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## Foreword

### *Asian EFL Journal Associate Production and Copy Editors*

Asian EFL Journal is proud to present another edition of the renowned publication due to the valuable contributions made by the authors in the field and the collection of dedicated people who work toward its quarterly production. In the first paper, *Diffusion of the CEFR among Vietnamese Teachers: A Mixed Methods Investigation*, Xuan Minh Ngo argues that very little work has been carried out to examine how the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is implemented in the classroom by teachers. In Vietnam, where this study takes place, the CEFR is now the officially sanctioned standard by which foreign language teaching and learning is measured, and the researcher seeks to examine teachers' perceptions and use of this framework in the university classroom. Through the medium of mixed method research (using qualitative and quantitative data), the study concludes that while Vietnamese teachers generally approved of the use of the CEFR, its adoption in the classroom was not consistent among the subjects of the research. The study recommends that a robust peer support network be created for teachers to discuss and develop their CEFR use in the classroom, and that current assessment practice in Vietnamese universities be more closely aligned with the CEFR as a means to successfully and completely embrace the framework across the language teaching spectrum.

The second study, *Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Concerning Learner Autonomy in the Language Classroom* studies the perspectives of a group of five EFL teachers around the concept and promotion of learner autonomy. Rochelle King and Jennie Roloff Rothman collected their data at a Japanese university using interviews and a short task. The results suggest that there is a significant gap between the teachers' theoretical understanding of learner autonomy and their practical knowledge of how to encourage it in their classrooms, which in turn limits students' appreciation of its importance. The authors conclude, therefore, that more extensive and effective teacher training is required in this field in order to achieve the best results for students inside and outside the classroom.

The third paper entitled *Uses of and Attitudes towards OWLs as L2 Writing Support Tools*, by Joshua M. Paiz, explores Online Writing Labs (OWLs) in the EFL/ESL context. While OWLs have been widely used since the early 1990s by mono-language writers, there has been little research into the use of this resource by EFL/ESL teachers and learners. Firstly, Paiz

conducted an online survey to discover respondents' use of OWLs; and secondly, a smaller number of these respondents took part in email interviews. The general findings were that OWLs are not fully-exploited; they may be used by instructors as resource tools but there are limitations due to linguistic accessibility and cultural appropriateness.

Next, Hitomi Abe's paper entitled *Americans' Evaluation of Japanese Refusals in English* discusses the cultural variances that impact the socio-pragmatic aspect of language and language learning. Her focus is on the speech act of refusal. Fifty Americans, 35 females and 15 males aged between 18 and 28 were required to evaluate the appropriacy of Japanese students' negative responses to requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions from close friends, in English. Results adjudged that half of the responses were 'impolite' due to their vagueness and perceived disregard for the interlocutors' feelings. This suggests the need for explicit pragmatic instruction and awareness-raising to enable Japanese students to say "no" more indirectly and use the expected specificity of explanation in English.

Then in *Investigating the Implementation and Development of Undergraduate English-Medium Instruction Programs in Japan: Facilitating and Hindering Factors*, Howard Brown examines undergraduate English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Japan and seeks to identify local factors in the university community which facilitate or hinder the implementation and development of EMI programs. Interestingly, what may negatively impact an EMI program in one context may have the alternate result in another. Brown identifies eight main issues that have persisted since EMI programs' general implementation in the 1980s, and continue to influence EMI programs today, even though the Japanese government endorses such programs.

Finally, most EIL professionals are aware that writing instructors often struggle with the best way to teach L2 students the most effective way of structuring a paragraph. Claire Rodway's research and argument, which is discussed in *Opening up Dialogic Spaces: Rethinking the Prescriptive Paragraph Structure in L2 Writing Pedagogy*, offers the reader examples of student work that illustrates the influence of the usual 'topic sentence + supporting sentences' template for teaching connectives paragraph construction and how this method negatively effects students' ability to develop the successful argumentation required of academic writing.

## **Diffusion of the CEFR among Vietnamese Teachers: A Mixed Methods Investigation**

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### **Bio Data:**

Xuan Minh Ngo has been working as a lecturer at the University of Languages and International Studies, VNU since 2009. He has a wide range of research interests from vocabulary acquisition and corrective feedback to language testing thanks to his comprehensive applied linguistic education at the University of Queensland, Australia. (ngoxuanminhulivnu@gmail.com)

### **Acknowledgements:**

The author would like to acknowledge first and foremost his MA supervisor, Dr. Paul Moore at the University of Queensland for his outstanding academic guidance, and Moonen et al. (2013) for introducing him to Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory. He also wishes to express his gratitude to the editorial staff and two anonymous reviewers of the Asian EFL Journal for their critical and constructive feedback.

### **Funding:**

The article is based on the author's thesis as part of his ALA scholarship granted by the Australian Government.

### **Abstract**

The study was conducted in Vietnam, a developing Asian country where the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) has been designated as the official standard of its foreign language education sector. Despite the CEFR's authoritative role, there has been a serious lack of research about this framework and how it is diffused among classroom teachers, the group of stakeholders that plays a decisive role in its successful implementation. In an attempt to bridge this gap, the current study aims to cast light on Vietnamese teachers' perceptions and use of the CEFR as well as on their related needs, based on the diffusion of innovations model (Rogers, 2003), and its reinterpretation in Van den Branden (2009). Via the convergent parallel design, a type of mixed methods research which involves triangulating qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2012), the study has found that Vietnamese teachers were generally positive about its impact, but adopted it at significantly different levels in their practice. Moreover, they demonstrated a serious need for learning further about the framework. In light of these findings, the study recommends that a formal peer support network for teachers should be established and that the current assessment practice should be reformed in line with the CEFR to ensure the ultimate successful adoption of this innovative framework.

**Keywords:** Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), diffusion of innovations, mixed methods research, teacher cognition, triangulation

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## **Introduction**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (henceforth the CEFR) was officially published in 2001 by the Council of Europe (henceforth the CoE) – the largest supranational organisation on the continent. After more than a decade since its publication, the framework has become a language teaching industry standard worldwide (Figueras, 2012). In Vietnam, a developing Asian country, the CEFR was first brought to public attention by its Prime Minister’s Decree 1400 which outlines the major strategies and goals of the foreign language sector in the national education system from 2008 to 2020. Pursuant with this document, the European framework is designated as the basis for “developing foreign language curricula, textbooks, teaching plans and assessment criteria at all levels of education to ensure their continuity” (Vietnamese Government, 2008, p. 2). Nevertheless, little is known about the framework’s actual dissemination beyond the policy level due to a serious lack of published studies on this issue. It is this critical gap that has motivated the researcher to conduct the current study.

The current study views the CEFR in Vietnam as an innovation which is defined by Rogers (2003, p. 12) as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption”. As it was introduced in a government bill, the CEFR essentially represents a governmental innovation in Vietnam’s attempt to enhance the foreign language proficiency of its current students, and ultimately its future workforce. However, as Van den Branden (2009) observes, such a top-down educational innovation may not necessarily be successful in the long term without teachers’ endorsement. In light of language teachers’ role and the current lack of relevant research, the researcher has decided to conduct a study into the diffusion of the framework among Vietnamese teachers.

## **Literature Review**

### *Innovations and Diffusion of Innovations*

As previously stated, this paper considers the CEFR an innovation; hence, the current section will start with a succinct summary of Rogers’ (2003) model, arguably one of the most famous in the literature on how innovative ideas are disseminated. Accordingly, diffusion is defined as the communication of an innovative idea or object “through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003, p. 5), resulting in the modification of this system.

Apparent from the above definition are the four major elements of this process, namely the innovation, communication channels, time and social system. Regarding the first, Rogers



(2003) outlines five attributes that determine an innovation's adoption, including its relative advantage compared with the existing practice, compatibility with the belief system of the adopters, ease of understanding and use, testability and the visibility of its effects. As for communication channels, the author distinguishes between mass media and interpersonal exchanges, explaining that whereas the former can effectively inform the audience, the latter is superior in convincing them of an innovation's merits, hence is "at the heart of the diffusion process" (Rogers, 2003, p. 19). The third element (time) divides the process into five stages (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation). The final component is "a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal" (Rogers, 2003, p. 28). The structure of this system, he argues, determines the types of innovation, making it optional, collective or authority-driven, whether the adoption or rejection is made by an individual, all group members or a gatekeeper.

Within this study, the main focus will be on the CEFR innovation's attributes, and adoption stages as perceived by the surveyed teachers. The first and last element will not be further discussed since the framework was introduced in an official government decree, thus is clearly a governmental innovation communicated via official institutional channels.

### *Overview of the CEFR*

As its full title suggests, the CEFR aims to provide a common basis for language curriculum design, assessment and material development. Furthermore, it is intended to act as a common meta-language for language professionals to reflect on and to discuss their practice (North, 2007). Meanwhile, the framework approach is stated explicitly as "action-oriented" (CoE, 2001, p. 9), which lays an emphasis on what learners can do in L2 in the real world instead of how many words and structures they can master.

Little (2007) neatly divides the CEFR into two parts, namely an encyclopaedic descriptive scheme and a set of six common reference levels. The descriptive scheme which occupies most of the framework comprehensively describes the "knowledge, skills and attitudes learners will need to develop" (CoE, 2001, p. 18) to become competent language users. However, as Figueras (2012) has noted, it is the set of six Common Reference Levels (A1-C2) that has exerted a remarkable influence on foreign language learning and teaching within and beyond Europe. A notable feature of these common reference levels is that they are designed to be language independent, hence can be adopted in the teaching and learning of all foreign languages.

### *Related Studies*

A thorough search for relevant studies performed by the researcher reveals that the framework in most cases is used in the context of assessment for standard settings (Papageorgiou, 2010, and Gad, Ardeshir, Hanan, & Chad, 2013), and test design (Alderson et al., 2006, and Hulstijn et al., 2012). Alternatively, some papers provide personal accounts of how the framework was employed in the authors' specific contexts (Alderson, 2002; Morrow, 2004, and Byram & Parmenter, 2012). Only a limited number of studies actually involve teachers or language professionals, and their findings can be divided into two major themes, namely perceptions and implementation of the framework.

Regarding the first theme, all identified studies indicate a generally positive attitude towards the framework with Australian participants considering it useful for both learning and teaching (Normand-Marconnet & Lo Bianco, 2013). Likewise, European teachers in Broek and Ende (2013) agreed that it improved transparency and comparability in foreign language education whereas Turkish student-teachers in Hismanoglu (2013) and Ilin (2014) appreciated the communicative orientation of the CEFR. Nonetheless, the framework was also criticised for its complex language and abstract content (CoE, 2005; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). Despite this complexity, some of its descriptors still lack precision and detail (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). Some teachers even doubted the feasibility of adopting the framework (Broek and Ende, 2013; Ilin, 2014) due to its revolutionary approach which contrasts with the traditional grammar-focused teaching. Some institution representatives in the CoE (2005) also warned about the risk of regarding the CEFR as a mandate rather than a reference whereas Australian teachers and students (Normand-Marconnet & Lo Bianco, 2013) questioned its relevance for script-based Asian languages.

As for the framework implementation, the studies reveal that it has been generally adopted in European countries, especially in policy documents, curricula, examinations and textbooks (Broek & Ende, 2013; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007 and Moonen et al., 2013). Nevertheless, in teacher training, the framework has mostly been utilised to define the teacher's proficiency level (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). Similarly, there is an evident lack of empirical research to support the link between the CEFR and exams (Broek & Ende, 2013) despite the widespread utilisation of its labels by examination boards (CoE, 2005). Moonen et al. (2013) also disclose a relatively small proportion of Dutch teachers employing the CEFR extensively beyond selection of textbook and highlight the striking discrepancy in the level of adoption among the Dutch institutions.

### *Gaps in the Literature*

Despite their remarkable contribution, the aforementioned studies still leave some unresolved gaps in the CEFR literature. First, only Faez (2011, a & b), Celik (2013), and Moonen et al (2013) had an explicit focus on working teachers whereas other papers involved institution or country representatives (Council of Europe, 2005; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007) or teacher trainees (Hismanoglu, 2013, and Ilin, 2014). Furthermore, all the papers except for Moonen et al (2013) and Faez (2011a) adopted a quantitative survey design, using online questionnaires as the only data collection instrument. Hence, it is reasonable to suspect their ability to appropriately uncover teachers' complex perceptions and varied levels of the CEFR usage. In addition to these methodological limitations, all of these studies were conducted in either European countries or developed nations such as Australia and Canada. Consequently, their findings can hardly be generalised to a developing Asian country like Vietnam.

### **Research Questions**

Aware of these issues and motivated by the distinct Vietnamese context, the researcher decided to conduct an investigation into the diffusion of the CEFR among Vietnamese teachers based on Rogers' (2003) theory of innovation diffusion. To be more specific, the study aims to answer two main research questions:

1. How do Vietnamese teachers perceive the CEFR?
2. How have they implemented the framework in their practice?

In an attempt to facilitate this process, the research also seeks to address another question:

3. What are their needs related to the CEFR?

### **Methodology**

#### *Design*

The current study adopted a mixed methods research design which is “a procedure for collecting, analysing and mixing quantitative and qualitative data” during the research process to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a problem (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009, p. 156). Among the types of mixed methods research, the convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) was employed because it consists of only one phase with quantitative and qualitative data being collected concurrently and merged together, hence being able to yield well-validated findings within a short time (Creswell, Plano Clark, & Garret, 2008). The overall design of the research can be seen in Figure 1.

## Mixed Methods Research

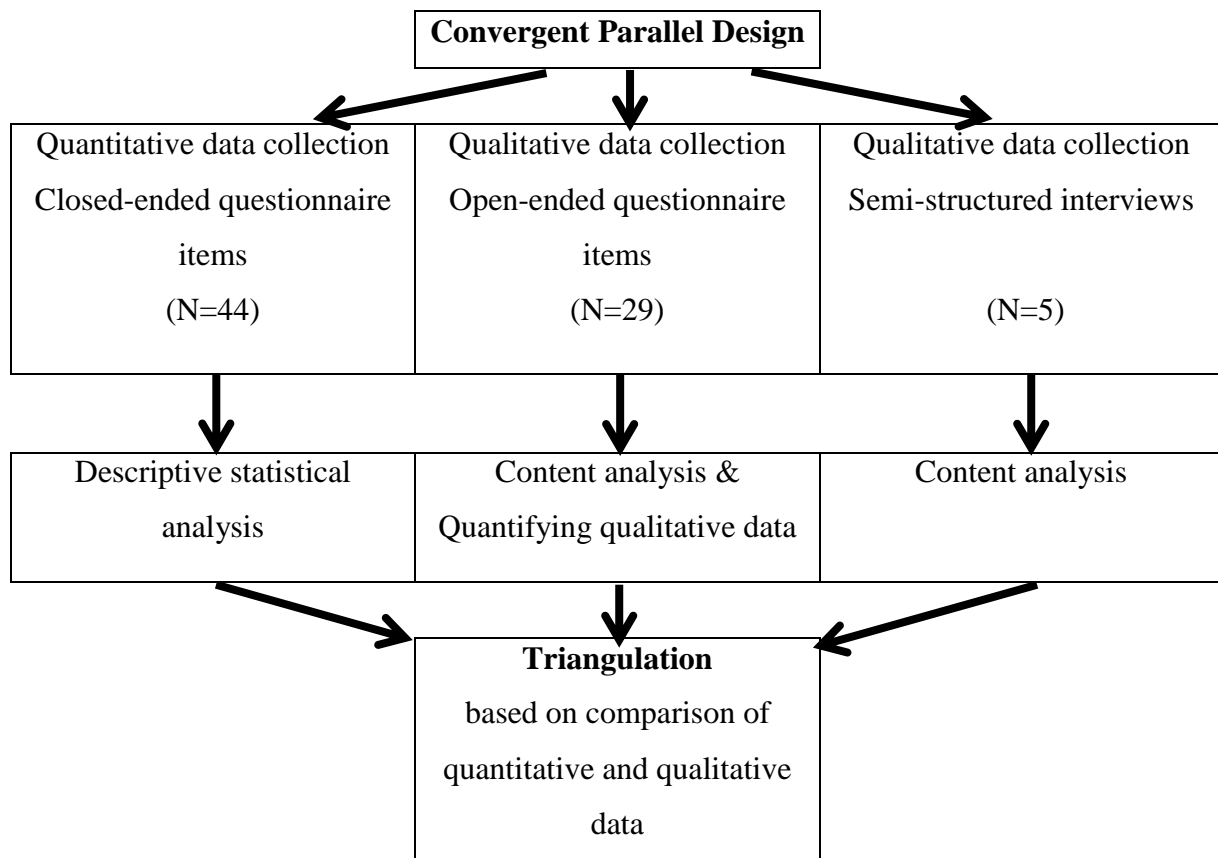


Figure 1. Research design overview.

### Instruments

A questionnaire was utilised because of its time, effort and finance saving nature (Dörnyei, 2003) and its ability to gather data on a large scale (Brown, 2000). This questionnaire was divided into five main parts, with the first three corresponding to the three research questions, one devoted to open-ended items and the last one eliciting demographic information. The open-ended items are expected to offer more in-depth information from the “participants’ own emic perspectives” (Brown, 2009, p. 205), and provide an independent source of data in the convergent parallel design. Following Dörnyei (2003), each content area was addressed in two to three individual items to overcome the flaw of single-item scales and the entire questionnaire was subject to piloting owing to the remarkable benefits of this stage. Post-hoc analysis was conducted with the closed-ended responses to check the internal consistency of the first three questionnaire sections ( $\alpha = .84, .92, .85$  respectively).

