to boost paragraph writing skills in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics.

This study showed that implementing CLM in an EFL class had positive effects on eleventh graders' paragraph writing skills in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. This finding is also in agreement with other similar research in different countries (e.g., Ismail & Maasum, 2009). Recent approaches in the field of language teaching acknowledge the relevance of this method, however, it should be used cautiously as it may lead low achievers to become dependent on higher achievers and hamper the participation of students who have a lower level of understanding. The current findings suggest that the one-to-five group learning method, which is being practiced in Ethiopia, can be effectively implemented in line with the principles of CLM. Since the National Education Policy (1994) emphasizes students' cooperation to acquire knowledge, this type of approach can decrease competitiveness and individualism and increases opportunities to actively construct knowledge among students through cooperation. EFL teachers should know that making students get together and study does not automatically mean that CLM is being used, and does not necessarily lead to effective learning. Cooperation is much more than being physically near other students. Therefore, EFL teachers should be trained in CLM so that they are able to incorporate its principles into group work. This could also enable them to structure cooperativeness among members in each group and intervene to improve the effectiveness of any group that is not able to do the activities well in EFL classes.

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**Appendix A**  
**Paragraph Writing Pre-test for Eleventh Graders**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_

Time Allotted: 40 Minutes

Total Mark: 20 points per paragraph

**Directions**

This is a paragraph writing test which is intended to examine your skills in writing paragraphs. Of the given questions, choose any two and write appropriate paragraphs with legible handwriting.

1. Write a narrative paragraph on one of your painful events.

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2. Describe your favourite relative.

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3. Write an expository paragraph about your favourite TV show.

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4. Abortion must be legal. Write an argumentative paragraph either supporting or opposing the motion.

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**Appendix B**  
**Paragraph Writing Post-test for Eleventh Graders**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_

Time Allotted: 50 Minutes

Total Mark: 20 points per paragraph

**Directions**

This is a paragraph writing test which is intended to examine your skills in writing narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative paragraphs. Hence, of the give four options, choose any two and write them with legible hand writing.

1. Think about your high school life, and write a narrative paragraph about the things you used to do.

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2. Describe your home.

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3. Write a contrast paragraph on the topic “city life and countryside life”.

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4. Capital punishment has to be banned. Write an argumentative paragraph either supporting or opposing the notion.

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## **Appendix C**

### **Focus Group Interview for the Research Participants in the Experimental Group**

1. Do you feel that CLM helps you improve your paragraph writing skills? Why?
2. Have you come across any problem when you learned paragraph writing lessons through CLM? If your answer is 'yes', how did you solve the problem(s).
3. What do you comment to make the implementation of CLM

Thank you in advance!

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## **Stylistics in the Southeast Asian ESL or EFL Classroom: A Collection of Potential Teaching Activities**

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### **Abstract**

For the past few decades, stylistics has emerged as a discipline that encompasses both literary criticism and linguistics. The integration of both disciplines opened many opportunities for English literature and language teachers to get creative in their teaching—by introducing the stylistic approach in their classrooms. However, in a typical Southeast Asian classroom (Sadiman, 2004), several problems such as the lack of resources, scarcity of quality teaching strategies, time deficiency, as well as the unfamiliarity of authentic assessment seem to impede the utilization of the mentioned approach or other learner-centered approaches. Moreover, only limited literature on the analysis, let alone the teaching, of the ballad adopting the stylistic method are evident. This paper could be described as an attempt to address these problems. It provides a fresh perspective in analyzing a well-known 18th century British ballad, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” in the syntactical/structural, lexical, and phonological aspects of stylistics. It also attempts to explain the evident theme of warfare based on textual evidences in the aforementioned aspects. In addition, it contributes to the existing literature advocating the stylistic approach in both the teaching of language and literature. Furthermore, it provides several potential comprehensive activities that take into account the challenging setting and situation of Southeast Asian English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, especially at the tertiary level. This paper also has implications on classrooms that experience the same aforementioned challenges, and is not only limited to the Southeast Asian context.

**Keywords:** activities, ESL, EFL, lexis, phonology, syntax, tertiary

### **Introduction**

It is apparent that Southeast Asian language classrooms tend to be more teacher-centered than student-centered (Renandya, Lim, Leong, & Jacobs, 2014). This could pose a problem, as the learning potential of the learners may not be maximized in a teacher-centered setting. Learner-centered practices stress higher-order thinking skills such as synthesizing, analyzing, and evaluating (Brookhart, 2010). Teachers who adopt these practices also train them to become more independent, creative, and active in learning, which may be mutually beneficial as teachers learn useful information to enhance their teaching while learning from their students. It can be observed that a lot of teachers in Southeast Asia prefer not to use the learner-centered approach (Renandya et al., 2014). Renandya et al. (2014) studied 212 English teachers in Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines and discovered that they are still moving toward learner-centered practices in the classroom. Moreover, results of the study showed that assessment practices in the aforementioned countries are traditional or exam-based. In another study by Pham and Renshaw (2013), results showed that Vietnamese classrooms were still predominantly teacher-centered, textbook -based, and routine-based.