Aware of the superficiality of questionnaire responses, the researcher also employed the interview in order to gain deeper insights into the participants’ experiences and perceptions

(Richards, 2009). The semi-structured format was adopted because its predefined questions ensure critical information can be obtained whereas its freedom for digression allows the researcher to explore emerging themes (Dörnyei, 2007). Following semi-structured format conventions, an interview guide was systematically prepared and piloted, incorporating all the three research questions and elements suggested in Richards (2009) and Creswell (2012).

### *Data Collection*

The questionnaire was administered online instead of the traditional paper form, allowing the participants more flexibility regarding the time and place to respond. Each interview was conducted in the participant's language of choice and captured by two digital recorders and the researcher's notes to avoid technological problems. Various measures introduced in Dörnyei (2007) and Seidman (2006) were adopted to enhance the interview quality. Probes were utilised to encourage both elaboration and clarification, yet excessive probing was avoided because it may lead to participant defensiveness (Creswell, 2012).

### *Participants*

All the participants were academic staff of an English faculty at a foreign-language-specialising university in Northern Vietnam, where there was fairly widespread use of the CEFR as evidenced in its policy documents. The online survey was responded to by 44 teachers, accounting for more than half of the eligible faculty staff. Regarding teaching experience, it should be noted that the faculty staff were divided by their managers into novice, junior, and senior depending on whether they had less than one, one to three, or four or more years of teaching experience. As a rule, their experience would determine their level of participation in the faculty projects. Their bio-data can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

#### *Closed-ended Questionnaire Respondents*

| Category   | Gender |      | Teaching experience |        |        | Qualification |       |     |
|------------|--------|------|---------------------|--------|--------|---------------|-------|-----|
|            | Female | Male | Novice              | Junior | Senior | BA            | MA    | PhD |
| Number     | 40     | 4    | 6                   | 7      | 31     | 18            | 26    | 0   |
| Proportion | 90.9%  | 9.1% | 13.6%               | 15.9%  | 70.5%  | 40.9%         | 59.1% | 0 % |

Besides the closed-ended items, the questionnaire also includes an open-ended section at the end as suggested in Dörnyei (2003). However, Brown (2009) discerns that the number of open-

ended items completed is often lower compared with their closed-ended counterparts. Hence, it was understandable that only 29 out of 44 participants responded to this part, giving a response rate of 65.91%. The participants' bio-data are detailed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Open-ended Questionnaire Respondents*

| Category   | Gender |       | Teaching experience |        |        | Qualification |       |     |
|------------|--------|-------|---------------------|--------|--------|---------------|-------|-----|
|            | Female | Male  | Novice              | Junior | Senior | BA            | MA    | PhD |
| Number     | 25     | 4     | 3                   | 5      | 21     | 11            | 18    | 0   |
| Proportion | 86.2%  | 13.8% | 10.4%               | 17.2%  | 72.4%  | 37.9%         | 62.1% | 0 % |

18 out of 44 questionnaire respondents expressed their willingness to participate in a semi-structured interview, but only five teachers were invited to participate in individual interviews due to various constraints of the project. The choice of interviewees was based on purposeful sampling, which is defined as the intentional selection of participants based on their ability to provide quality information (Creswell, 2012). Among the purposeful sampling techniques, the maximal variation strategy whereby participants chosen differ on a significant characteristic is recommended in Seidman (2006) as the most appropriate for interviewing because it reflects the complexity of reality by offering insight into a wide range of perspectives. Of the demographic data available, experience was deemed the most relevant because in the research context, this factor determined the participants' level of involvement in the faculty projects. However, the gender and qualification factors were also reasonably accounted for as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Interviewees' Profiles*

| Pseudonym | Experience | Qualification | Gender |
|-----------|------------|---------------|--------|
| Ann       | 3 years    | BA            | Female |
| Heather   | 8 years    | MA            | Female |
| Taylor    | 5 years    | MA            | Female |
| Thalia    | 12 years   | MA            | Female |
| Toby      | 8 months   | BA            | Male   |

### *Data Analysis*

All closed-ended responses were typed in to the SPSS software Version 21 and subject to data cleaning as recommended in Dörnyei (2003). Accordingly, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each item on the questionnaire since these combined values provide a fairly comprehensive description (Field, 2009). These individual statistics were then averaged and transformed into subtopic variables to offer a better overview of the data (Dörnyei, 2003), and facilitate the subsequent triangulation. Following Brown (2009), data from the open-ended items were quantified with the individual answers being reduced to more general categories to disclose prominent trends of the data. As for the interviews, the researcher transcribed all the interviews in their entirety to avoid “premature judgments” (Seidman, 2006, p. 115) associated with selective transcription. To ensure the transcripts’ accuracy, the researcher first proofread them against the two recorders and the field notes, and then emailed them back to the participants for validation. Subsequently, the transcripts were imported into Atlas.ti V7.1.7 for coding. Caution was exercised throughout this critical process to prevent subjectivity on the researcher’s part, and patterns were allowed to emerge inductively and naturally without any preconceived categories (Seidman, 2006). As part of the research design, the findings from the three sources of data were finally triangulated to answer the research questions.

## **Findings**

### *Findings from the Closed-ended Questionnaire Responses*

All the statistical results from the closed-ended questionnaire items can be found in Appendix A. Due to the constraints of this article, only some prominent statistics will be included in this section.

#### *Perceptions*

For a clear overview of the teachers’ perceptions of the CEFR, the individual variables represented by the questionnaire items were merged and transformed into four broader variables, representing the perceptions of the framework as a document, and its roles in four major areas (see Table A2 for details). Generally, the teachers had a very favourable opinion of the CEFR’s role in developing curricula ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) and assessment ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = .59$ ). They also gave fair ratings of its impact on pedagogy ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) and communication ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .53$ ) especially with students ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .76$ ). However, their view of the framework as a document was less positive ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .72$ ), which could be attributed to its length ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ).

## Use

Like the perceptions items, the individual usage items on the questionnaire were also merged and transformed into four subtopic variables as shown in Table A4. The role of the CEFR was the most manifest in the participants' assessment practice ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), closely followed by the teaching activities ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). Their experience with using the CEFR for curriculum development was also substantial ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ), but clearly not equal as indicated by the high standard deviation. The adoption of the framework in the teachers' professional communication was much less prominent ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) especially with their students ( $M = 2.59$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

Overall, the participants were quite experienced in using the CEFR, but the high standard deviations indicated that there was a striking discrepancy among them. It should also be noted that their modest use of the framework in communicating with students contradicted their perceptions as reported above.

## Needs

The respondents expressed a substantial demand for more guidance on the CEFR via both training workshops ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) and relevant documents ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) (Table A5), yet with a stronger emphasis on the former. Likewise, none of the respondents were against using the CEFR more frequently in their work.

### *Findings from the Open-ended Questionnaire Responses*

This section will briefly present the findings from open-ended questionnaire items. For further details, please refer to the tables in Appendix B.

## Perceptions

The two most common compliments regarding the CEFR were on its clear and detailed description of proficiency levels as can be seen from Table B1 (Appendix B). An equal number of participants praised the framework for its hierarchy and usefulness in assessment, followed by the number of people giving credit for its being systematic and useful for course design. A notable finding was the repetition of the best known features which are not stated in the framework such as "outcome-based", "equivalent to IELTS" and "can-do statements" made by different participants.

The most prominent criticism against the CEFR was the unclear distinction between the proficiency levels, especially the "mid-levels" according to Table B2. Six participants also



complained about the length of the framework document and three about its abstract language. Three teachers even regarded the framework content as “too complicated to be put into practice”. Another even showed serious concern over the “overwhelming influence” of the framework, even to non-European languages at the university.

Generally, the vast majority of the respondents (23 out of 29) expressed a positive attitude towards the CEFR, regarding it as a “user-friendly” and “useful tool”. Nevertheless, the criticisms about the complexity and applicability of the framework were also repeated by five participants. Only one novice teacher exhibited a neutral stance, considering it a “nebulous” concept due to her lack of involvement in CEFR-related projects.

#### Areas Where the CEFR Most and Least Benefits

In response to two items (The area I find the CEFR MOST/LEAST useful in is ...), six participants misinterpreted it for the most and least useful components of the CEFR. Meanwhile, some stated “no idea” without any further explanations. Apart from these cases, the remaining responses can be divided into four categories as shown in Table B3. Accordingly, the framework was perceived as the most useful in the curriculum development. Its benefits in assessment and classroom practice remained controversial with relatively equal counts for both questions, and over one sixth of the participants regarded professional communication as resistant to the CEFR’s positive impact.

#### Use

For the last two open-ended items, the participants were asked to report the areas where they made the most and least use of the CEFR. Their responses are jointly displayed in Table B4 for a convenient cross-check. The results consistently indicated that the CEFR was applied the most extensively by the teachers in developing curricula and the least in professional communication, signifying certain congruence between their perceptions and reported practice. Interestingly, there appeared to be both expansive and limited utilisation of the framework in classroom pedagogy and assessment among the respondents.

#### *Findings from the Semi-Structured Interviews*

##### Perceptions

Overall, there was a mixed attitude towards the CEFR, but the main tone was arguably more positive. All respondents found the framework beneficial for their jobs despite having initial difficulty understanding it and coping with its length.

On the one hand, the role of the CEFR in assessment was recognised by all the participants. Heather tentatively regarded the framework's macro role as setting "boundaries" between, or labelling of, distinct levels of proficiency. Toby praised the role of the CEFR in designing marking rubrics, and Ann complimented it on its potential for student self-assessment as well as continuous and fixed-point assessment. On the other hand, apart from Taylor, the rest levelled criticisms against the CEFR especially regarding qualitative, hence subjective words in the descriptors, such as "spontaneously, fluently" or "almost error-free". Despite her initial optimism, Ann expressed serious doubt about students' motivation to apply the CEFR self-assessment since their exit tests did not follow the framework.

There was general consensus among the interviewees that the CEFR had facilitated communication among language teachers, making it more "transparent" (Heather), "systematic" and "credible" (Thalia). Nonetheless, all except for Thalia expressed a cautious attitude towards using the framework to communicate with students because they doubted their students' ability to comprehend the CEFR terminology.

All the interviewed teachers agreed that the CEFR benefited curriculum development by acting as the "compass" (Heather), "anchor" (Thalia), and "basis" (Taylor), resulting in compatibility between course objectives, material selection, teaching and learning. Nevertheless, Thalia referred to the need for "difficult adjustment" of the framework to the local context.

All the teachers acknowledged the impact of the CEFR on teaching, but in different ways. Only Thalia asserted that "in terms of teaching, we've used the CEFR quite effectively" while the rest viewed its influence as indirect via the link between the framework descriptors, course objectives and individual lesson goals.

## Use

The most perceptible theme as shown by the data was, interestingly, communication. However, this did not equal an extensive use of the framework for this purpose. All the interviewees utilised the CEFR for professional exchanges with their colleagues, yet Ann and Taylor described their usage as "not quite often", "very briefly" and "not deliberately". With regards to students, the trend was even less optimistic. Ann and Taylor hardly employed the CEFR terms for fear that their students would not understand.

The CEFR was adopted extensively for developing curricula by all the interviewees, acting as the basis for setting the course objectives of all the five respondents and for selecting the course books of Taylor, Thalia and Toby. Although Taylor referred to designing activities, she

based the design directly on the chosen textbooks rather than on the framework; hence, it remains to be seen whether this can be counted as informed by the CEFR or not.

The CEFR was applied to assessment by the interviewees in several ways. Four of them used the “can-do statements”, common reference levels, and the description of competencies to compose assessment checklists and rubrics. Taylor, nevertheless, did not apply the CEFR, but adapted the descriptors from the IELTS and TOEFL exams, reasoning that those were the sources of materials and descriptors for the C1 exit test and that by doing so she made her students better prepared for this high-stakes test. As a side note, the university’s English exit test at the time of the interview was a combination of international exam formats including TOEFL, IELTS and the Cambridge Advanced English Test. All senior students were required to sit the test, and if they scored 8 or higher out of 10, they would be granted a certificate stating that their English proficiency was at C1 level. At the time of writing, there has been no punitive measure against those failing to reach C1, but it is circulated among the teachers and students that future cohorts of students will not be able to graduate without this certificate. Interestingly, the test was not taken seriously by two interviewees (Taylor and Ann) as evidenced by their laughter and Ann’s comparing the test to “a mess”.

The CEFR did not feature directly in the teaching practice of the participants except for Toby who employed the framework to determine whether a specific activity was at the appropriate level of difficulty for his students. However, Ann, Taylor and Thalia still affirmed the framework’s influence on their classroom activities because in their understanding, the CEFR had been incorporated into the specific lesson objectives.

## Needs

Overall, the interviewees expressed a serious need for more training related to the CEFR. In terms of content, they wished to gain a more systematic overview of the framework (Taylor and Thalia) as well as a working knowledge of how to apply the CEFR in designing assessment tasks, in syllabi (Ann, Heather) and in teaching (Heather and Toby). Ann also hoped to be informed of the research underlying the framework and its correlation with such international tests as the IELTS and TOEFL. Furthermore, Heather wished for a more detailed and “quantitative” version of the CEFR to use in assessment while Toby showed his preference for a simplified edition for quick consultation.

## *Triangulated Findings*

Research Question 1: What are their perceptions of the CEFR?

Generally, most participants expressed a positive attitude towards the CEFR, especially its role in curriculum development. While the questionnaire respondents had a high opinion of the framework's impact on assessment ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = .59$ ), the interviewees criticised its descriptors as being “too qualitative” for this purpose due to the inclusion of key words that are open to interpretation such as “spontaneously, fluently” or “almost error-free”. Another conflict was also observed in the participants' ratings of the CEFR's usefulness for pedagogy and professional communication. Whereas both the closed-ended questionnaire and the interview data suggested that professional communication benefited more from the framework than pedagogical practice, the open-ended questionnaire results indicated otherwise. Similarly, while the statistics suggested a more positive role of the CEFR in teacher-student communication ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .76$ ), all the interviewees expressed doubt about such use, and instead showed more confidence of teachers using the framework language for professional exchanges. Besides compliments, the participants raised quite a few criticisms against the framework document, especially its length. The qualitative data also disclosed the participants' complaints about its abstract language, theoretical content, and applicability. Another concern shared by two interviewees and one questionnaire respondent was the “overwhelming influence” of the framework on the non-European languages taught at their institution.

[ONE thing I do NOT like about the CEFR is] its overwhelming influence in the course design and assessment in my university. For example, students learning Chinese and Japanese ... also have to be assessed based on its levels. So I'm [sic] like “what the hell” :((

## Research Question 2: How have they adopted the CEFR?

A major divergence can be detected in the data sources regarding the use of the CEFR. While the closed-ended responses unveiled the most expansive employment of the framework in assessment ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), both sources of qualitative data indicated that area to be curriculum development. A close examination of the statistics, nevertheless, provided part of the answer, which was probably the remarkable gap in the teachers' experience in using the CEFR for developing curricula. Since all the interviewees had this kind of experience, and only 29 out of 44 questionnaire participants responded to the open-ended items, it is quite reasonable to assume that those who had more experience using the framework were better represented in the two qualitative data sources. This experience gap was again manifest in the quantitative data on the CEFR adoption in assessment and pedagogy. However, all the three data sets consistently showed that the CEFR was utilised for communication by teachers with colleagues more often than with students. This might be explained by the interviewees' concern about students' ability

to understand the framework's abstract language.

Regarding the CEFR usage in assessment, it was revealed by the interviewees that they did not adopt the framework directly but rather used IELTS and TOEFL materials since these were the sources of materials for the university exit test. They reasoned that in so doing, their students were better prepared for this high-stakes test, and they still complied with the CEFR because both these tests were aligned with the framework. As the questionnaire respondents could not be contacted for clarification, it was not clear whether they shared this interpretation of using the CEFR for assessment. Furthermore, it is open to debate whether such a practice qualified as adopting the framework for assessment purposes.

Research Question 3: What are their needs related to the CEFR?

All the surveyed teachers expressed a remarkable need for more guidance on the framework, both via interactive workshops and written documents. The interviewees also added some expectations about the type of training. In terms of content, they wished to gain a more systematic overview of the framework as well as a working knowledge of how to apply the CEFR in designing assessment tasks and syllabi, and in teaching methods. Furthermore, one interviewee wished for a more detailed and “quantitative” version of the CEFR to use in assessment while another showed his preference for a simplified edition for quick consultation.

## **Discussion**

### *Consistent Findings*

The current research has generated a number of consistent findings with the studies previously reviewed. Like the language professionals in the CoE (2005), Faez et al. (2011a), Hismanoglu (2013), Martyniuk & Noijons (2007), and Normand-Marconet and Lo Bianco (2013), the surveyed Vietnamese teachers generally have a mixed, but overall positive attitude towards the framework. On the one hand, they applauded the framework's contribution, especially to curriculum development and assessment. On the other hand, they criticised its length, abstractness and applicability. Regarding the implementation, the Vietnamese teachers employed the CEFR in their practice at significantly different levels, which is similar to the case in Moonen et al. (2013). Likewise, all the Vietnamese participants also expressed a strong need for more CEFR-related training as well as a summary of the framework.

### *New Findings*

In addition to supporting the existing related studies, this project has expanded the CEFR literature by both challenging and deepening some of their findings. This study alleviates the

concern of Little (2007) and Byrnes (2007) about the limited influence of the CEFR in the classroom. It has shown that there was potential for the CEFR in daily practice when it informed the course objectives which were then realised in individual lesson goals as reported by the participants. In addition, the research casts doubt on the vision in North (2007) about the CEFR as a shared meta-language by revealing the teachers' negative view and limited use of the framework for this function. Thanks to its convergent parallel design, which involves a qualitative component, the study has been able to specify the type of training that depends on teachers' requirements, and the need for a more detailed and quantitative version of the CEFR for assessment purposes.

### *Theory Building*

The study has widened the scope of diffusion research to second language education. In this context, the innovation is not a piece of advanced technology or product, but a sophisticated framework for language teaching, learning and assessment. The limited adoption of the framework was also consistent with Rogers' (2003) prediction that a lack of interpersonal interactions might result in adopters being less convinced of an innovation's merits. Furthermore, the time element and its associated five adopter categories (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards) are illustrated by the varied levels of adoption among the surveyed teachers. The role of assessment mentioned in Van den Branden (2009) was also supported by teachers' reluctance to implement the CEFR because it was not compatible with the exit test.

The current research has added to a growing body of the CEFR international case studies such as those in Alderson (2002) and Byram and Parmenter (2012). The implementation of the CEFR in Vietnam, a developing country in Asia, provides insights into similar contexts where the foreign language education sector has not properly developed and become relatively independent of the government. At the same time, its government takes a serious interest in English language learning and is eager to adopt internationally recognised standards to boost the foreign language proficiency of the workforce. Additionally, it utilises the diffusion of innovations theory to interpret the findings as opposed to the conventional approach of language planning so that the impact of the CEFR can be understood beyond the policy level. As such, it complements the existing studies and offers an alternative theoretical basis for future research projects related to the CEFR.

## *Recommendations*

### For Policy Makers

As recommended in Van den Branden (2009), a formal peer support network should be established so that teachers may discuss theories, plan and observe lessons, then reflect on their experiences with their colleagues. More importantly, considering teachers' frequent complaints about their workload, it is essential that such activities be accommodated within their normal working hours. Educational administrators should also explicitly encourage an open atmosphere that allows experimentation, error and uncertainty, which is inevitable during the implementation of an innovative idea (Rogers, 2003). In addition to peer support, teachers' need for more knowledge about the CEFR should be properly addressed by external experts and trainers. As expressed by the participants, teachers first need a systematic overview of the framework and its underlying concepts such as action-oriented approach, plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Furthermore, they should be offered practical demonstrations of how to employ the CEFR in specific aspects of their jobs such as curriculum development and assessment.

Besides expert training and peer support, the mismatch between the CEFR and high-stakes assessment should be resolved. The practice of synthesising materials from commercial exam preparation books as reported by interviewees should be phased out, and the test construction should be in accordance with authoritative documents such as the CoE's (2011) guidelines for test development and the CoE's manual for relating tests to the CEFR (2009).

### For Teachers

Regarding the fact that the CEFR is the official framework for curriculum design and assessment, teachers, as "active, thinking decision makers" (Borg, 2003, p. 81), should also respond proactively rather than simply depend on their superiors for support; otherwise, they will have to "suffer" as one interviewee said. To start with, they may access the authoritative guidelines on how to use the framework on the CoE website such as the guide for users by Trim (2001). Likewise, teachers who are required to design tests will find the manual by the CoE (2011) highly useful. Besides written documents, those who prefer multimedia materials can access webinars by leading experts on the framework via the same website. In addition to personal discovery, teachers should make use of interpersonal exchanges to discuss issues related to the framework. Such informal discussions, if frequently conducted, will contribute to enhancing their knowledge and awareness so that they will be more ready to integrate the framework in their daily practice.

### For Framework Developers

As for framework developers, attempts should be made to make the framework more accessible to its end-users, namely teachers and learners. A possible solution will be to develop several versions of the document to suit different purposes, including a summary for quick reference, and a more detailed version for assessment. These versions, however, should be rigorously piloted with teachers and students to avoid complaints about length and complexity, as with the current framework. Criticisms about the CEFR's theoretical foundation especially the unidimensionality of the scale (Hulstijn, 2007), and the lack of a comprehension theory (Alderson, 2007), should also be given due attention.

### *Critical Reflections*

Although the present study aims to make an original contribution to the literature on diffusion of innovations and the CEFR in terms of both methodology and context, it has some inevitable limitations. With regards to participants, only a small number of Vietnamese teachers could be involved in the study due to time constraints and geographic distance. As all the respondents were based in one faculty, their opinions were not necessarily representative of teachers from faculties majoring in other languages, or other universities especially those not training foreign language majors. Similarly, the surveyed teachers' views might not reflect their counterparts' working in the primary or secondary education sector.

As for the data collection process, the questionnaire was administered online, which did not allow as much chance for clarification as direct administration. Nevertheless, the researcher did provide an email address so that the participants could contact him for any further queries. Similarly, the interviews were conducted by phone, hence lacked the visual non-verbal interactions of a face-to-face interview. However, attempts were made by the interviewer to make the interviewees feel relaxed and willing to reveal their honest opinions and to provide aural back-channeling signals throughout the interview.

Finally, the data analysis was comprised of a major qualitative component; hence, subjectivity was an inherent part of the process. Nonetheless, the researcher did follow the recommendation in Seidman (2006) and allow the patterns to emerge naturally during coding instead of imposing the hypotheses informed by the literature.

### *Agenda for Further Research*

This paper has explored the reception of the CEFR based on the diffusion of innovations model by Rogers (2003) and its re-interpretation by Van den Branden (2009). Thus, its descriptive



findings can serve as a basis for a further study based on the same model into the factors that hamper and facilitate the adoption of the framework. Alternatively, the recommendation of a peer support network in Van den Branden (2009) can be examined using a quasi-experimental approach.

Furthermore, the current research can be replicated in other contexts involving teachers from different universities, or even secondary and primary schools to provide a more comprehensive picture of the CEFR in Vietnam. Other stakeholders involved in the diffusion of the CEFR such as teacher trainers, teacher supervisors and education administrators should also become involved in order to cast light on the social system of this innovation.

As for the methodology, to complement the self-report techniques of this study, future research projects should consider utilising classroom observations and document analysis to examine the impact of the CEFR in teaching practice, syllabus design and assessment.

## **Conclusion**

The research represents a pioneering attempt to investigate the dissemination of the CEFR in Vietnam from the perspectives of teachers, a critical but often neglected stakeholder. It has attempted to reveal their perceptions and usage of the framework as well as their related needs based on the diffusion of innovations model in Rogers (2003) and re-interpreted in Van den Branden (2009). Via the convergent parallel design which involves the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data, the study has both confirmed and challenged the existing findings. Overall, it can be said that the CEFR led to positive changes in the research context, but action must be taken by all parties, including policymakers, framework developers and teachers to sustain and expand its favourable influence. Most importantly, resources should be dedicated to matching the institution's assessment system to the CEFR and establishing a formal peer-support network to help teachers successfully integrate the framework into their daily practice.

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## Appendix 1

### Findings from the Closed-ended Questionnaire Responses

**Table A1**

*Perceptions of the CEFR*

| Question                   | Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------------|---|----------|-----------|
| General                    |   |          |           |
| 10                         | It is easy to understand the framework.   | 3.23     | .94       |
| 11                         | Its length is appropriate.  | 2.82     | 1.06      |
| 12                         | Its language is clear.  | 3.43     | .90       |
| 13                         | Its system of terminology is consistent.  | 3.82     | .92       |
| Curriculum development     |   |          |           |
| 14                         | The CEFR is useful for curriculum/ syllabus development.                            | 4.25     | .72       |
| 15                         | The common reference levels are useful for setting learning outcomes.               | 4.23     | .74       |
| 16                         | The descriptive scheme is useful for learner need analysis.                         | 3.80     | .90       |
| Pedagogy                   |   |          |           |
| 17                         | The CEFR informs effective language teaching practice.                              | 3.45     | .79       |
| 18                         | It is a reliable reference for selecting learning materials.                        | 3.84     | .81       |
| 19                         | It is a reliable reference for designing learning activities.                       | 3.77     | .86       |
| Assessment                 |   |          |           |
| 20                         | The CEFR is useful for assessing students' language competence.                     | 4.20     | .70       |
| 21                         | It relates assessment to students' real-world language ability.                     | 3.75     | .94       |
| 22                         | It makes assessment more criterion-referenced.                                      | 4.16     | .71       |
| 23                         | The framework descriptors provide sufficient detail for assessment.                 | 3.64     | .89       |
| Professional communication |   |          |           |
| 24                         | The framework provides a common meta-language for discussion with colleagues.       | 3.55     | .85       |
| 25                         | The framework contributes to professional growth.                                   | 3.73     | .90       |
| 26                         | It is a useful means of communicating learning objectives and outcomes to students. | 3.98     | .76       |

**Table A2**

*General Perceptions of the CEFR*

| Variable   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Perception of the whole framework                | 3.32     | .72       |
| Perception of the CEFR in curriculum development | 4.09     | .66       |
| Perception of the CEFR in pedagogy               | 3.69     | .66       |
| Perception of the CEFR in assessment             | 3.94     | .59       |
| Perception of the CEFR in communication          | 3.75     | .53       |

**Table A3***Use of the CEFR*

| Question                   | Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------------|---|----------|-----------|
| Curriculum development     |   |          |           |
| 28                         | I use the CEFR to design the syllabi/ curricula for the school/faculty. | 3.52     | 1.53      |
| 29                         | I use the CEFR to set the learning outcomes of a course.                | 3.93     | 1.27      |
| 30                         | I use the CEFR to analyse learners' needs prior to syllabus design.     | 2.84     | 1.45      |
| Pedagogy                   |   |          |           |
| 31                         | I choose materials that match the CEFR levels of my students.           | 3.95     | 1.03      |
| 32                         | I use the CEFR criteria to design materials.                            | 3.68     | 1.16      |
| 33                         | I use the CEFR criteria to design activities.                           | 3.45     | 1.25      |
| Assessment                 |   |          |           |
| 34                         | I assess my students' oral production against the CEFR levels.          | 3.80     | 1.03      |
| 35                         | I assess my students' written production against the CEFR levels.       | 3.70     | .93       |
| 36                         | I assess my students' reading comprehension against the CEFR levels.    | 3.75     | .99       |
| 37                         | I assess my students' listening comprehension against the CEFR levels.  | 3.75     | 1.12      |
| Professional communication |   |          |           |
| 38                         | I use the CEFR to communicate with my students.                         | 2.59     | 1.11      |
| 39                         | I use the CEFR for professional discussion with my colleagues.          | 3.48     | 1.15      |

**Table A4***General Uses of the CEFR*

| Variable                                  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Use of the CEFR in curriculum development | 3.43     | 1.19      |
| Use of the CEFR in pedagogy               | 3.70     | 1.01      |
| Use of the CEFR in assessment             | 3.75     | .91       |
| Use of the CEFR in communication          | 3.03     | .97       |

**Table A5***Teachers' Needs Related to the CEFR*

| Question | Statement  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------|--|----------|-----------|
| Needs    |  |          |           |
| 41       | I want to attend training workshops related to the CEFR. | 4.48     | .73       |
| 42       | I want to access guides on how to use the CEFR.          | 4.39     | .97       |

## Appendix 2

### Findings from the Open-Ended Questionnaire Responses

**Table B1**

*Positive Remarks on the CEFR*

| Positive remark           | Frequency |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Clear                     | 8         |
| Detailed                  | 6         |
| Hierarchical              | 3         |
| Useful for assessment     | 3         |
| Systematic                | 2         |
| Useful for course design  | 2         |
| User-friendly             | 1         |
| Equivalent to IELTS       | 1         |
| Outcome-based             | 1         |
| List of can-do statements | 1         |
| Unknown                   | 1         |
| Total                     | 29        |

**Table B2**

*Criticisms against the CEFR*

| Criticism                          | Frequency |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Unclear distinction between levels | 9         |
| Lengthy                            | 6         |
| Abstract language                  | 3         |
| Unrealistic                        | 3         |
| Not covering business language     | 1         |
| Overwhelming influence             | 1         |
| Unknown                            | 6         |
| Total                              | 29        |

**Table B3**

*Areas Where the CEFR Most and Least Benefits*

| Area                       | Most | Least |
|----------------------------|------|-------|
| Curriculum development     | 11   | 1     |
| Classroom pedagogy         | 3    | 4     |
| Assessment                 | 5    | 5     |
| Professional communication | 2    | 5     |
| Misinterpretation          | 6    | 6     |
| No idea                    | 2    | 8     |
| Total                      | 29   | 29    |

**Table B4***Areas that the CEFR is Most and Least Used*

| Area                       | Most | Least |
|----------------------------|------|-------|
| Curriculum development     | 12   | 1     |
| Classroom pedagogy         | 8    | 10    |
| Assessment                 | 7    | 7     |
| Professional communication | 1    | 3     |
| Misinterpretation          | NA   | 2     |
| No idea                    | 1    | 6     |
| Total                      | 29   | 29    |



## **Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Concerning Learner Autonomy in the Language Classroom**

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### **Bio Data:**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses findings of a study that investigated teachers' beliefs and practices concerning learner autonomy at a Japanese foreign language university. The interview participants were five teachers from a content-based speaking and listening EFL course that holds learner autonomy development as one of its core tenants. Participants were asked to define learner autonomy, identify autonomous tasks in classroom materials (vocabulary, listening, discussion transcription, and reading discussion lessons), and modify classroom tasks to promote learner autonomy more effectively. After the interview, teachers' definitions of autonomy were compared to definitions from the literature. Additionally, the researchers explored the relationships between teacher practices and definitions.

This study found that while most teachers are able to define learner autonomy, they are inconsistent and vague in their application and promotion of it in the classroom. If teachers are unclear on what learner autonomy in the classroom looks like or how to effectively promote it, then students may not appreciate its value in their language learning. For these reasons, it is

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essential that teachers receive training and support in what learner autonomy means, and how to promote it in their specific context to help students develop the autonomous skills they need to meet their language learning goals.

## **Introduction**

Although creating “an increasing sense of awareness and liberation in man [which] moves to the idea of man as ‘producer of his society,’ has been claimed to be a worthy educational goal”, (Little, 1991, p. 6) the definitions of learner autonomy are as numerous and diverse as the teachers who purport to incorporate it into their classrooms. Nevertheless, there are a few core elements that stand out across definitions: learners being responsible for “taking charge” of their learning (Dickinson, 1978; Holec, 1981; Little, 2007), having the freedom to make meaningful choices (Little, 1991, 1995; Dickinson, 1995), and developing the capacity of critical self-reflection (Little, 1999, 2007). With elements of learner autonomy generally identified, a context-specific methodology for implementing it in the classroom becomes necessary and, with it, guidelines for teachers to follow (Nunan, 1997). Without teachers who are well-versed in how to train learners to become autonomous, development of students’ autonomy may be impeded (Dickinson, 1992; Graves & Vye, 2012). Despite the clear importance of teachers’ roles in promoting learner autonomy, very little research exists on their beliefs and practices concerning it (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Consequently, through this project we addressed this gap and make the case for the necessity of institutionally-specific goals and objectives for learner autonomy and teacher training because inconsistency is frequent and problematic.

## **Literature Review**

In one of the earliest definitions of learner autonomy in language learning, Holec (1981) calls for learners to be “taking charge” (p. 3) of their own learning. This definition remains at the forefront of the field, with others modifying his definition rather than creating entirely new ones. For example, Little (2000a) combined Holec’s definition with his own to create a more thorough definition that addresses both the attributes and psychology of learner autonomy:

Autonomy in language learning depends on the development and exercise of a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action; autonomous learners assume responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method of their learning, monitoring its progress, and evaluating its outcomes (p. 69).

Benson (2011) further clarifies autonomy by dividing choice into two types: content-based choice (the what is studied and why it was chosen) and methodology-based choice (the when,

where and how it is studied). All these elements combined give teachers a clearer understanding of what autonomy entails.

As definitions developed, researchers in the field began outlining concrete plans for implementation of learner autonomy in the classroom. While many models exist (Macaro, 1997; Littlewood, 1999), Nunan (1997) argues there are degrees of autonomy; it is not a black or white ability for students to obtain, but rather one where the extent to which it is achieved is affected by a variety of factors, some related to their learning, others linked to the context or circumstances under which they are learning. He outlines a five-level model for developing language learners' autonomy in a principled pedagogy where students move from the lowest level of awareness to the final stage of transcending the classroom environment and seeing the connections between tasks there and those of the outside world. Models like this are useful references for teachers implementing autonomy in the classroom because they have clear practical application.

Teachers should promote learner autonomy in the classroom and transfer responsibility to students so that the learners “[generate their] own purposes for learning, in pursuit of those purposes [they] determine not only the content of learning, but the way in which learning will take place [and] how successful [it will be]” (Little, 1991, p. 7). As such, the goal of learner autonomy must be made explicit to the students, for

most learners, at the start of the learning process, do not know what is best. It is the function of the materials [or curriculum] augmentation which ultimately will leave them in a position where they do know what is best (Nunan, 1997, p. 194).