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Some possible causes for the impediment of the full paradigm shift to learner-centered teaching would be (1) lack of time and skills, (2) the flawed relationship between assessment and teaching because teachers are pressured to produce exam results that do not measure communicative language use, (3) quantity and quality of materials, (4) diverse philosophies and views on instruction, as mentioned in the study by Renandya et al. (2014).

The needs of a typical Southeast Asian classroom (Sadiman, 2004) can be summarized as follows: (1) lack of resources, (2) lack of time, (3) lack of learner-centered strategies, (4) lack of authentic assessments, and (5) lack of teacher training and professional skills. In this paper, we aim to cater to these needs by starting with a stylistic analysis of one specific poem, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” and then offering potential activities suitable for Southeast Asian language classrooms. The stylistic analysis contributes to the limited studies on “The Charge of the Light Brigade” by discovering the theme of the literary text through textual evidence. Based on the analysis we aim to provide educators with potential activities focusing on syntax, phonology, and lexis that will lead their language or literature learners to an interpretation of the ballad. These activities are not only time-efficient, resource-friendly, and easy to implement but also anchored on learner-centered philosophies. They are flexible and may be modified depending on the needs of the learners and teachers. Moreover, this paper suggests specific steps on how to implement activities that can help the learners develop an appreciation for poetry, history, and the English language, while also giving them an avenue to practice their language macro-skills in speaking, writing, reading, and listening.

In particular, this paper aims to answer the following questions: (1) What is the theme of “The Charge of the Light Brigade” based on syntactical, phonological, and lexical evidence from the poem itself? (2) How does the syntactical, phonological, and lexical evidence relate to the interpretation of the poem? (3) What potential stylistic activities in syntax, phonology, and lexis can educators utilize to teach learners to appreciate the beauty of literature and also language macro-skills such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening?

Before we present the analysis and teaching activities, we will discuss the relationship between language and literature, the nature of the stylistic approach, and the benefits of this approach on ESL/EFL literature and language classes.

### The Relationship between Literature and Language

Literature and language are thoroughly intertwined (Amase, Tsavmbu, & Kaan, 2014). Literature is a tool for understanding language in different cultural and classroom contexts. Thus, it can aid in language development. When teachers facilitate a discussion of a certain literary text, the learners are provided with an avenue to practice the language, especially when they voice their opinions and share their insights in oral or written forms. This, in turn, enhances the language proficiency of the learners. Moreover, literature also helps in the learning of a language, as some texts may have been adapted from real life conversations and situations (Wang, 2010).

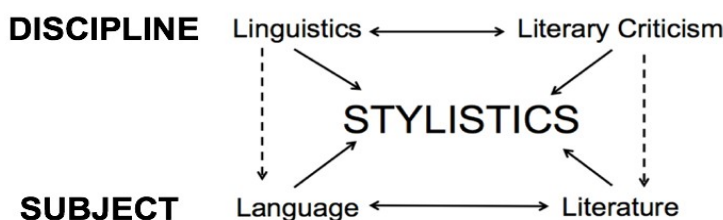


Figure 1. Grid of Relationships of Stylistics with Other Disciplines  
(Philippine Normal University, 2013, p. 246)

Ludwig Wittgenstein (2010), an Austrian-British philosopher, once said that the limits of one's language means the limits of one's world. Language is an integral part of literature because it is not only used to communicate or express ideas orally and in written form, it also serves as an artistic medium for the literary piece (Chapman, 1973). It is important for one to understand that aside from entertaining, one of the goals of literature is to inform. Another is to persuade and stimulate the mind. It is with language that literary ideas are formed. Furthermore, the study of language in literature, or linguistics, is essential in literary criticism as it teaches learners to appreciate the literary text, its syntax, lexis, and phonology, and its relationship to the interpretation of the text. The analysis of these literary ideas using language, or linguistics, is part of what is known as stylistics, which is a combination of language and literature and a bridging discipline between linguistics and literary criticism (See Figure 1) (Philippine Normal University, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates their relationships to stylistics.