However, materials alone cannot make a student autonomous. They must be used by teachers aware of the possibilities contained within a curriculum and who are able to confidently introduce elements of learner autonomy into their classrooms. Without proper guidance, introduction of strategies, and training from teachers, learners may not have consistent opportunities to develop their autonomy or feel comfortable calling their own shots (Crabbe, 1993; Little, 1995). Thus, it is absolutely crucial for teachers to have a clear understanding of what they are doing and why in order to effectively implement learner autonomy in the classroom.

## **Context**

This interview-based study was conducted in the English department at a foreign language university in Japan, regarding Freshman English (FE), a mandatory first-year oral communication course. Teachers taught theme-based units (e.g. relationships, music, movies)

produced internally; however, they could adapt the materials as long as lesson objectives and goals were met. Teacher training consisted of a three-hour FE in-service meeting that addressed issues and course curriculum or policy changes pertinent to the new academic year but did not focus on how to teach any lessons. For the remainder of the year, FE teachers were encouraged to talk to each other for more support.

This university's various programs and its self-access learning center have given it a reputation throughout Japan for promoting learner autonomy. As understanding of autonomy has improved over time, vague applications of autonomy in FE, such as teacher-controlled tasks, were eliminated and the stronger tenets, such as reflective activities were kept or added. In particular, the beliefs that learners should be involved in their learning, have the freedom to make meaningful choices (Little, 1991, 1995; Dickinson, 1995), and develop their capacity of critical self-reflection (Little, 1999, 2000a, 2007) are all important components of the current course. Additionally, students can access materials freely and discuss their language goals and study plans with learning advisors in the self-access learning center. However, at the time of this study, no formal institutional definition of autonomy existed and the current pre-term teacher training focused on providing an overview of the course's curriculum but did not address effective learner autonomy implementation.

## **Methods**

### *Research Questions*

1. What are teachers' definitions of learner autonomy?
2. How do teachers promote autonomy in the classroom?

### *Participants*

All fifteen instructors teaching the FE course were asked for and provided consent to participate in the research. Due to a close working relationship between the researchers and possible participants, five of them were randomly selected to avoid the appearance of bias. When interviewed, two teachers had finished their first year teaching the course, and the others their second, third and fourth years. They all originated from a variety of native English-speaking countries and hold an MA in TESOL or Applied Linguistics. Given the high turnover of teachers in the department, the selection of first, second, third, and fourth-year teachers was considered a fair representation of the faculty being investigated.

## Interview Format and Materials

Since the aim of the research was largely information-gathering, semi-structured interviews of almost entirely open-ended questions were conducted because they would provide a basic framework to help the interviewees offer appropriate responses for effective narrative analysis without restricting opportunities to expound on answers or pursue relevant tangents (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013). A more structured format might have limited what participants could express and possibly prevented a deep analysis of the data because participants could have been led to provide answers the researchers might have preferred.

Each one-to-one interview consisted of two parts: definitions of autonomy, and identification of autonomous tasks in lessons (Appendix 1). The first part of the interviews focused on eliciting teachers' definitions of autonomy in language learning as well as their thoughts about the role of autonomy in the FE course curriculum. This also tended to include their observations of students' and other teachers' attitudes towards autonomy in the classroom. In the second part, teachers evaluated four sample lessons and identified elements which they thought promoted autonomy, and suggested modifications for those which could promote it more effectively.

The materials used in the second part of the interview were core lessons from the FE course (vocabulary, listening, discussion transcription and reading discussion lessons); however, the content was modified to be a newly designed unit which had not yet been taught. Due to its presence in the course research reading list for teachers, the researchers modified the lessons using Nunan's (1997) levels of autonomy to include a range of autonomous, semi-autonomous, and non-autonomous tasks, which were defined, respectively, by the researchers as one in which the students direct their own learning within the activity; one that contains structured choice; and one that involves complete teacher control of the activity (Appendix 2). However, the overall objectives and format remained unchanged so that teachers were familiar with the structure but would have no experience with the content, thus ensuring equal exposure to the materials. Teachers were told that these materials might be adopted in the future, and were asked to imagine using them with students midway through the academic year.

## Procedures

One week prior to the interview, each participant was given and asked to review the interview questions and lessons. Each teacher was interviewed individually by the same researcher at the end of the academic year. Interviews were recorded with teacher permission but their identity was kept confidential so they could feel comfortable expressing their honest opinions and feelings. Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes, and recordings were transcribed by the

researchers. Any personal information identifying interviewees was removed.

## Analysis

The data were organized and evaluated using non-narrative thematic analysis (narrative inquiry), and the researchers searched for emergent patterns and themes from within rather than using predetermined categories (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013). Since the goal of this research was exploration of current beliefs and practices, with the aim of developing training that responded to findings, rather than looking for specific elements from the start, it was determined that this analysis would provide the most useful data. Unlike thematic narrative analysis, which seeks to find instances of pre-determined concepts or even phrases, non-narrative analysis allowed participants' ideas to be expressed in their own words and for the participants, rather than the researchers, to determine the direction of the conversation (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013).

## Results

### *Definitions*

In analyzing teachers' definitions of learner autonomy, it was found that they all included Holec's (1981) basic definition of controlling/directing one's own learning but each independently emphasized different elements of learner autonomy (Figure 1). However promising these definitions looked, upon closer inspection it became clear that teachers' practices did not support their definitions.

| The ability to control/direct your own learning and... |   |
|--|---|
| T1   | without teacher direction.  |
| T2   | students have the intrinsic motivation to teach themselves.   |
| T3   | learners work towards self-defined goals by self-selected methods.                                  |
| T4   | students work at their own pace, and instruction relies heavily on the use of technology.           |
| T5   | choice happens within the classroom under teacher supervision, often from teacher approved options. |

Figure 1. Summary of teachers' definitions of learner autonomy

### *Thematic Analysis*

Many themes materialized while exploring teacher beliefs on autonomous learning, but the

analysis focused on those which were common across teachers and overlapped with elements in the literature, specifically those of Little (2000a) and Benson (2011) in their combined definition. Specifically, the concepts of content-based choice, methodology-based choice, meaningful reflection, and independent application beyond the classroom are discussed in this paper because they best fit the course’s aim of promoting self-directed learning in and out of the classroom.

### Content-Based Choice

Benson (2001) argues that in order for learning to be “authentically self-directed”, students must be given the opportunity to learn about what interests them. The FE course curriculum allows teachers to give students more control over the content and goals of their learning, but the degree to which it is done varies among teachers (Figure 2).

|    |  |
|----|--|
| T1 | Students should have the freedom to make content-based decisions and more opportunities to repeat an activity with content they supply.  |
| T2 | Students should decide what topics and goals are important or interesting to them and which will increase their intrinsic motivation to learn. Students need to reflect on past choices. |
| T3 | Students should work towards self-defined goals and have opportunities to choose topics or materials that are interesting and appropriate for them.                                      |
| T4 | Students should be allowed to self-select materials and content with some teacher guidance, and should identify their learning goals.  |
| T5 | Students should choose activities and topics that interest them, but they may be overwhelmed and unable to make these choices.   |

*Figure 2.* Summary of teacher descriptions of content-based choice

All the teachers spoke about the importance of allowing students to make choices concerning the content of the course. Teacher 1 wants students to direct their learning but thinks very few students are able to direct all aspects of their learning. Despite this feeling, he believes the majority of students are able to direct some of their learning, so he gives them structured tasks and allows them to make content-related choices within that structure. He said:

I think in the FE context, it’s a more specific form of learner autonomy where students are just more responsible for making certain decisions. They still want

the teacher to guide things and we still try to encourage the students to take responsibility, and a few of them do. But, I'd say, out of a class of 30, 3 or 4 of them would.

What I prefer to do is have [a] theme...[and] have it very well scaffolded by the teacher, but then give the students the opportunity to choose within. [For] example, in the travel unit...that I did is put them in groups and chose continents, and then the group discussed within themselves to get a country out of that continent.

He often suggests modifications that require students to repeat activities or do similar ones but with student-selected content. This provides students with scaffolding and the opportunity to first learn how to do an activity using controlled content, and then hopefully complete similar successful activities on their own to learn using content of interest to them.

Similar to Teacher 1, Teachers 2 and 3 also believe students should make content-related choices, but they extend this to include student-selected learning goals because they argue that in order for students to select appropriate content, they need to know what they want to learn about. They believe students should reflect on their learning goals and past learning experiences in order to develop better learning goals and select more appropriate materials for the future. If students do these things, both teachers believe that students will be more motivated to learn and extend their learning outside the classroom. For example, Teacher 3 says:

[Autonomy is] learners working towards self-defined goals by self-selected methods. Doing what they want in the way they want to do it. If they want to practice their listening, and they want to become a more fluent listener, then they decide that and they set that as a goal.

In the Reading Discussion lesson, he talks more about content-based choices, saying that it is better for students to select their own articles because it makes them responsible for their learning: "I like the idea of them going... selecting their own article. That they can choose an article that is interesting to them and that is at an appropriate level for them."

Similarly, Teacher 2 states, "Part of how I think about autonomy is the students decide what is important [because] it is up to the students to decide what they're interested in and how to go about finding... a key to their motivation [for] doing it." She believes that students become motivated to direct their own learning when they are responsible for the success of their own learning goals. Like Teacher 1, she believes students need scaffolding and modeling in order to learn how to successfully do different learning activities, but in the end they should be given more freedom to direct and adapt those activities to achieve their goals. This is evidenced in her comments about a structured task in the Listening lesson:

Becoming a good listener in the beginning might involve this kind of task because it's giving them options, showing them this is one type of thing you could look for. But, towards the end, ideally, students [should] discern the basic structure of



that listening before telling them what it is and getting them to decide what the important parts are.

On the other hand, it is difficult to understand Teachers 4 and 5's descriptions of student-defined goals and student-selected content. Teacher 4 does mention "empowering" students by allowing them to choose discussion topics and reading materials, and she believes that students enjoy opportunities to make these types of decisions. However, she often contradicts herself when talking about how involved the teacher should be in these decisions. When describing her role in a discussion activity she says, "I, as a teacher, haven't told them. It's a group dynamic. [They] come up with ideas." Conversely, when evaluating the Reading Discussion lesson, she states that the lesson promotes autonomy because students are using teacher provided materials to self-select an appropriate article. She voices a similar idea about the Listening lesson saying students need guidelines to successfully create their own discussion activities, so it is unclear when and how scaffolding and teacher guidance are necessary in tasks that she identifies as autonomous.

Regarding goals, Teacher 4 says that students "actually like taking charge of their goals and achieving their goals. They're proud of that," but she does not provide any specifics on how students create or achieve their goals. During the Listening lesson, she approves of the lesson reflection because it allows students to reflect on what they want to learn and take charge of their learning, but, again, she does not give any specific details about why this is meaningful or how this is accomplished despite repeated requests.

Teacher 5 is also vague in her discussion of meaningful choice regarding goals and content. Unlike the others, she seems to believe that even though students should be given opportunities to make these choices, they are often unable to choose and become overwhelmed. Then the teacher must intervene by making all choices happen within the classroom, enabling her to "nudge" students in the right direction. In general, the other four teachers agreed that the Reading Discussion lesson promoted learner autonomy because it gave students guidelines on how to select appropriate articles, allowing students to find interesting content. However, while Teacher 5 identifies this lesson as autonomy promoting, she qualifies it as "too autonomous for a lot of students because...if [they] don't have a specific topic, [they] can waste so much time stressing out." She expresses concern that allowing students to prepare outside of class is inadvisable because it is too much for students to do on their own, and they often fail to do it. Beyond this, Teacher 5 provides no further comments or examples about students' choice of goals and content.

In general, all the teachers agree that allowing students to choose their own materials and learning goals promotes autonomy. Teacher 1 questions students' ability to make these choices, but, like Teachers 2 and 3, he believes with scaffolding they can develop this skill. Teachers 4 and 5 provide less evidence of content-based choice, and, in fact, Teacher 5 contradicts what she says by making changes that put the teacher back in control. Despite teachers knowing this is an essential element of learner autonomy, there is little evidence to suggest it is being effectively or consistently implemented.

### Methodology-Based Choice

Compared to content-based choice, there was more overlap in language used and ideas expressed when discussing methodology-based choice (Figure 3). All of the teachers recognized the importance of students making decisions about method, time and location, but few concrete examples were provided.

|    |  |
|----|--|
| T1 | Students require teacher assistance, scaffolding, and guidelines in order to learn how to make good choices.                               |
| T2 | Students should create their own structure or framework within the class materials, which creates intrinsic motivation.                    |
| T3 | Students should find their own best way to reach self-determined goals by selecting their own learning methods and setting their own pace. |
| T4 | Students should be allowed to work at their own pace and decide when, what, and how much they do.  |
| T5 | Students need a flexible timeframe which allows them to work at their own pace.  |

*Figure 3. Summary of teacher descriptions of methodology-based choice*

Many teachers' comments focus on encouraging students to think about how they might achieve something, yet Teachers 1 and 4 are not specific. For example, Teacher 1's summary of the course curriculum vaguely discusses methodology-based choices:

I think there's a [sic] lot of aspects where the students are sort of assisted in making their own decisions. So, they come up with a particular self-directed learning project; we scaffold the ideas and give them some of the background

materials they need, and then they make the decisions. And it's always hard for them in the beginning because they have no idea what to do. But we scaffold it a little bit sort of tighter, and they can make the decision.

Teacher 4 is also vague in saying, "This is autonomous here... 'What will you do to improve this?' And make a study plan to improve. Study plans are always awesome." This is the only time she discusses study plans in her interview, yet she offers no explanation for why they are beneficial or how to engage students in the activity. Also, she says autonomy is the "where, what, how, when, [and that] it's sort of left up to them. But I think learner autonomy is not just 'here see you later' you have to provide the scaffolding for them to be able to do it." Although she uses the term "scaffolding" and repeatedly highlights its importance, she never offers specific examples of what such scaffolding looks like despite prompting from the interviewer.

In contrast, Teacher 3 specifically spoke about methodology-based choice but went so far as to question its authenticity:

It's almost like an oxymoron to say an autonomous task given in a class. It could be a task involving some element of autonomy, but they'd still be following whatever instructions you've given them. I suppose some might go beyond the instructions you've given them, or a task where they had to set their own instructions to decide not just which of these tasks [they] want to do.

He suggests that in order to have methodology-based choice in the classroom, there cannot be interference from the teacher. Following teacher instruction inherently compromises students' ability to choose how, when, and where they learn.

Teacher 2 believes methodology-based choice can occur in the classroom as long as students have intrinsic motivation to participate in their learning:

[Intrinsic motivation] really needs to be there for a student to be autonomous. I recognize...teachers are there to help scaffold students into developing themselves as students, but [often] the tasks or activities that teachers might develop...provide instrumental motivation...but it would be great if the teacher's role could facilitate and get students to become at least aware of what their intrinsic motivations are.

Her beliefs coincide with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) which connects the idea of learner autonomy with that of intrinsic motivation. Experiencing the methodological choices they make gives students better control over their actions and increases awareness of future options.

The only element of methodology-based choice that teachers mentioned specifically, sometimes repeatedly, is the importance of students working at their own pace. Teacher 3 explains students "look in the [self-access center], talk to the teacher, get some advice, and then

go away and do what they want to do.” In Teacher 4’s definition, pace also played a role in student enjoyment of a lesson:

They really like being in charge of their own learning so...I was really flexible with the tasks...say this is a 90 minute [task]. Some of my kids are going to do it in 45 minutes, some are not and some are going to do it in 105.

She goes on to highlight this as, sometimes, the only existing autonomous element in certain lessons: “vocabulary lessons aren’t extremely autonomous except that you’re just telling them to go at their own pace.”

Teacher 5’s beliefs went even further, defining learner autonomy in terms of pace: “So, taking charge of your own learning is basically doing it at your own pace.” She also provides an example of an autonomous task focusing on both method and pace:

[Task 5 of the Vocabulary lesson is] an individual extension, which I assume could be a possible homework activity...I would even do these activities in the class, as work stations. Give them the choice. They could choose from these in class time, rather than me saying, right, here’s a worksheet on just one specific skill...I would make it a whole lesson. They might be able to do 2 in a lesson... So it’s up to them what they want to do, or how many they want to do. That’s what I would do. So then, that to me, is more autonomous.

Interestingly, Teachers 4 and 5 constantly speak about the importance of students having control over their pace as key to their autonomy but frequently refer to students who do not work in a timely fashion as “lazy” or incapable of autonomy. Teacher 5 questions students’ ability to complete the Reading Discussion preparation, even with directions that tell students how to choose an appropriate article and design good discussion questions, stating:

You still have students that [won’t] follow that...Some are just lazy, like “do you like this music group?” Where else does that go?... I plan to give them a little help or advice, like, ‘Maybe you could change this? How do you think you could change this?’...but I think Task 5 is definitely autonomous but it can sometimes be a bit too broad for them. And even if they’ve got the guidelines, sometimes it’s still over their heads. Especially for those students who are busy or leave it to the last minute. Sometimes it’s just too difficult or too long.

Her solution to this problem is removing some opportunity for choice from the students’ control and returning it to the teacher. This is seen repeatedly throughout her interview, as though she is unconvinced or unwilling to give students the freedom to make choices about their learning unless “nudged” in her preferred direction.

Overall, the lack of details provided by most of the teachers suggests that they are unsure of how to provide students with opportunities for choices regarding methodology, pace, or location. Teacher 3 has the clearest explanation on this topic, and Teacher 2 focuses on

developing scaffolding and student motivation. On the other hand, Teachers 1, 4, and 5 are vague, saying it was happening but did not explain how. At times, they would say it was important, but when pressed for examples they were ambiguous. Teachers may know what methodology-based choice is in the academic sense but many are unsure of what it looks like or how to implement it in a classroom setting.

### Meaningful Reflection

Reflection is often considered a key to learner autonomy because monitoring and evaluation are necessary for learners to identify individual preferences and track progress (Little, 2000b; Benson, 2006). Reflection must be meaningful and well-structured; otherwise, it amounts to little more than a basic review of what was done and a simplistic evaluation of which activities were enjoyed. While these elements are important, without going deeper, the development of autonomy is compromised. All teachers recognized the value of reflection (Figure 4) but provided different perspectives, and only some consider it crucial.

|    |   |
|----|---|
| T1 | Students should question what they are doing as a means of raising awareness.                                     |
| T2 | Students need to be trained on how to reflect effectively to use it to guide future choices.                      |
| T3 | Reflecting on past choices helps students make better choices and learning plans in the future.                   |
| T4 | Reflection helps students make study plans.   |
| T5 | Students should be taught how to reflect more deeply so they are not just giving their opinions about activities. |

*Figure 4.* Summary of teacher descriptions of meaningful reflection

Teacher 1 focused on the importance of students questioning the usefulness of what they are doing with regard to their learning. If they are not questioning what they are doing, they will receive no benefit because:

Students [need to] recognize certain things that they should or should not be doing in connection with their own learning...I don't mean question the decisions the teacher's making, but question certain things, [like] activities, a grammar point, something that they've had maybe given to them in the class or they've

discovered outside and they begin to question it and think ‘how is this useful in my particular context and for me?’ So they’ll be questioning their own actions through the course.

Unlike the other teachers, he emphasizes questioning what they are doing during activities rather than at other times, suggesting this is when they benefit most from reflection. He continues by drawing a connection between in-progress questioning and developing an awareness of their progress:

It’s actually interesting because they are questioning what they’re doing but they’re also questioning...why they are questioning what they are doing...that’s beginning to generate this awareness of what learner autonomy is.

Teacher 2 considers reflection to be a major part of learner autonomy for students, but stresses that they may not know how to do it effectively at first. Training is necessary for “getting students to recognize their own learning styles and scaffolding them to... become an independent learner, where they can recognize their strengths and weaknesses and independently choose a path.” She consistently expresses this belief throughout the materials evaluation discussion as well:

Usually after a unit I’ll do a reflection...I would ask them specific questions. Not something that can be cut and pasted. And certainly if they were unhappy with how they did things, [ask] them, ‘what would you do differently if you had to do this again?’...You can’t be autonomous without self-reflection.

When discussing another lesson, she likes the reflection questions because they require students to identify both strong and weak points as well as outline how they will work to improve: “I think it’s a step in the right direction because it’s getting them to think more seriously and specifically.”

This is the type of scaffolding she has in mind for teaching students to reflect effectively, but she identifies other possible questions:

The first time they do this [task], have some very specific questions [about their performance]...Then later on we might take those out, and [ask], ‘What will you do to improve this?’ Again, scaffolding them into thinking about what we want them to think about.

Teacher 3 also believes the value of reflection lies in helping students make better choices in the future. If they are unable to ascertain whether or not activities relate to their self-defined goals, then it is difficult to determine whether they have improved:

If they go beyond identifying individual mistakes...and then find something they want to work on, I’d be happy with them to achieve that...if they’re convinced that’s a good, useful plan based on having seen something, and this gives them a reason to make a plan.

In particular, he highlights the questions in the pre-listening task of the Listening lesson:

It seems quite autonomous because they're thinking about it; they're making a plan; they're deciding what they're going to do, what they're going to be. They're hopefully deciding what's going to be in their minds when they go on to do the listening.

Before students begin the lesson, reflecting on what they have tried previously helps lay the bases for a new learning plan. Teacher 4 similarly notices the usefulness of reflection in guiding future study but much more vaguely. She defines learner autonomy as “self-reflection, reflecting on what they've done in class. Sort of just their thoughts on things, maybe designing how they want to study as well, in what way they're going to study and how they're going to study,” but she offers no specific questions or ways to implement it in the classroom at any point in the interview. Why it holds the degree of importance she ascribes to it or how the quality is connected to autonomy are not elaborated upon, thus giving a relatively incomplete picture of this teacher's beliefs on reflection.

Loosely, Teacher 5 agrees with Teacher 3 regarding a need for explicit training on how to reflect properly, but instead of explaining how to train students, she focuses primarily on the value and quality of reflection by asking:

Why is [reflecting] only considered with autonomy? You can have a transmissive lesson and still reflect on it, but it doesn't make it autonomous. That's where it gets confusing for me because reflection is just giving your opinion on the lesson and what worked for you. If you wanted to be autonomous, it would be 'I don't have to write this' because I know a lot of autonomous learning scholars and [research] who always talk about autonomous learning and reflecting on what you learned, but you can do that at any time. It doesn't have to be hand-in-hand with autonomous learning... I think reflection is just reflection on its own.

Despite feeling this, she does distinguish between better and worse reflection questions. She identifies those in Task 6 of the Reading Discussion lesson as not useful because:

It's on all the lessons and half of [the students] don't fill it out and they don't care because the questions are 'What skills did you practice today?' Easy, you just have to write the [skill]. 'What will you remember from this lesson?' Useful vocabulary is usually what they write. 'Did you enjoy this lesson?' can be a yes or no answer. They don't ask any information about what the students are actually thinking, and half the time [students] just write what they think we want them to write.

She signals out Task 5 in the Listening lesson as useful since the questions are structured and require students to think of their own answers:

It's not just yes/no questions... They have to think [about] what improved and how did it improve... There's not just a simple 'Did you enjoy this lesson?' which is absolutely useless. These are so much better. These are what I think students

would benefit from...these questions are promoting autonomy. The others not so much because it's personal opinion.

She does not consider reflection on task performance autonomy promoting because it is simply a personal opinion. Further, she specifies that good questions ought to require students to go beyond simply expressing an opinion and require them to do something outside the classroom. If both are not present, she would consider it a bad reflection question.

All the teachers appear to have moments of overlap regarding reflection, the most obvious being the importance of its quality. Yet, there is also confusion with some teachers questioning its ability to promote autonomy, and others questioning when and where it ought to be done. Due to this, there is little consistency across classrooms regarding reflection.

#### Independent Application of Skills Outside the Classroom

In Nunan's (1997) Five Degrees of Autonomy, the final degree, transcendence, is the ability to make connections between the classroom and the outside world. While freshmen are not expected to fully realize this degree, they may begin to, independently or with teacher guidance. The range of teacher comments concerning this element seems to be the largest, with some teachers barely addressing it and others covering it extensively (Figure 5).

|    |   |
|----|---|
| T1 | Students cannot learn everything in class, so the goal is providing students with the foundation and tools necessary for building their language skills outside of class. |
| T2 | Students need to be intrinsically motivated to give meaning and purpose to classroom tasks in the real world.   |
| T3 | Classroom tasks should directly link to tasks students will encounter in the real world so students can be successful in using those skills outside the classroom.        |
| T4 | Using technology in the classroom provides opportunities for students to do activities at home and is more permanent than paper handouts.                                 |
| T5 | Students benefit by reflecting on how they can use the skills outside of the classroom.   |

*Figure 5.* Summary of teacher descriptions of independent application of skills outside the classroom



Teacher 4 had few comments on independent action. The closest comment she gave was, “personally I think using technology helps because students can do that from home, so they can learn using technology rather than just handouts that you photocopy and they can throw away.” However, it is unclear if she means students freely accessing materials outside of the classroom via technology is autonomous or whether simply using a computer outside of class supports autonomy.

Teacher 5 also makes no specific mention of independent action, but about the reflection activity on the Listening lesson she says:

The last question, ‘How can you apply what you learned today outside the classroom?’ That’s completely autonomous because it’s encouraging them to do more outside the classroom on their own time...Giving them a little more control outside the classroom. In that sense, these questions are promoting autonomy.

She acknowledges that students need to consider how they can use classroom skills outside of the classroom, but she does not explain why it is important or how it promotes autonomy. She believes this question is autonomy promoting because it encourages students to work outside of class, not because it links classroom activities to real-life. Additionally, although she wants students to think beyond outside application of skills, she dislikes the question where students identify what they have learned in class. It is difficult to understand how she expects students to apply skills outside the classroom if the scaffolding which helps students identify what they have learned is removed.

On the other hand, Teacher 1 believes in giving students a “platform” on which they can continue to build:

I often say we’re giving you [the students] the kind of tools and we’re giving you the platform to be able to go do your own thing. I’m not going to teach you everything you need to know and need to be able to use...[I’m] giving you the tools which you can use outside.

Later, regarding training students to be autonomous, he continues:

It takes probably about two units for them to realize things are different here. They’re not just going to learn grammar point after grammar point or word list after word list. They’re going to learn transferable skills that they’re going to hopefully be able to use in other places.

He believes teachers should explicitly help students make connections between the classroom and real-life situations, especially in the early stages of autonomy training.

Teacher 2 focuses on students’ intrinsic motivation to connect the classroom to the real world; however, unlike the others, she focuses less on the use of language skills and more on use of

content knowledge outside of the classroom. Students must see how class topics are useful because without that connection, there is no reason to study it. When reviewing the Reading Discussion lesson, she identifies the students' role as being "responsible for keeping the discussion going, and not for the sake of going but also finding something in it that interests them." She views this activity as an opportunity to ignite a student's interest in a given topic, thus motivating them to find more information about it:

Maybe there's a point in the article that gets them thinking about the topic in general, and they want to explore it later on...[and] options are opening up through the article itself... You can go on and if you really want to know more about this, there's this website right over here, or there's this book, talk to this person.

Teacher 3 speaks the most prolifically about students' use of skills outside of the classroom, and also felt it was essential for classroom tasks to be connected to the real world. He clearly states multiple times that they should mirror real-life experiences: "what they do in class... should be things they can do autonomously later"; "showing them different ways to be autonomous. Other tools they can go out and sort of reuse in the future"; and "[using self-access resources on campus] during class is not the point of doing that. The point of doing that is they will go afterwards." When analyzing the Reading Discussion lesson, he questions its authenticity because it is not necessarily a "task that carries over into their real lives." When asked about this lesson not being autonomy promoting, he responded, "not necessarily, but it's not going to do as good of a job of promoting outside class autonomy."

The variety of responses on this topic suggests that it is probably the least understood and promoted by these teachers. Teacher 3 seems to be the one teacher with a clear understanding of this, and he tries to actively promote it in the classroom. The other teachers recognize its role in autonomy but do not necessarily value or promote it.

## **Conclusion**

As seen in the results above, these teachers know that promoting autonomy in the classroom is one of the cornerstones of teaching theory at this university, and they each try to promote and implement autonomy in their classrooms to the best of their abilities. However, in answer to our research questions, we found that no two teachers have or use the same definition of autonomy when teaching FE. Each uses their own variation of the basic Holec definition which in turn influences the methods they employ to promote autonomy in the classroom. As a result, the degree to which learner autonomy is being taught and realized in the classroom varies from

classroom to classroom, so there may be variance among students' understanding of autonomy and their ability to successfully direct their own learning.

Our research echoes that of Crabbe (1993) and Little (1995), and we argue that in order for students to fully develop autonomy, proper autonomy training for teachers is essential. This will ensure that all teachers apply the same definition of learner autonomy, have a clear understanding of curriculum-defined goals and objectives related to autonomy, and know how to effectively and regularly implement it in their classrooms. If these are not achieved, students will not have the appropriate tools necessary to direct their language learning, forever putting them at a disadvantage in developing their own autonomy (Deci, Sheinman, Schwartz, & Ryan, 1981; Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999). Additionally, we agree with others that there is a need for context-specific definitions of autonomy as well as teacher training on how to realize these goals in the classroom (Dickinson, 1992; Cotterall, 2000; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2011).

The presence of autonomy in curricula has grown ever stronger, and today many institutions include it as a clearly stated goal. Despite this growing presence, there is still little known about teachers' beliefs and practices concerning autonomy in the classroom. This study fills a small portion of that gap by showing that while most teachers demonstrate understanding of some elements of learner autonomy, as evidenced by their knowledge of Holec's (1981) definition, none of them demonstrate any consistency in implementing it in their classroom practices or use similar techniques. That being said, this is just one study in one context; more exploration of such beliefs and practices will help explore better ways to implement autonomy in the classroom. Furthermore, while we cannot say how definitions and training should be developed or implemented at individual institutions, we hope that further research on this topic will offer more insight for programs as they move forward in preparing teachers to effectively train students to be independent learners.

### **Limitations**

While great care was taken to be as objective as possible, one limitation of this study was the direct involvement of the researchers in the data collection. The use of a third party interviewer was not possible because there was no teacher well versed enough in autonomy research who could conduct the interviews. Due to this, participants may have felt uncomfortable expressing their true thoughts and opinions because the researchers were senior members of the FE course curriculum committee. As such, the researchers attempted to mitigate this issue by having the researcher who was the committee coordinator avoid direct contact with the participants and not conduct interviews. Another challenge for the researchers was to ignore teachers' identities

during data analysis even though participants were given random identification numbers for this part of the study. To avoid subjective analysis, the researchers focused solely on the interview responses and did not discuss personal interactions with the participants. Similar research in the future should consider using third parties to conduct the interview process, from participant selection through transcription, in order to ensure participant candidness and objective data analysis by the researchers.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview Questions**

#### *Part 1: General Questions about Autonomy*

1. What is your general definition of learner autonomy?
2. How do you define learner autonomy in the Freshman English context?
3. How do you think we should be educating or training freshman English students about learner autonomy?
4. What attitudes from students have you heard or experienced about learner autonomy?
5. What attitudes from other teachers (please do not use names) have you heard or experienced about learner autonomy?

The following questions were asked while teachers were looking at the materials from four FE model lessons (vocabulary, listening, discussion transcription, and reading discussion).

*Part 2: Questions about Lessons/Activities*

1. Do you think this lesson effectively promotes learner autonomy? Can you show me specific elements of this lesson to support your answer?
2. How would you modify this lesson to better promote learner autonomy in your classroom?
3. After modifications, what do you think your role as a teacher is in this lesson?
4. After modifications, what do you think your students' role is?
5. After modifications, do you think your students would be able to successfully complete the lesson? Do you think they would be more autonomous? Do you think they would enjoy the lesson?

## Appendix 2

### Chart Indication Level of Autonomy for Activities

| Lesson/Activity   | Not Autonomous | Semi-Autonomous | Autonomous |
|---|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Vocabulary Lesson</b>  |                |                 |            |
| Task 1: Key Unit Vocabulary                                     | x              |                 |            |
| Task 2: Linking Key Words together to make phrases              | x              |                 |            |
| Task 3: Solving a Problem Using Roles                           |                | x               |            |
| Task 4: Rank the topics and find the group's most popular topic |                | x               |            |
| Task 5: Individual Extension                                    |                |                 | x          |
| <b>Reading Discussion</b>                                       |                |                 |            |
| Task 1: Organization of Discussion                              |                |                 | x          |
| Task 2: Before you begin  |                |                 | x          |
| Task 3: Discussion Guide  |                |                 | x          |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Task 4: Essential Vocabulary               |   |   | x |
| Task 5: Discussion Questions               |   |   | x |
| Task 6: Lesson Reflections                 | x |   |   |
| Record a Conversation                      |   |   |   |
| Task 1: Record and Transcribe Conversation |   | x |   |
| Task 2: Reflections                        |   |   | x |
| Listening Lesson                           |   |   |   |
| Task 1: Brainstorming Listening Strategies |   |   | x |
| Task 2: Further Discussion                 |   |   | x |
| Task 3: Identifying Today's Goals          |   |   | x |
| Task 4: Listening Activities               | x |   |   |
| Task 5: Lesson Reflections                 |   |   | x |
| Task 6: Homework                           |   | x |   |

## Uses of and Attitudes towards OWLs as L2 Writing Support Tools

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### Abstract

Online Writing Labs (OWLs) have enjoyed a period of sustained development since their inception in the mid-1990s. Many of these OWLs were initially developed for a mainstream audience of predominantly monolingual-English writers. However, increasing international enrollments in the 1990s and growing access to the World Wide Web led OWLs to expand their resources to include ones that addressed the needs of multilingual writers. These multilingual writers may be writing in the English-as-a-second language or in English-as-a-foreign language context. A relatively small body of literature exists pertaining to OWLs more generally. Very little information exists on OWLs and their use to support second language writers.

To give a voice to this underrepresented context, the present study examines the uses and perceptions of OWLs in the EFL context. This project utilized survey and email-based interviews to gather data from second language (L2) writing practitioners across the globe that make use of OWLs ( $n = 134$ ). The findings of this research suggest that OWLs enjoy a relatively high usage in the EFL context, but that the manner in which they are used is skewed towards being resource tools for the instructors as they prepare their lessons. The findings also identified a number of barriers-to-use that may impact a student-writer's ability to utilize the resource,

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including issues of linguistic accessibility and cultural appropriateness. This means that practitioners must adequately scaffold many OWL materials before deploying them in the classroom. These findings suggest that OWL designers can take a number of actions to meet the needs of users from various national settings in the EFL context.