### **Stylistics and the Stylistic Approach**

According to Leech (1969), stylistics is the study of the use of language in literature. Abdulqadir (2012) elaborates this by defining it as a study of a literary discourse from a linguistic orientation; it is an interdisciplinary subject (see Figure 1). In stylistics, one may focus on the syntactic, phonological, lexical, semantic, and graphological elements of style (Leech & Short, 1981). The elements mentioned earlier are important considerations in text analysis because they portray the range of senses expressed in a literary piece. They are integral to the stylistic analysis of the text as they provide readers a more objective way into the text, which may be beneficial as it complements the subjective analyses of the readers (Carter, 1982), which is typically found in a traditional literature classroom where the teacher assigns the learners a reading and after a while asks them comprehension questions at the literal, inferential, and evaluative levels. Teachers in the conventional literature classroom may also ask the them to identify the plot through a diagram. The subjective analyses pertain to the inferential and evaluative levels of questioning such as asking the author's purpose or the moral lesson of the story. Thus, the stylistic approach may help the readers read and think critically. Not only does it allow them to read between (inferential), and beyond (evaluative) the lines to comprehend the text, it encourages them to look at the text itself (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010).

Because of the potential advantages and the tested deficiencies of traditional poetry teaching, educators around the world attempt to formulate strategies and activities that revolve around stylistics (Ahmad, 2014; Akyel, 1995; Fakeye & Temitayo, 2013; Inyang, 2009; Jaafar, 2014). This is the stylistic approach, which is the investigation of how the resources of a language code can be put into use in the production of actual messages (Fakeye & Temitayo, 2013). In the stylistic approach, literature is considered a communicative discourse. The goal of this approach is to "decode meaning and structural features of literary texts by identifying linguistic patterns in the text" (Fakeye & Temitayo, 2013, p. 51). It is also with this approach that the author's choice of words and their functions are emphasized, along with the structure, deviation from norms, foregrounding, parallelism, grammatical patterns, and how they bring meaning to the text (Fakeye & Temitayo, 2013).

### **Benefits of the Stylistic Approach to ESL or EFL Literature Classes**

The stylistic approach brings numerous benefits to the ESL or EFL classroom, particularly in literature classes. Thus, several educators choose to use this approach. Aside from encouraging learners to think critically, another rationale in adopting the stylistic approach in classroom instruction would be its effectiveness in teaching poetry. In Inyang's (2009) study, it was demonstrated that ESL learners exposed to the stylistics method performed significantly better in tests than those who were taught using the formalist approach. The assessment instrument used in Inyang's study is the Poetry in English Achievement Test (PEAT), which aims to determine "the achievement and retention ability of students in poetry" (p.84). It consists of 50 multiple-choice items and has

the KR-20 reliability coefficient of 0.75 (adequate). In another study by Ahmad (2014), apart from the very significant and positive differences between the groups taught using the formalist and stylistic approach in terms of their performance, both teachers and learners in different Saudi Arabian universities found the stylistic approach an enjoyable means to “enrich and energize the learning environment of an ESL classroom” (p.123). According to the results of Akyel’s (1995) study, student teachers in Turkey found that the stylistic approach of teaching poetry was an effective tool for preparing their lessons because it helped them gain confidence in reading and interpreting. Moreover, they felt that the lessons were successful due to the high level of participation in the classroom. Furthermore, Fakeye and Temitayo (2013) recommended that the stylistic approach be utilized in teaching various concepts in poetry upon discovering the significant positive effects of the approach on 138 ESL learners in six secondary schools in Africa. It can be suggested that the stylistic approach may be effective in teaching literature in Asian ESL (e.g., the Philippines and Singapore) in the perspectives of teacher and learners.

Although the stylistic approach seems to be more effective than formalism in teaching literature, especially poetry, it should not be a replacement for the formalist approach of teaching literature (Inyang, 2009). Instead, it may be used as a supplement to the traditional approach. However, teachers may opt to use the stylistic approach without the traditional method, as it has been done before (Inyang, 2009). With that in mind, it is evident that stylistic-based activities can improve the quality of poetry learning and teaching in the literature classroom.

### **Benefits of the Stylistic Approach to ESL or EFL Language Classes**

For many years, stylisticians were grounded on the idea that literature is made out of language and claimed that their academic activity may be useful for struggling EFL learners (Gower, 1986; Watson & Zyngier, 2007). In fact, in Asian EFL countries such as China, the stylistic approach seems to be the trend in pedagogy research (Shi & Wang, 2013). Although there is literature demonstrating that the stylistic approach actually impedes language learning and several critics claim that literary reading has no direct role in language learning (Gower, 1986; Watson & Zyngier, 2007), a recent study by Fogal (2015) generally showed the following: (1) stylistics may be a tool for improving L2 performance, (2) stylistics contributes to language awareness, and (3) stylistics may be a tool for building academic skills beyond L2 acquisition. Devardhi and Nelson (2013), in their study, advocated the stylistic approach as a means to “develop language proficiency and highlight metalinguistic reflection” through “conscious attention to details and linguistic features” (p.1). Shi and Wang (2013) strongly agree with this and state that the stylistic approach might give learners command of how to use the language; however, they note that enriching their knowledge of stylistics is a prerequisite. They also pointed out that the stylistic approach highlights the road for English learning.