**Keywords:** Online Writing Labs, OWLs, L2 writing, ESL, EFL, Online Writing Instruction, OWI

## **Introduction**

Second language (L2) writing has been a phenomenon under intensive study for over three decades, with the academic field of L2 writing forming approximately twenty-two years ago (Silva, 2014). At its formation, Silva (1993) argued that L2 writing was a unique linguistic and academic activity that has a set of properties that are unique to L2 English users, namely, that L2 writers face an increased number of challenges when writing in their L2s than native speakers face when writing in their L1 (see Nunan, 2001; Silva & Matsuda, 2000, 2013; Tribble, 1996). These challenges include navigating a linguistic system in which they may not be wholly proficient (Silva, 1993); navigating new, and often competing, L1/L2 rhetorical expectations (see Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005); having to spend additional time on planning longer compositions (Silva, 1993); and not being familiar with the expectations of academic writing in Western contexts (Nunan, 2001; Silva, 1993). Due to the unique nature of L2 writing, and the important role of writing in academic contexts, there is a need to provide additional support to L2 writers throughout the writing process. One tool that can be deployed is the Online Writing Lab (OWL).

OWLs have gone from relatively novel to exceedingly commonplace in just under two decades. This scholarly interest has similarly ebbed and surged in the published literature; the examination of OWLs in the traditionally defined English-as-a-foreign language (EFL)<sup>5</sup> context has remained largely underexplored and underreported. This is an unfortunate circumstance as both writing centers and their online components/counterparts are seemingly beginning to enjoy a boom period around the globe. This relative lack of published literature can leave potential OWL developers with a great deal of ground to cover in designing and advocating for OWLs at their home institutions. This article will attempt to begin filling this gap by reporting on research targeted at EFL writing practitioners/OWL users.

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<sup>5</sup> Despite the contention that occasionally arises around terms like ESL and EFL (see Nayar, 1997), this paper will use EFL in its traditional sense of those nations outside of the anglosphere where English language teaching and learning occurs as a foreign language of study, and not a second language of daily use.

To achieve this, this article will first sketch an overview of relevant literature on OWLs and the EFL context. This review will be supported heavily by research examining OWLs from a Western (that is, United States) perspective as so little has been published on OWLs in the EFL context. From there, this article will present research that was carried out by a large, globally recognized OWL housed at a large, Midwestern research university. This research was focused on uncovering usage patterns, attitudes, and the perceived needs of EFL writing practitioners/OWL users. The article will conclude with how the findings from the research—which are specific to the needs of the OWL examined—might be of use to EFL writing center practitioners and potential EFL OWL designers.

### *The Beginnings and Spread of OWLs*

Many accounts have established 1994 as the beginning of the Online Writing Lab (Miraglia & Norris, 2000; Purdue OWL, 2013a), with at least two OWLs coming online at this time—one of which would grow into the largest and most recognizable, the Purdue OWL. Since that time, there has been a sizable discussion taking place in the sub-field of writing center theory that has examined the space, place, and best practices regarding the online portion of writing labs. However, even as the reach of some OWLs has spread across the planet, the literature on OWLs has not kept pace. One of the more sizable contributions on OWLs, Inman and Sewell's (2000) *Taking Flight with OWLs*, is now fifteen years old. However, given advances in the technologies available to writing lab specialists, OWL designers, as well as students, this piece has begun to show its age. When considering the unique needs of L2 writers, the gap in disciplinary knowledge becomes even more noticeable, as only three pieces have directly addressed the intersection of OWLs and L2 writing.

### *Developing and Expanding OWLs and Their Role in the Writing Center*

OWLs seemingly exploded onto the scene in the early to mid-1990's, with OWLs coming online at universities across the United States (e.g., Purdue University, Washington State University, the University of Nevada at Reno). In the intervening time, a number of OWL-related articles in journals related to computers and writing, rhetoric and composition, second language writing, and writing center theory have appeared. Also, edited volumes like Hobson's (1998) *Wiring the Writing Center*, Inman and Sewell's (2000) *Taking Flight with OWLs: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work*, and Barnett and Blumner's (2008) *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice* have helped to guide scholars, practitioners and OWL designers in lobbying for, planning, and launching their own OWLs. These articles and

edited volumes examined the place of OWLs in writing center theory at a time when the technology was still new and untested. During this time, many administrators felt institutional, and perhaps even disciplinary, pressure to adopt online writing labs to their institutions, which contributed to resistance and a feeling of uncertainty. Major concerns voiced in the literature included the following: launching an OWL would severely cut into already over-taxed writing center monetary and human resources (e.g., Harris & Pemberton, 2008; Monroe, Rickly, Condon & Butler, 2000; and Shadle, 2000); there would be issues with equal access to all students (Palmquist, 2003); and OWLs would be the antithesis of writing center work due to underlying disconnects with mainstream writing center philosophy and theory (e.g., Beebe & Boneville, 2000; Hobson, 2008). This final issue had a profound impact on many early OWL designers as they went about their work of planning and implementing OWLs. Colpo, Fullmer and Lucas (2000), three OWL designers from the University of Nevada at Reno, stated that, "...the very concept of information-based OWL[s are] practically antithetical to the learning environment...(p. 78)". However, the potential for positive impacts of OWLs on the learning, teaching, and practicing of writing seem to outweigh some of the more negative possibilities, including the promise of OWLs to, "decenter [the] writing center (Colpo, Fullmer & Luca, 2000; p. 76)." This could lead to the writing center, and its services, being viewed as not necessarily specific to the English department. Rather, by decentering the writing center, it could come to be viewed as a place to assist writers across the entire campus. Curtis and Roskams (2000), OWL developers in Hong Kong, highlighted ways to increase possible positive impacts of OWLs that provide live, web-based tutoring might have for L2 writers. Their research suggested that tutors must work closely with tutees to ensure that expectations from both sides are brought into alignment. Finally, OWLs that provide asynchronous feedback on student texts via online chatrooms or discussion boards have been shown to create effective spaces for dialogues as well as dissolve hierarchical power structures that may be present in face-to-face tutorials or student-teacher writing conferences (Miraglia & Norris, 2000).

Designing and implementing an OWL is a challenging and time consuming task, one that can tax both writing center budgets and the patience of writing center administrators. Adding to these potential hindrances, individuals and institutions wanting to launch OWLs may also face the relative dearth of materials on designing and creating OWLs. However, one particularly robust piece to help guide this process is Harris and Pemberton's (2008) "Online Writing Labs (OWLs): A Taxonomy and Options and Issues". In this piece, the authors discussed the various types of OWLs that can be developed to meet local needs, and they discuss numerous back-end issues, like server space and the tech experience needed by potential designers, to help

administrators select which type of OWL may be the most appropriate solution for their context. Their taxonomy described OWLs that exist across spectrums of interactivity and time-responsiveness. For example, using asynchronous means like email or BBS-based services, a writing center can offer live tutorials that can be highly interactive, but that are not real-time—with synchronous chat services like *Skype* being the real-time alternative. Alternatively, using an HTML-based Web page allows a writing center to provide non-interactive assistance that can be updated in near real-time in response to users' needs. However, these solutions can have relatively high costs attached to them (e.g., equipment, licenses, and tutor salary). This can be costly in terms of financial resources, but it is most costly in regard to human resources, as each tutor that is engaged in OWL tutorials is one that is not engaged in live, in-lab tutorials. On the other end of the spectrum are services like automated file retrieval systems and dynamic Web pages that can contain handouts and other informational resources, which are non-interactive but may be highly time responsive.

Harris and Pemberton (2008) also pointed out a number of administrative and technical considerations for designing and implementing OWLs. On a more abstract level, they called out the matter of how an OWL might or might not fit into the institutional mission of the university or department in which the writing center is housed. An attendant consideration was how an OWL may help the writing center fulfill its goals and showcase its educational relevance. In the case of U.S.-based, writing centers this can be seen as aiding writers as they work towards becoming academic and/or workplace writers. Additionally, OWLs could help to highlight the social, iterative nature of writing (e.g., North, 1984). To say that this applies writ large to writing centers in all global contexts may be seen as reductive. However, scholarship carried by writing center administrators in Poland and Japan underscore the seemingly catholic nature of this mission of service, support, and assistance (Kimura, Sato, & Moody, 2013; Reichelt, et al., 2013). Deploying an OWL should be done to extend the services of the writing center and to increase its efficacy and the number of students reached. This can be achieved by meeting students where they are at and by allowing the university to engage with, and provide service to, the wider community [See, for example, Monroe, Condon and Butler (2000)].

### *OWLs in the EFL Context*

Studies examining OWLs in the EFL context are exceedingly rare. After a protracted period of library research, there were only two articles that were readily available and in English—Tan's (2011) *Asian EFL Journal* piece "Innovating Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs outside North America", and Rilling's (2005) *Computers and Composition* article "The development

of an ESL OWL, or learning how to tutor writing online.” Much later, a summary translation of Gu and Zuo’s (2002) “A New Means of Teaching English Writing” from the Chinese-medium journal *Foreign Language Instruction* became available. However, as this last article is entirely in Chinese, this may limit its possible impact on the global community of L2 writing scholars and practitioners.

Tan (2011) examined the best practices of successful writing centers and online writing labs from across North America. This included brief examinations of OWLs from North American and European institutions, before moving on to examining a few OWLs that originated in the Asian context. Tan noted that while many of the best practices including effective OWL design and implementation have traveled well to Asian educational contexts, there are a number of unique traits of writing centers and OWLs outside of North America. Namely, these writing centers and OWLs do not serve homogeneous, monolingual populations. They also tend not to offer synchronous online tutoring (either via email or other CMC tools). Finally, there is a relative dearth of original materials on Asian OWLs, as most seem to merely link to North American OWLs, which may have a longer history of in-house content development (p. 403).

Gu and Ding (2002) provided a glimpse of OWLs as pedagogical tools in the Chinese context.<sup>6</sup> This article focuses on the classroom and on the potential support function that OWLs can serve for the EFL writing class and for EFL writers. They reviewed the resources available on two US-based OWLs (i.e., the Purdue OWL and the Salt Lake Community College Online Writing Center), and provided a very brief discussion of how these might be used in the Chinese EFL classroom. The authors also provided a brief overview of an OWL based in Taiwan, Ted Knoy’s website The Chinese OWL, which was created by a US national working for the National Chiao Tung University in Taiwan. Gu and Ding concluded by reporting on research that they completed in order to advocate for the compilation of an OWL based in Mainland China. Their findings indicated that the students and faculty of Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) felt under prepared for writing in English in their college courses, in part because too little class time was dedicated to writing. They maintained that the creation of an OWL at HUST would also allow for students to gain access to resources that would address local concerns (e.g., authenticity in writing, vocabulary and expression, writing in so-called *chinglish*/China English) and to do so in a space to which students had consistent and regular

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that Gu and Ding (2002) is indexed and abstracted in English but is written in Mandarin. It is accessible through the The Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (ckni.com.cn). The summary provided here is based on a translation of Gu and Ding completed for the author by B. Hu, an interdisciplinary colleague who is a Chinese national.

access (the college intranet).

A more targeted examination of using OWLs to support second language writers was presented in Rilling (2005); granted this article was focused on L2 writing at a North American institution. This article described a research project that examined synchronous online tutorials and the efficacy of the error feedback provided during these tutorials. Rilling provided grounded examples of best practices at the OWL that she examined by offering an overview of the email-based tutorial. This overview encouraged focusing on systemic issues in an opening email message, providing more detailed commentary in-text, providing a summary note at the end of the students text, and working to create personal connections via electronically mediated means.

It should be clear (given the brevity of the above section) that reports on OWLs in the EFL context have been lacking from the broader literature on L2 writing. Even one of the more thorough pieces that examined OWL best practices discusses OWLs in Western contexts before examining OWLs in the Asian context. Of these Asian OWLs, the author states that they have often been “infused [into Asian countries]...by Westerners who took up a teaching or professional contract at [Asian] institutions (Tan, 2011, p. 392).”

## **Methods**

This study examined the uses of and attitudes towards OWLs in the EFL context. While it did examine OWLs in general, it is focused specifically on the Purdue OWL.

### *Site Selection Rationale*

The Purdue Online Writing Lab launched during the spring 1994 semester as part of a university reinvestment grant (Paiz, 2014). Originally, it was an evolution of the Purdue Writing Lab’s GOPHER site, which linked users on the Purdue University West Lafayette Intranet to writing lab handouts. Shortly after launching as a Web-based resource, the Purdue OWL staff began creating resources specific to the OWL. This eventually came to include a number of resources specifically targeting the needs of L2 writers, in partial response to a growing international student population at Purdue University and in part due to a marked increase in Purdue OWL traffic from outside the US and Canada. Over the past twenty years, the Purdue OWL has continued to expand its content development activities—eventually forming a partnership with a major US textbook publisher (Sequin, 2013).

The mission of the Purdue OWL has always been to help writers when and where they are whether it is in the library stacks early in the morning, or in their dorm rooms late in the evening. This is done by extending the reach of the Purdue Writing Lab beyond the physical space and

by providing quality instructional content. Allowing free and open access to educational institutions and individuals around the globe is viewed as an extension of Purdue University's Land, Sea, and Air Grant mission, as outlined by the Morrill Acts of the US Congress. As this is the case, the Purdue OWL does not engage in marketing activities beyond word-of-mouth and special 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary promotional materials (Conard-Salvo, Spronk, & Paiz, 2014).

The Purdue OWL is considered a part of the Purdue Writing Lab administrative structure. Two coordinators, one for content and one for technical issues, oversee its day-to-day operations. These coordinators are both doctoral students in the University's English department working on the OWL as part of a .25FTE appointment. They both have disciplinary homes either in Rhetoric and Composition or in closely allied fields (e.g., applied linguistics). Graduate students that are enrolled in English Department programs at Purdue develop the content for the Purdue OWL. These content developers have had some training and experience in the teaching of writing and/or in technical/professional writing.

The Purdue OWL was selected for this study due to its being one of the most comprehensive and most utilized OWLs. During the 2013-2014 academic year, the Purdue OWL received over 246,338,576 hits from all over the globe, as well as tens of thousands of emails from users all around the world asking for resources, requesting writing assistance, offering feedback on Purdue OWL resources, or thanking the Purdue OWL for its services (Bergmann, Conard-Salvo, & McCall, 2014). The Purdue OWL was also selected because it offers some resources targeted more generically at second language writers (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/5/>) and because the current OWL coordinator has expressed a renewed dedication to expanding and revising Purdue OWL resources for second language writers (Paiz, 2014).

### *Research Instrument*

This year-long (June 2012-June 2013) study consisted of a two-part data-collection instrument: The first part, a 41-item internet-based survey, was deployed across seven (inter)national professional listservs and provided the majority of the data for this study. The second part was a four question, open-ended email interview that was sent out to respondents that self-selected to participate while completing the survey.

### *Research Survey*

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a 41-item internet-based survey delivered using the *Qualtrics* survey platform. The survey consisted of four sections: a demographics section, a general OWL related section, a Purdue OWL specific section, and a

follow-up section. There were seven questions in the demographics section designed to provide the researcher with enough data to create a sketch of the professional background and institutional context of the respondents. There were three questions related to OWLs in general. These questions asked about use, or non-use, of OWLs and the manner in which OWLs were used in the second language writing classroom (e.g., reference while lesson planning, as supplemental materials, in-class instructional materials). Twenty-nine of the remaining 31 questions focused on uses of and attitudes towards the Purdue OWL and Purdue OWL support of second language writers. The final two questions invited respondents to participate in an email-based follow up interview and to provide contact information for the follow up.

The survey was distributed across seven (inter)national listservs that are targeted at writing scholars, practitioners, and administrators, as well as L2 writing specialists. This included the second language writing IS listserv for TESOL and the L2 writing SIG listserv of CCCC, the listserv of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the EFL IS listserv of TESOL, and the listserv of MENAWCA (Middle East – North African Writing Center Association). The survey was distributed by the researcher (functioning as the Purdue OWL Coordinator) and by the Director of the Purdue Writing Lab. The survey was open for six months, from August 2012 to January 2013.

Due to the manner in which the survey was distributed, it is difficult to estimate the number of potential respondents that may have been reached. However, given the accepted fact that survey-based methods are plagued by low response rates, it is safe to assume that response rates for this study were comparably low, when compared to the total targeted population. During the survey window, 260 individuals began this survey; of this number, 134 (51.5%) completed it. Attrition rates are typically high for Web-based surveys, and this can be linked to a number of reasons (e.g., number of open-ended questions (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003)). The attrition rate for this survey can be linked to a number of possible sources, such as (a) the number of open-ended questions ( $n = 8$ ), (b) the length of the survey, and/or (c) the target audience, many of whom are active professionals with considerable teaching or administrative loads or some combination of the two.