In addition, the stylistic approach would most likely be effective for Southeast Asian (e.g., Filipino, Cambodian, etc.) learners at the tertiary level because they possess higher comprehension and analytical skills than their primary and secondary counterparts according to Piaget’s stages of cognitivism. The researchers also believe that the approach is practical as it makes use of the text and focuses on analysis through communicative discourse, which also develops their communicative abilities (Punchard, 2002). By allowing learners to express their opinions and ideas, and to give their own interpretations of texts based on textual evidence in the classroom, the teacher can guide and indirectly, or directly, teach language skills (Punchard, 2002). In terms of pronunciation, the stylistic approach is effective since one component of the approach is the phonological aspect (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). The teacher may constructively correct their pronunciation if needed.

Despite criticism of the stylistic approach and the justifiably and relatively weak representation of stylistics in the ESL and EFL contexts, it seems that the approach does have positive implications for ESL and EFL classrooms just as in the literature classroom (Hori, Tabata, & Itō, 2009).



### Introduction and Summary of the Poem

This paper focuses on Alfred Tennyson's poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade." Unlike Tennyson's other works such as "St. Simeon Stylites" (1833), a dramatic monologue, and "Tears, Idle Tears" (1847), a blank-verse lyric poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854) is a narrative poem. The English-born Victorian poet wrote the ballad during the Crimean War when Britain entered the war in Crimea in an effort to defend Turkey from Russian expansion to preserve British access to eastern trade routes (Markovitz, 2013). The literary work is a response to the historical military called the Charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava—a result of the political drama between the British and the Russians. According to the historical record, due to miscommunication and tactical blunder, the Light Brigade or light cavalry was sent to the front lines against another artillery battery that is heavily equipped with firearm. Although the Brigade was not totally destroyed, it caused the loss of the British brigade and eventually paved the way for World War I as the balance of power in Europe was altered (Baugmart, 2002).

### THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

*by: Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

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| <p><b>I.</b></p> <p>1 Half a league, half a league,<br/> 2 Half a league onward,<br/> 3 All in the valley of Death<br/> 4 Rode the six hundred.<br/> 5 "Forward, the Light Brigade!<br/> 6 Charge for the guns!" he said:<br/> 7 Into the valley of Death<br/> 8 Rode the six hundred.</p> <p><b>II.</b></p> <p>9 "Forward, the Light Brigade!"<br/> 10 Was there a man dismay'd?<br/> 11 Not tho' the soldier knew<br/> 12 Some one had blunder'd:<br/> 13 Theirs not to make reply,<br/> 14 Theirs not to reason why,<br/> 15 Theirs but to do and die:<br/> 16 Into the valley of Death<br/> 17 Rode the six hundred.</p> <p><b>III.</b></p> <p>18 Cannon to right of them,<br/> 19 Cannon to left of them,<br/> 20 Cannon in front of them<br/> 21 Volley'd and thunder'd;<br/> 22 Storm'd at with shot and shell,<br/> 23 Boldly they rode and well,<br/> 24 Into the jaws of Death,<br/> 25 Into the mouth of Hell<br/> 26 Rode the six hundred.</p> | <p><b>IV.</b></p> <p>27 Flash'd all their sabres bare,<br/> 28 Flash'd as they turn'd in air<br/> 29 Sabring the gunners there,<br/> 30 Charging an army, while<br/> 31 All the world wonder'd:<br/> 32 Plunged in the battery-smoke<br/> 33 Right thro' the line they broke;<br/> 34 Cossack and Russian<br/> 35 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke<br/> 36 Shatter'd and sunder'd.<br/> 37 Then they rode back, but not<br/> 38 Not the six hundred.</p> <p><b>V.</b></p> <p>39 Cannon to right of them,<br/> 40 Cannon to left of them,<br/> 41 Cannon behind them<br/> 42 Volley'd and thunder'd;<br/> 43 Storm'd at with shot and shell,<br/> 44 While horse and hero fell,<br/> 45 They that had fought so well<br/> 46 Came thro' the jaws of Death,<br/> 47 Back from the mouth of Hell,<br/> 48 All that was left of them,<br/> 49 Left of six hundred.</p> <p><b>VI.</b></p> <p>50 When can their glory fade?<br/> 51 the wild charge they made!<br/> 52 All the world wonder'd.<br/> 53 Honor the charge they made!<br/> 54 Honor the Light Brigade,<br/> 55 Noble six hundred!</p> |
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### Interpretation and Stylistic Analysis

The following section is divided into four parts: (1) structural/syntactical analysis of the poem, (2) lexical analysis of the poem, (3) phonological analysis of the poem, and (4) theme analysis of the poem. It aims to provide evidence to lead readers to their own interpretations of the ballad.