#### *Follow-up Email Interviews*

During the course of the survey, 46 respondents elected to participate in the follow up email interview. This interview consisted of four, open-ended questions designed to gain additional insight from the interviewees regarding barriers to using OWLs and suggestions for additional Purdue OWL L2 writing content development. Interviews were distributed by the Purdue OWL



Coordinator, and the interview period ran from March 2013 to June 2013. The interview questions are provided at length below:

1. Initial findings suggest that users teaching in the traditionally defined EFL context tend to only use the Purdue OWL for their own reference as teachers; they do not provide Purdue OWL instructional materials directly to students. What do you feel is the single greatest difficulty in using the current Purdue OWL resources for teaching writing in the traditionally defined EFL context?
2. In terms of new material creation for the Purdue OWL, what do you feel would be the one most valuable new resource for EFL students and teachers?
3. Do you feel that there should be separate sections on the Purdue OWL for resources dedicated to teaching English writing in the EFL context? That is, should there be separate sections for General Writing, ESL Writing, and EFL Writing?
4. Do you feel that the writing resources for ESL/EFL students should address the nature and place of first language (L1) writing in second language (L2) English writing (e.g., the use/permitting of L1 use and reliance for classroom L2 writing tasks)?

Of the 46 respondents that opted to participate in the follow up email interviews, only 15% responded. Despite this low response rate, information from the follow up interviews will be presented in the following sections to accentuate the survey data.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage commenced immediately after survey collection closed and it was verified that there were no active, in-progress survey attempts. Basic descriptive statistics were compiled using the built in statistical package in the *Qualtrics* Survey Software package. A more detailed analysis and interpretation of the survey results was carried out by the researcher in consultation with the administrative staff at the Purdue OWL; consulting with the graduate-staff and faculty that oversee the Purdue OWL helped to better ground the interpretation of data results.

The second stage of data analysis consisted of a holistic, *in vivo* analysis of interview responses. Once the interview collection closed, the researcher compiled all answers to individual questions, so that themes could be identified across individual answers to a particular question. After an initial read through to identify themes in the data was completed, the researcher then re-read the data and color-coded passages of texts that related to the themes. The major themes identified in the texts were: Critique, Suggestions, Further Research, OWL Usage, and Clarifications. Critiques offered a critical opinion of current Purdue OWL resources; for example, a statement similar to the following would be deemed a critique: I feel that Purdue OWL ESL resources are too syntactically complex for my high intermediate students in the

EFL writing classroom. Suggestions offered some advice on how to improve Purdue OWL resource for EFL writers. These included comments similar to the following: One way that the Purdue OWL could better serve EFL writers would be to include a variety of resources that discuss strategies for positively using the L1 in L2 writing. The Further Research theme was applied to any comments that suggested additional research that would need to be undertaken before either (a) effective OWL resources could be developed, or (b) the question being asked could really be answered. When the latter was the case, it was most often in connection to the interview question regarding the place of the L1 in L2 writing. Passages of text that were coded as OWL Usage offered some further explanation of how interviewees currently use OWL resources in the teaching of writing. A passage of text was classified as a Clarification if it offered some deeper clarification of a previous statement. Take the above example of a critique as an example: I feel that Purdue OWL ESL resources are too syntactically complex for my high intermediate students in the EFL writing classroom. Let us assume that this was followed, relatively soon after, by the statement: Many of my students are at about the Cambridge First Certificate level, and your resources seem to be geared towards Advanced/near native learners in the US. In this case, the phrase beginning, “Many of my students...,” would be coded as a clarification because it further explains or explores the preceding comment. As coding was done holistically and by hand, there are instances where passages of text might be blended into two or more categories, as there may have been no clear breaking point in the ideas. To better link related sections of text, directional markers like arrows and collection markers like brackets were used. While only a single coder was used, the researcher in this case, this was deemed sufficient as he has been trained in qualitative research methods and has intimate knowledge of the Purdue OWL. Where necessary, other members of the Purdue OWL staff were consulted.

## **Results**

### *Survey Findings: Demographics*

One hundred thirty-five respondents completed the survey portion of this research. These 135 respondents represent educators that are currently teaching and/or have taught in a wide variety of national contexts, ranging from the United States, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil in the western hemisphere to Slovakia, Greece, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, China, and Taiwan in the eastern hemisphere. When considering previous teaching experience the respondents represent a large number of educational contexts (see Table 1). The top three regional contexts represented included: North America ( $n = 114$ ); East Asia ( $n = 9$ ); and Eastern Europe ( $n = 7$ ). As the survey instrument asked respondents to list all regional contexts in which

they have taught, this may have led to the high  $n$  for the USA/Canada, as many of the international respondents also listed having taught in the USA or Canada. Given the possible career trajectories of TESOL teaching specialists, this is not surprising. A wide range of institutional contexts was also represented; however, the majority of the respondents have either taught, or currently teach, in higher educational contexts. The top three institutional contexts represented were: Public 4-year/2-year Universities/Colleges (52.59%); Private 4-year/2-year Universities/Colleges (22.96%); Public/Private Intensive English Programs connected to a university or college (11.85%).

**Table 1**

*Regional Contexts Previously Taught In*

| <u>Regional Context</u>                              | <u><math>n</math> Responses</u> |
|--|---------------------------------|
| North America  | 114                             |
| East Asia  | 9                               |
| Eastern Europe                                       | 7                               |
| Middle East  | 6                               |
| Asia: Other  | 2                               |
| South America  | 2                               |
| Central America                                      | 2                               |
| Western Europe: Predominately Anglophone Country     | 2                               |
| South East Asia                                      | 1                               |
| Western Europe: Predominately Non-Anglophone Country | 1                               |
| Sub-Saharan Africa                                   | 1                               |
| <hr/> Total: 135 <hr/>                               |                                 |

These three contexts represent 87.4% of the 135 respondents. The remainder taught in primary and secondary education (both public and private), or were independent educators/corporate trainers.

With regard to the proficiency levels and student age groups, there is some variability; however, this is skewed towards upper proficiency levels and older age groups. Out of 397 responses to the multiple-answer question, “What proficiency levels of English writing, or writing intensive courses, have you taught?” 25.44% of responses were at the Advanced/Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency level and 27.96% were at the Upper-

intermediate/Cambridge First Certificate level. 22.92% taught students at the Low-intermediate/Cambridge Preliminary level, and the remainder taught students at the Beginner/Cambridge Key level or the Pre/True Beginner level, 14.1% and 9.57%, respectively. In response to the multiple-answer question, “What age group(s) of students do you teach/have you taught?” 29.09% were teaching/have taught young adults (ages 19-25); 22.5% were teaching/have taught adults (ages 26-35); 15.0% were teaching/have taught mid-life adults (ages 35-54); 12.5% were teaching/have taught teenage school children (ages 13-18); and, 9.32% were teaching/have taught older adults (ages 54+). The remainder was teaching/have taught pre-teens (ages 11-12), young school children (ages 5-10), or pre-school children (ages 2-4) at 5.45%, 4.77%, and 1.36%, respectively.

### *Survey Findings: General OWL Findings*

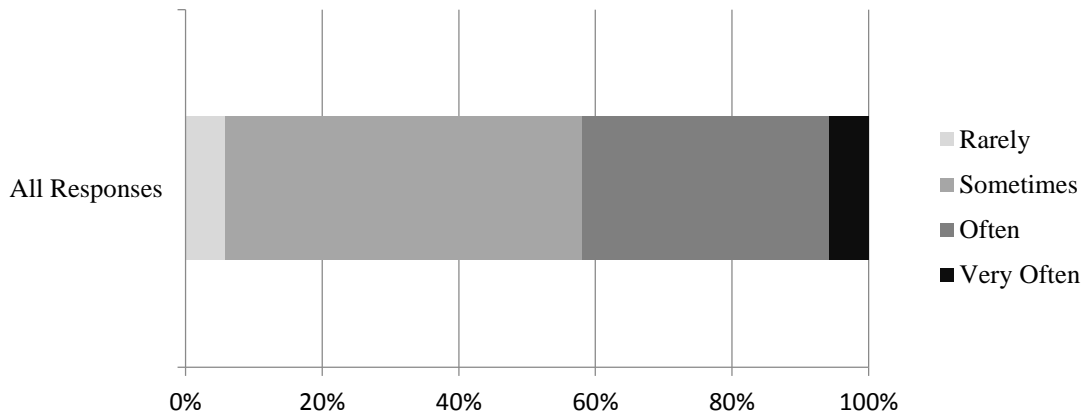
With the demographic data in place, this section will present the findings from this research that explore general OWL penetration and usage.<sup>7</sup> This section will explore the following three general OWL questions, as well as a question designed to smoothly transition into the Purdue OWL specific findings:

1. Do you use Online Writing Labs (OWLs) to assist in the teaching of writing?
2. How often do you use OWLs to assist in the teaching of writing?
3. Which of the following best describe how you use OWLs to assist in the teaching of writing?
4. Do you use the Purdue OWL to assist in the teaching of writing?

Focusing first on the penetration of OWL use in the L2 writing classroom, the data shows that 79.7% of 133 respondents use OWLs in some capacity when teaching L2 writing. Of this number, 41.9% report using OWLs either often or very often, and 52.38% report using them only sometimes. For a more detailed presentation, see Figure 1. The data also show a wide variety of reported OWL uses in the L2 writing classroom. In response to the multiple-answer question “Which of the following best describes how you use OWLs to assist in the teaching of writing?” the top three uses are: as supplemental instructional material for students (38.55%); as a source of supplemental grammar exercises for students (19.68%); and as supplemental writing exercises for students (18.47%). The data shows that a large number of respondents also report using OWLs for their own reference when planning their lessons (16.86%).

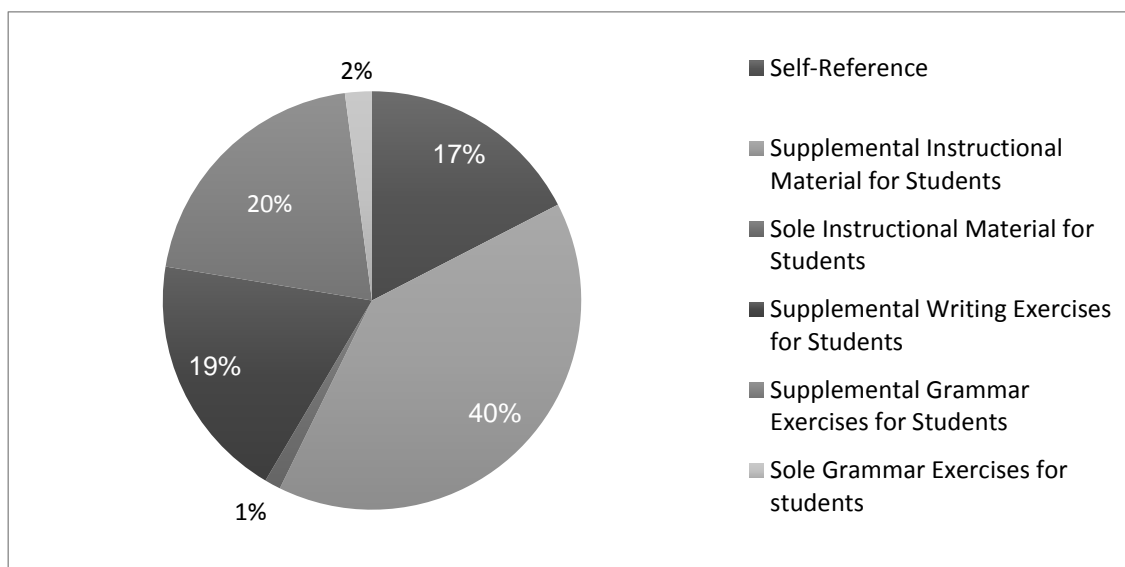
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<sup>7</sup>Here, the term “general OWL” refers to all OWLs, as opposed to the Purdue OWL, specifically.



*Figure 1.* Responses to “How often do you use OWLs to assist in teaching writing?”

Figure 2 provides a more detailed presentation of this data and adds in some of the more marginal uses.



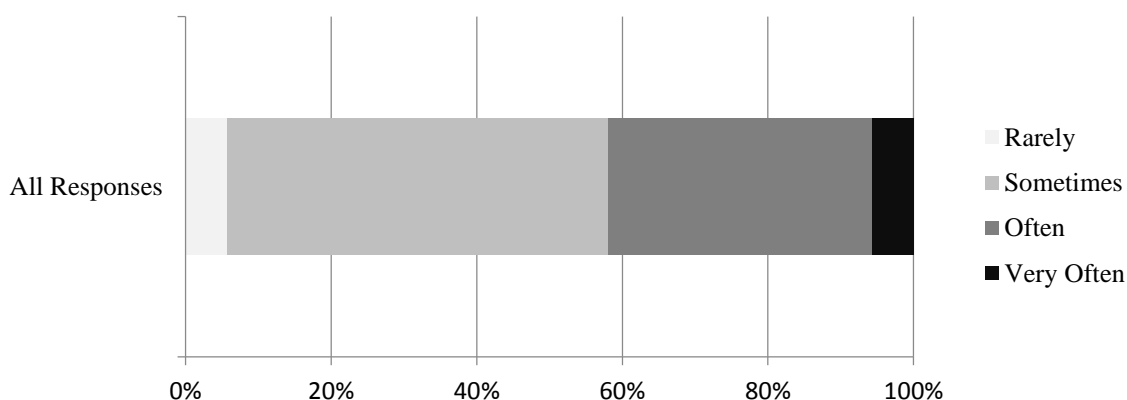
*Figure 2.* General OWL Uses

The above findings draw a picture of general OWL penetration and use in the L2 writing classroom. As stated above, however, the majority of this paper will focus on one globally recognized OWL, the Purdue OWL. Before transitioning into the findings regarding the Purdue OWL, it may be useful to present the data on Purdue OWL penetration among the population that was sampled. According to the data, 89.52% of those that make use of OWLs in the L2 writing classroom make use of the Purdue OWL.

#### *Survey Findings: Purdue OWL Findings*

As stated above, a large percentage of those surveyed that make use of OWLs also use the

Purdue OWL. The data shows that a relative minority makes regular use of the Purdue OWL (32.98%). Figure 3 provides a more detailed examination of the usage of the Purdue OWL. Examining this data alongside of the data for general OWL usage, it is clear that usage patterns mirror one another rather closely (c.f., Figure 1 and Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Responses to “How often do you use the Purdue OWL to assist in the teaching of writing?”

The findings regarding how the Purdue OWL is used in the L2 writing classroom also mirror the findings for general OWLs, but with some minor variations. The top three uses of the Purdue OWL to support the L2 writing classroom are: as supplemental instructional material for students (37.16% of total responses), as a source of supplemental writing exercises (20.35%), and as a source of supplemental grammar exercises (19.03%). Only 15.93% of responses indicated that they used the Purdue OWL solely for their own self-reference when preparing their lessons for L2 writers.

Perhaps one of the more surprising findings involves respondents’ knowledge and use of Purdue OWL ESL specific resources. In response to the question, “Did you know that the Purdue OWL has ESL specific resources?” 25.53% of respondents reported that they had no knowledge of these resources ( $n = 24$ ). Of the 70 respondents that reported knowledge of ESL resources, only 55, or 79.71%, reported making use of Purdue OWL ESL specific resources.

#### *Purdue OWL resource utilization*

The following findings will help to highlight the utilization patterns of Purdue OWL resources. These data come from the following multiple-answer question: “If you make use of the Purdue OWL, what type of resources do you make use of most often?” Resource utilizations are: MLA/APA style and citation guides (27.27% of responses), avoiding plagiarism guides

(19.48%), general writing guides (18.5%), research and report writing guides (13.96%), writing process resources (13.63%), subject/discipline specific writing resources (3.9%), Purdue OWL YouTube Vidcasts (1.3%)<sup>8</sup>, and other (1.95%).

### *Appropriateness of Purdue OWL Resources for L2 Writing*

One of the major exigencies for this study was to determine if Purdue OWL resources were meeting the needs of its users. The following data will give insights on whether or not Purdue OWL resources are meeting the needs of L2 writing practitioners. This data is presented in full in Figure 4. Looking at these data as a whole it is clear that there is no small degree of ambivalence about the appropriateness of existing Purdue OWL resources for the teaching of L2 writing, particularly in the EFL context. This is represented by the high percentages of respondents that responded neither agree nor disagree in response to questions about the appropriateness of Purdue OWL resources without any modification. This is most apparent with regard to Purdue OWL discipline-specific writing instructional resources, ESL-specific and general grammar exercises, and ESL-specific and general grammar instructional materials. One of the more stark findings here is with regard to Purdue OWL Vidcast lectures, where over 60% of respondents indicated no knowledge of this type of resource. It would appear, based on the data, that the most appropriate resources for L2 writing practitioners working in the EFL context are the Purdue OWL's general writing resources.