#### Structural/Syntactical Analysis of the Poem

Every aspect of the text has to be taken into consideration if one wishes to understand a literary piece from the stylistic point of view. This includes the structural and aesthetic elements of the text. After looking into the structural and syntactical analysis of the literary text, it appears that the poem is stanzaic and is divided into six stanzas. However, the number of lines in each stanza varies and is not consistent throughout the poem. This “inconsistency” may be in parallel with the inconsistencies of a war. Also, with careful observation, you will notice that the stanzas are episodic, meaning that each stanza highlights an event in the narrative poem. In addition, it appears that there are only several instances where there is indentation in the poem, and these indentions are not the ones we use in prose. Also, the lines are justified to the left. What does this imply? Along with the parallel syntactic structure of certain lines such as line 13 to 15 of the poem, the almost symmetric alignment of the poem could suggest that the Light Brigade is very orderly and acts as one unit with one purpose. It could also imply the discipline the soldiers had. From a certain vantage point, it may actually look like the formation of the brigade. According to Turner (2003), a brigade is composed of three to six battalions each. The poem has six stanzas, which could represent the six battalions that were sent to battle.

It also appears the certain phrases in the poem are repetitive. In lines 1 and 2 of the poem, we can see that the phrase “half a league” is repeated three times. This could suggest a progression, which emphasized the distance the army had to travel to battle the Russians.

Furthermore, the repetition of the syntactic structure [“cannon” + prepositional phrase (PP)] in lines 18 to 20 and 39 to 41, along with the parallel syntax of lines 24 and 25 [“into the” + noun phrase (NP) + prepositional phrase (PP)] can possibly emphasize of the details of the battlefield— the sound of cannons everywhere, indicating chaos and uncertainty, as well as the repetitive gunshots and seemingly never-ending deaths.

Moreover, the poem could also stress the intensity of war and the reality of death. It also appears that the noun phrase “six hundred” appears in the last lines of all stanzas of the literary text. Perhaps the author wanted to emphasize the 600 cavalymen who blindly obeyed their senior officers and fell victim to death due to the officers’ blunder.

#### Lexical Analysis of the Poem

The lexis or vocabulary should also be considered in the interpretation of a poem. The choice of words portrays an image that can be beneficial for text analysis. From the title of the poem, as well as certain lines, the “light” in “The Charge of the Light Brigade” may mean two different things. It could mean the type of arms they carry; it could also be associated with the cheerfulness and courage the troops possessed on the battlefield. Aside from that, in lines 27, 29, and 35, one can see the stark contrast between the sabers of the British and the guns and cannons of the Russians from the choice of words: “stroke” and “flashed” for the sabers and “shot” and “shell” for the guns and cannons. If you notice, the words “volleyed” and “thundered” are more likely associated with the bullets and guns of the enemy since “volley” denotes the projectile of arrows or bullets and “thunder” is linked to a loud and booming sound. In addition, from the contrast, we can see the apparent shift of meaning of the guns. In line 6, “guns” suggest a challenge or call to war. However, as the poem progresses, the guns have another signifier – “cannons,” which reflect the reality of death in battle. The figurative choice of words such as personification is noticeable in the poem. The author, in “Valley of Death” in lines 3, 7, and 16, gave “Death” jaws in lines 24 and 46 of the ballad. This most likely seemed like a reference to a powerful lion because an encounter with one would mean immediate death. In addition, “Death” is also a personification of the “Grim Reaper,” a phrase that first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1847, seven years before Lord Tennyson wrote the ballad. Moreover, from the literary text, we can infer that the personal pronoun “he” in line

6 of the ballad must pertain to someone of great authority – someone great enough to command the infantry in battle – the general. What is the antecedent of the objective personal pronoun “them,” which was repeated three times in lines 18 to 20? Based on textual evidence such as the phrase “six hundred” found in lines 8, 17, 26, 38, 49, and 55 of the poem, one can deduce that “them” refers to the cavalry or the Light Brigade.

### Phonological Analysis of the Poem

Aside from the structure, phonological elements such as rhyme, assonance, and alliteration are language patterns that contribute to the total effect and imagery of the poetry (Chapman, 1973). These patterns are integral to the analysis and representation of the text. If the patterns change, the representation changes with it (Widdowson, 1992). “The Charge of the Light Brigade” is filled with phonological patterns and evidence as mentioned above. In line 22 and 43, the alliteration of the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /sh/ is evident and somehow paints the imagery of bullets shooting; one can almost hear the bullets leaving the barrels. The author may have purposefully chosen the words since both “shot” and “shell” are words related to bullets. Also in line 35, the alliteration of the voiceless alveolar grooved fricative /s/ is apparent in the compound word “saber-stroke.” This alliterative pattern suggests the swishing sound of the blade as it cuts through the air. In addition, along with the consonant sounds /s/, /t/, and /r/, the high-mid back rounded vowel /o/ followed by the voiceless velar plosive /k/ reflects the fast and abrupt striking of the blade. An example of this in the poem is the word “stroke” in line 35, where the sounds /s/, /t/, and /r/ are followed by an /o/ and /k/ sound. The /o/ and /k/ sound is also found in “smoke” and “broke” in lines 32 and 33, respectively.

Throughout the poem, it seems that the voiced alveolar-dental stop /d/ is also evident, especially at the end of the line. An example would be at lines 50-55 where all the last letters have the sound /d/. Evidence of the consonant /d/ can also be found in words such as “death” in line 24, “dismayed” in line 10, and “shattered” in line 36. In line 31, the consonance of the alveo-dental /d/ is present in the clause “All the world wondered,” while in line 15, the alliteration of /d/ is evident in the words “do” and “die.” This phonological evidence could reflect the distant blasting of cannons.

Another phonetic feature evident in this poem, aside from alliteration and consonance, is the rhyme. It appears that the rhyme is irregular, rhyming couplets (lines 32 and 33) and triplets (lines 27-29) are identified throughout the text. Slant rhymes such as the words “blundered” and “hundred” of lines 4 and 8 in stanza 1 were also identified. The unruliness and irregularity of the rhyme somehow signal the chaotic nature of the people on the battlefield and, of course, the aftermath. With regard to rhythm, the ballad is dactylic. In other words, most feet in the poem begin with a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. Evidence of this can be found even at the beginning of the poem. “Half a league, half a league” located in line 1 is dactylic in nature since “half” is stressed while “a” and “league” are not. Other evidence can be found in line 16: “into the valley of death.” Two dactylic feet are evident in the line: “IN-to the” and “VAL-ley of” – the capitalized letters being stressed. From the dactylic feet spotted throughout the poem, one can almost hear the beating of the drums, the marching of the soldiers, or even the percussive and echoing sound of the horse hooves. In lines 18-20, one might even hear the loud and then diminishing sound of the cannons: “CAN-non to the right of them” (line 18).

### Theme Analysis of the Poem

From the textual evidence in syntax, lexis, and phonology, the theme of warfare is evident. Alfred Tennyson may be trying to show the readers that war can have disastrous and catastrophic consequences. From the phonological sounds to the choice of words, the author indirectly points out the realities of war. Also, with the choice of negative words as “Death,” “shot,” “storm’d” and positive words such as “noble,” “glory” and “hero,” the author might also be trying to emphasize the bilateral nature of war. Some people may perceive war as something related to confusion, bloodshed, and terror; while other people might look at war as something honorable, valiant, heroic, or even exciting. Furthermore, the author may have also depicted the following: (1) contrast



between mortality and immortality, (2) deaths of several soldiers, and (3) immortality of the courage and valiance of the noble soldiers who, without question, have fought honorably in “The Charge of the Light Brigade.”

### Teaching Activities

In the following section, potential stylistic classroom activities in syntax, phonology, and lexis are given to guide teachers so that they can help literature learners appreciate the text more and language learners to enhance their skills in English. The activities are learner-centered and do not only focus on the reading and identification of plot events as in the traditional approach; they also consider the exchange of ideas and opinions, linguistic analysis, and active participation. Critical reading and analysis of the ballad is needed to succeed in the following activities.

Generally, there are five potential activities that correspond to the aforementioned stylistic evidence: (1) Oral reading and summarizing the poem, (2) structural/syntactical analysis of the poem, (3) lexical analysis of the poem, (4) phonological analysis of the poem, and (5) theme analysis of the poem. Under lexical analysis, there are two smaller activities – phrase structural analysis and pronominal analysis while under phonological analysis, there are three mini-activities – alliteration and consonance, rhythm patterns, and stress patterns.

These activities can aid the teacher in facilitating discussion of the poem and are based on the aforementioned analysis of syntactical, phonological, and lexical evidence found in the ballad “Charge of the Light Brigade.” The following activities are primarily designed for Southeast Asian ESL and EFL learners, particularly those at the tertiary level. However, they can also be adapted to address the needs of native speakers of English in the higher elementary to secondary grades, since they are assumed to be more adept in English language use than ESL learners (Stricker, 2002).

#### Activity 1: Oral Reading and Summarizing the Poem

The teacher gives copies of the poem to the learners. The teacher introduces the ballad, saying that it is one kind of poetry. The teacher gives different examples of poetry such as the haiku, sonnet, etc. and continues with the activity.

The teacher can assess how they interpret the ballad by dividing them into six groups and initially assigning each group with a stanza in the poem, which is given to them on a sheet of paper. The activity would be more effective if the six groups were arranged in a circle. After each group has read their first stanza aloud, the teacher instructs the groups to give their stanza to another group. In other words, the papers containing the stanzas should be passed clock-wise (e.g., Group 1 would pass their paper to Group 2, Group 2 to Group 3, etc.). When the paper containing the stanza reaches the home group, the teacher asks a representative from each group to present their stanza by summarizing and then sharing their group’s interpretation. Then, as a synthesis activity, the teacher can ask questions like: How does each group’s interpretation of their respective stanzas contribute to the overall interpretation of the poem? Does this group’s interpretation differ from how you interpret it? What makes it differ from your interpretation? What textual evidence in the poem contributes to your interpretation of the poem?

The teacher can then instruct learners to get a sheet of paper and list clues and textual evidence from the series of activities. The teacher tells them to hold onto the paper for the duration of the analysis.

#### Activity 2: Structural/Syntactical Analysis of the Poem

Based on the structural/syntactical analysis done in the earlier parts of this paper, the teacher guides the learners into deducing a possible image of the poem. The teacher facilitates a discussion and may ask learners the following questions: If you try to squint your eyes, look at the poem from afar, or rotate the piece, what do you see? (to elicit the six-stanza-six-battalion relationship discussed earlier) Did you notice the figure of the overall structure of the ballad? How does the alignment of the poem affect your interpretation of the ballad? What does this formation suggest about “Charge of the Light Brigade”? (to elicit the image of orderliness and discipline of

the soldiers marching as discussed) What words or phrases repeat throughout the poem? What does this imply? (to elicit the repetition of the gun sounds, etc.)

### Activity 3: Lexical Analysis of the Poem

#### **Vocabulary Analysis**

Using the same groupings as in activity 1, the teacher divides the class into six groups. After dividing them, they give each group a piece of paper and they write the word “light” on the board. Then, the teacher instructs learners to write as many synonyms or related word phrases/definitions to the word “light” within one minute. After one minute, the teacher calls on each representative of the group and asks them to say their words as they fill in the table (see Figure 2). The group with the most correct words/definitions wins. In the case below, the winners are group 6. Another variation of this activity may be done with the word “death.”

| <b>LIGHT</b>                     |                                |                      |                            |                      |   |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Group 1                          | Group 2                        | Group 3              | Group 4                    | Group 5              | Group 6                                 |
| sun<br>not heavy<br>feather-like | no darkness<br>courage<br>good | happy<br>good<br>sun | stars<br>moon<br>not heavy | happy<br>sun<br>good | carefree<br>starry<br>stars<br>cheerful |

Figure 2. Example Table for Vocabulary Analysis Activity (to be drawn by the teacher)

The teacher then continues the vocabulary activity by posting the following words in metacards on the board: volleyed, thundered, shot, shell, cannons, flashed, stroke, sabre, and plunged. The teacher posts the aforementioned words in random order and asks learners to categorize them into two categories: (1) gun and (2) sword. The teacher calls on volunteers to pick one metacard and post it around one of the words written with the result being a vocabulary word web.

After the activities, the teacher may ask the following questions: What do you think “light” means in the title? Why? Why was “death” given jaws? How are the words on the metacards (e.g., gun and sword) related to the word written on the board? Why did the author choose these specific words instead of \_\_\_\_? What is the importance of word choice in literature? How does it affect interpretation?

#### **Pronominal Analysis**

Considering that learners have an adequate background for the use of pronouns, the teacher can ask them to highlight all of the pronouns in the poem to help them identify who or what is being referred to in the ballad. The teacher may then instruct the learners to get another sheet of paper and to write down all of the pronouns; then, based on contextual evidence, the teacher asks learners to identify the antecedents of the pronouns by asking questions such as: What does he in line 6 refer to? What evidence in the text helped you arrive at that conclusion?

### Activity 4: Phonological Analysis of the Poem

#### **Alliteration and Consonance**

The teacher can ask learners to identify at least one set of alliterative words and another set of words that show consonance. The teacher writes down the words on respective metacards and then posts these on the board. After that, they can instruct learners to sketch images that reflect what they feel or hear when they see the words. After a while, the teacher instructs them to post their artwork around the respective metacards. The teacher can

then ask: What image from the ones posted on the board struck you the most? How are the images reflected through alliteration or consonance in the poem? What effect does the alliterative /sh/ sound carry? What does the /sh/ sound reflect? How about the consonant /d/ sounds? What do you hear as you reread the poem?

### ***Rhythmical Pattern: Rhyme Pattern***

The teacher shows a stanza of the ballad. Using a light-colored marker or a highlighter, the teacher emphasizes the last word of each line with a circle or highlighting. The teacher can then ask the following questions: What do you notice about the words? Do they rhyme? Do they rhyme perfectly or not? From the rhymes, what could the author be implying? How do the imperfect slant rhymes relate to your interpretation of the poem (Charge of the Light Brigade)?

### ***Rhythmical Pattern: Stress Pattern***

The teacher can instruct learners to read the poem again. This time, the teacher can task them to tap the tables and stomp their feet, mimicking the war theme of the ballad, to reflect unstressed and stressed syllables. The teacher can ask the following questions: What effect does the activity have on the poem? How does it differ from the initial reading of the poem? What do you hear? What sounds can you associate or relate to the pattern of the beating? How does it contribute to the overall picture of the ballad?

### **Activity 5: Theme Analysis of the Poem**

First, the teacher divides the class into four groups and tells the learners that they will all participate in a mini debate. The first two groups will be assigned the topic: “Does the poem depict war as something chaotic and bloody or brave and noble?.” The other two groups will be assigned: “Does the ballad emphasize mortality or immortality?.” The teacher tells them that they need to use evidence from the text, whether syntactical, lexical, or phonological to support their arguments.

After the activity, the teacher may instruct learners to sit in a circle. The teacher facilitates the culminating activity by asking the following questions: Based on the previous activities as well as the textual evidence written on your paper, what can you now say about the theme of the poem? What is the author trying to say in the ballad? Do you think that focusing on grammar, sounds, and vocabulary was useful in understanding the poem’s meaning and in helping you interpret it? How? Do you now appreciate language/linguistics in helping you interpret a text? Do you now appreciate literature for helping you improve reading, speaking, listening, and writing? How will you apply what you have learned in analyzing this ballad in the future?

## **Conclusion**

Stylistics, a bridged discipline between linguistics and literary criticism, is an under-appreciated and misjudged tool for teaching both language and literature. Some teachers may deem it ineffective for teaching language since the nature of the stylistic approach is not language centered, but literature-interpretation centered. However, Ahmad (2014) suggests that poetry can be a great tool to improve the language skills of learners if language activities are integrated into the teaching of poetry. Literature teachers, on the other hand, may attribute its ineffectiveness to the complexity of the procedure and the implementation. Moreover, some learners may find the stylistic approach too technical or boring.

Nevertheless, some researchers have shown that this approach can enhance the development of language proficiency and contribute to language awareness aside from improving L2 performance (Devardhi & Nelson, 2013; Fogal, 2015). These researchers also highlighted that the stylistic approach may promote communication between the teacher and learners and may be used to indirectly teach the four macro-skills in language. The stylistic approach also seems to show positive results in literature classes (Akyel, 1995; Fakeye & Temitayo, 2013; Inyang, 2009).

Although the current study only focused on the ballad “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” a small representative of literature as a subject, the study has several implications to ESL and EFL language and literature classes. The stylistics-based activities suggested seem promising for Southeast Asian ESL and EFL language and literature classrooms for the following reasons: (1) it does not require many materials or a lot of space, (2) it may not be as time-consuming as other learner-centered activities, depending on a teacher’s pace, (3) it is predominantly learner-centered, and (4) it integrates authentic assessment (drawing, debate, etc.) into the actual lesson. The stylistics activities that the researchers recommended, took into consideration the deficiencies, or rather, challenges of a typical Southeast Asian classroom such as that of the Philippines. This paper offers an alternative perspective of pedagogy for ESL and EFL classrooms.

In summary, based on the aforementioned discussion, analysis, and activities, it is apparent that the stylistic approach has great potential in both literature and language classes, especially at the tertiary level; first, because it teaches learners how to appreciate the beauty of literature through linguistics, and second, because it teaches them how to communicate with others by expressing their opinions and ideas while guiding them to read and listen to poetry critically.

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