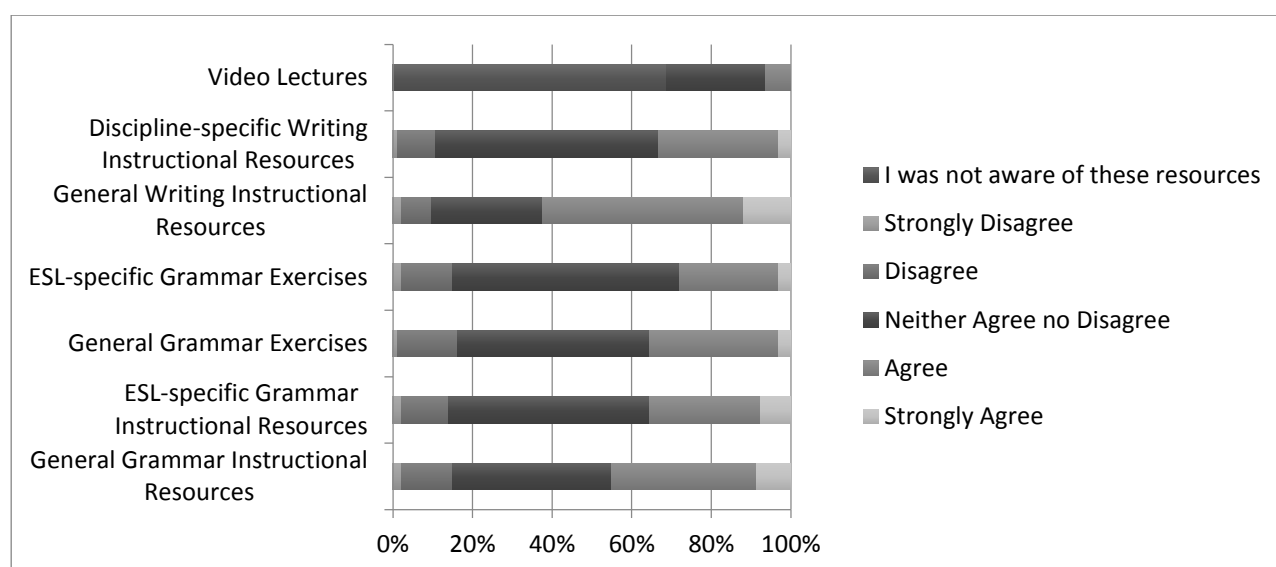


Figure 4. Appropriateness of Purdue OWL resources for L2 writing

<sup>8</sup> Vidcast lectures are multi-modal video lectures on a variety of topics. Purdue OWL vidcasts are accessible from: <http://www.youtube.com/user/OWLPurdue>.

These are banks of resources (static HTML pages, sample papers, and *PowerPoint* presentations) that cover topics ranging from invention to revision, as well as citation styles and rhetorical considerations.

### *What EFL Practitioners Need: A Wish List of Resources*

The following data were generated in response to questions asking respondents what types of resources would be useful to them. Figure 5 provides a detailed view of the findings related to these questions. What these data show is that practitioners would welcome a wide variety of new L2 writing focused resources, with the strongest interest being in static, that is, HTML-based resources that cover topics ranging from grammar and mechanics to idea generation and general writing. Also of possibly great interest to practitioners are sample essays written by L2 writers. Respondents indicated that any new resources developed should be targeted at a wider range of proficiency levels. While still showing a high level of possible interest, there appears to be less enthusiasm for more dynamic resources (audio and/or audio/visual lectures). This is suggested by the lower percentages of responses marked “strongly agree,” 24.18% and 26.37% respectively.

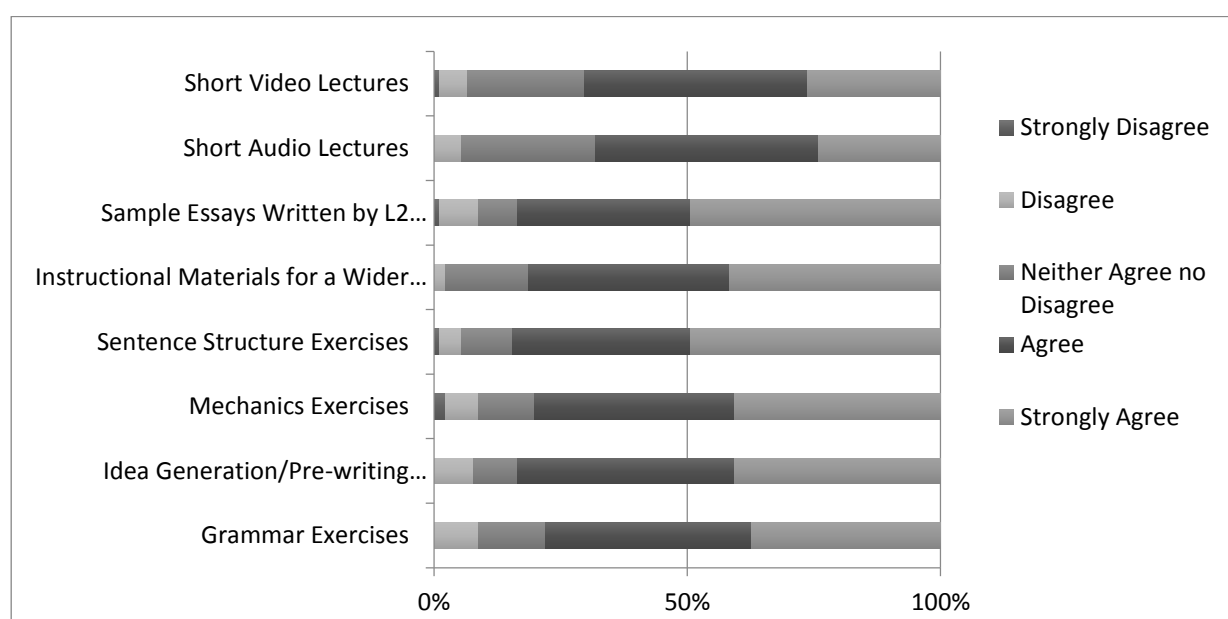


Figure 5. Resource Types of Most Potential Use

### **Interview Findings**

The findings presented in this section are from the open-ended follow up interviews conducted via email after the survey data collection window closed. As a reminder, these interviews were sent out by the researcher to individuals who self-selected to participate. Due to space



considerations, only excerpts of the interview transcripts will be presented here. Also, it should be noted that due to the self-selection rate, and the lower response rate, the findings presented in this section might not be generalizable to a larger population.

### *Barriers to Use*

Based on an early analysis of the survey data, it appeared that there were barriers to deploying the Purdue OWL as a reference tool for students. When interviewees were asked about barriers to use, there were a number of potential barriers that were reported. The two largest barriers to use were the density of some resources on the screen and the linguistic complexity of many of the resources available on the Purdue OWL. With regard to resource density, interviewees reported that “the sheer amount of material offered on each link or page can be overwhelming (from Interview 1),” or that “there is a lot of text which can be intimidating to many English language learners (from Interview 2).” Many interviewees also reported that there were a number of linguistic issues that made adopting Purdue OWL materials in the classroom problematic. One interviewee reported that, “The explanations and examples are written for US Freshmen and are at a higher level of language than most EFL learners, even if they are at a lower to higher advanced level of proficiency (from Interview 5).” Another stated, “There are not enough materials for lower levels (from Interview 6).” One interviewee provided some further explanation of the linguistic inappropriateness of Purdue OWL resources, stating that the Lexile level of the Web site is above the abilities of their students (from Interview 3).

### *New Materials Creation*

In regards to new materials creation, there was very little overlap in interviewees’ responses. Answers ranged from “...more of the same (from Interview 3)” to “[l]essening the language load (from Interview 5)” to having more “[v]isual descriptions...short videos for explanations of writing styles (from Interview 2).” Reiterating the need for a greater diversity of resources to reach audiences of varying proficiency levels, one interviewee stated that their “...students need something basic (from Interview 5).” However, this interviewee went on to state that they felt that this was outside of the scope of the Purdue OWL’s mission.

### *The Place of the L1 in L2 Writing*

Four out of seven interviewees stated that information about how the L1 might be used in L2 writing tasks would be beneficial to their practice as writing teachers. This was evidenced by comments like the following:

- Again, yes, there are so many of us who would be grateful for a universally-available, credible source such as this (from Interview 1).
- I've found nuanced research on L1 and L2, the interaction between them, concepts of multilingualism and "translingualism" very valuable in teaching writing. For adult learners in particular, discussions around the complexities of culture and language seem add to their writing and academic skills (from Interview 2).
- Yes. There are differences and neither group has to be ashamed. Each group has the ability to help the other (from Interview 7).

However, this sentiment was not universal among the interviewees. One cautioned that it might lead to OWL resources seeming too “fragmented (from Interview 3),” and another stated that “there are too many differences (from interview 4)” to account for. The interviewee in Interview 4 continued by challenging the interviewer to consider how a resource like the Purdue OWL would handle this task, asking “...how would you tackle that?”. One interviewee was more cautious, stating that they felt any material discussing the possible place of the L1 in L2 writing would best be included as an appendix (from Interview 5).

## **Discussion**

It is clear from the data above the OWLs enjoy a deep penetration into L2 writing classrooms in both the ESL and EFL contexts. OWLs are also used to support L2 writers in a wide range of ways, from informing practitioners’ course planning to acting as the sole instructional text available to students. Taken alongside of certain interview comments (e.g., “everyone loves a website, not a book (from Interview 1)”), it is clear that OWLs permit universities and practitioners to meet learners where they are at and to extend that reach outside of traditional classroom and writing center spaces. With many OWLs available even on mobile devices, this means that they are available to L2 writers in need of assistance in any corner of the globe where a wireless signal or a wired connection might be available.

That being said, it is clear that there are number of challenges facing the adoption of OWLs in the EFL writing classroom. Considering that many OWLs are currently based in the US and Canada (Tan, 2011), this is particularly problematic and requires L2 practitioners to “think on their feet” and to modify, or otherwise scaffold, OWL materials. This is evidenced by the fact that in both the survey data and the interview data respondents and interviewees discuss the need to take special action to make Purdue OWL materials appropriate to their classes. It should be noted, however, that much of what appears on OWLs across the globe might be copyrighted material. Even if there are fair use proscriptions in place, the ability for a practitioner to modify resources found on OWLs may be limited or non-existent. This means that additional time and

cognitive effort may be needed to more effectively scaffold OWL materials in the L2 writing classroom.

Another challenge is that of publicity. While the OWL examined here enjoys a rather high degree of recognition, publicity is still an issue in regards to new types of resources—namely, the vidcast resources. Publicity is important to consider for a number of reasons. Writers in need of assistance cannot make use of resources that they do not know exist. In the case of the Purdue OWL, which has a stated interest in continuing to expand its dynamic vidcast resources, this lack of awareness of vidcast resources is particularly striking. This is salient because of the seeming popularity of the YouTube service. However, merely navigating YouTube without knowing what to look for can lead to numerous clicks through dead-end searches. Also, the YouTube service, which currently houses Purdue OWL Vidcasts, may not be available in all locations due to government regulations or censorship.

### **Implications for L2 Writing Practitioners and OWL Designers**

There are a number of implications for L2 writing practitioners in general and for OWL designers more specifically. With regard to implications for L2 writing practitioners, it is clear from the findings above that materials from North American-based OWLs will need special consideration before being deployed in the L2 writing classroom. This may include the need to modify OWL resources to be more linguistically appropriate. However, one should again note that many OWLs contain copyrighted material and modification may not be an option. The Purdue OWL, for example, allows users to use and download its resources for educational purposes, but it does not permit any modification of resources. These strictures are spelled out in the Purdue OWL's Fair Use Policy (Purdue OWL, 2013b). Another major consideration for practitioners may be the need to scaffold North American OWL materials, particularly considering that some of these resources may be culturally bound, and that their meaning may not be as strong for those not socialized into Western literary and academic traditions.

No single OWL can be everything to everyone. The staff at the Purdue OWL, one of the world's largest OWLs, often find themselves wrestling with their commitment to supporting writers at Purdue University, in the state of Indiana, and across the globe and the fact that the Purdue OWL is already rather large—housing over 700 resources—that expansion must be carefully planned (Purdue OWL Administrative Staff, personal communication, 2012). That being said, I would like to echo Tan's (2011) call for more local/regional OWLs, as these OWLs are better situated to meet the needs of L2 writers in the EFL context. Lobbying for resources and effective planning are vital, not only for initializing OWLs, but also for keeping them active.

Gu and Ding (2002) discussed one regional OWL, The Chinese OWL (Taiwan). They also reported on the need for an OWL that addresses the needs of EFL students learning and writing in Mainland China (39-40).<sup>9</sup>The findings of their survey- and interview-based study can be used to advocate for such resources. In resounding Tan's call, there is the need to meet the unique local needs of writers in the EFL context. The data presented above clearly indicates that many OWL resources are too linguistically complex for writers in the EFL context, who may be at lower proficiency levels than L2 writers matriculated into North American universities. This is just one of the considerations for potential EFL OWL developers, and it is one way to advocate for resources for OWL development. Developing local/regional OWLs can address these needs by being designed from the ground up to meet the linguistic needs of local users.

Another consideration for potential EFL OWL developers is in addressing the possible place of the L1 in L2 writing. This is a unique area of potential growth for OWLs, one that many North American-based OWLs—the Purdue OWL included—may be under-equipped to handle. However, OWLs developed at schools and universities in countries outside of the Anglophone sphere may have access to students and potential content developers who have lived a multilingual life, and these are the human resources that are necessary to create meaningful, well-informed resources that address the unique needs and challenges of multilingual writers. Finally, there is the issue of access. This is an issue that has been brought up by many writing and Computer-aided Language Learning (CALL) specialists (e.g., Levy and Stockwell, 2006; Egbert and Hanson-Smith, 1999). While computers and computer-/internet-based resources are increasingly ubiquitous in many places around the globe, many still live in places with only centralized computer access, with unreliable access to electricity, and with intermittent or slow Internet access; that being said, there are ways to address these issues. Making resources available as downloadable/printable PDFs is one possible solution.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One of the primary limitations has to do with the relatively small number of respondents. Given the potential respondent pool, the number of responses to this survey was low and this may mean that these findings might not be generalizable to other populations of practitioners. This could have been addressed, in part, by extending the survey collection window and also by sending reminder emails to the listservs. Another limitation that should be noted is how the sampling was conducted. Only professional listservs from across the globe were used to

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<sup>9</sup> Please note: The Chinese OWL is no longer accessible from the URL provided by Gu and Ding.

distribute the survey instrument. This means that only individuals that are members of these organizations, or at the very least have knowledge of these organizations and are permitted to join their listservs, were able to participate in the research survey. This could introduce certain biases into the data, as could the manner in which the questions were asked. For example, the questions about the manner in which resources are used could be seen to presuppose that practitioners are familiar with the theoretical exigencies and writing center best practices that drive much of the development work that takes place at online writing labs. Finally, it is worth noting again the relative age of much of the OWL literature and the relative lack of ESL/EFL OWL literature. Many of the resources used to inform this study were decades old at the time that this study was carried out. Also, only a few of the articles were specific to second language writers and/or written in English. There is, simply put, a sizable gap in the literature, and this study is limited in the sense that it is attempting to update information that is beginning to fall out of date, and by addressing OWLs in a context where they have been the targets of relatively little inquiry, while having little existing literature to help ground it.

This final limitation makes resoundingly clear the open avenues available for future research. The possibilities, at present, are near limitless. Based on this study, however, there are three potential avenues that can be addressed by future research. The first avenue that is open for future research deals with the administrative and back-end challenges of bringing OWLs online. The field of L2 writing and L2 writing program administration could benefit greatly from descriptions of getting EFL OWLs populated with resources, online, and made available to a wide audience. The second avenue for possible research would be further research examining the creation of meaningful L2 writing resources for OWLs. This can help to inform the development efforts of OWL developers around the globe. Finally, there is the possibility for research exploring how L2 writers actually consume OWL materials, examining particularly issues of usability. Research in this vein can help to ensure that OWLs are being effectively and efficiently designed and executed.

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## Americans' Evaluation of Japanese Refusals in English

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### Abstract

The speech act of refusal can be complicated and even more difficult to perform in a second language. This study investigated Americans' evaluations of the appropriateness of Japanese speakers' refusals in English. The purpose of this study was to identify American English speakers' preference for refusal strategies and to contribute to the improvement of EFL learners' acquisition of sociopragmatic knowledge in classroom settings. The American participants were given situations with refusals taken from Japanese participants' responses on the written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and asked to evaluate the refusal on a semantic differential according to its appropriateness and how they felt about that. The results revealed that half of the Japanese refusals were evaluated as impolite by American participants. Since they were interpreted as lacking in consideration for the interlocutors' feelings and with only a vague reason given, their refusals were considered impolite. When refusing in English, speakers are expected to offer indirect expression of "no" and an explanation with a specific reason to mitigate the negative consequence.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic competence, pragmatic transfer, refusal, Japanese EFL learners, EFL teachers, politeness

### Introduction

From a sociolinguistic point of view, refusals are complicated speech acts. Although the existence of the speech act is universal, the frequency and contents are culture-specific. Speech acts reflect the fundamental cultural values and social norms of a target language and demonstrate the rules of language use in a speech community. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) mentioned that "they are major cross-cultural 'sticking points' for many nonnative speakers, and for that reason refusals are important for second language educators and others involved in cross-cultural communication" (p.56). In refusing, we might run the risk of offending the other person, so indirectness and mitigation should be used to avoid offense and maintain good human relationships. The form and content of refusals change according to the

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eliciting speech act (e.g., request, invitation, offer and suggestion) and they are affected by the status of the interlocutor (Beebe et al., 1990). Refusal is a difficult speech act in our native language and it is still more difficult and complicated when refusing in a foreign language. For second language learners, it is necessary to know which speech acts are different in first and target language, how they are different, and what is not appropriate to say. These differences might cause miscommunication among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Teaching speech acts is essential because learners can perceive and understand the use of language appropriately and they can be equipped with the knowledge of a variety of language choices employed based on the situation. It is very important for second language learners to understand how to refuse appropriately in their target languages.

This study investigated Americans' evaluations of the appropriateness of Japanese refusals in English. Refusal strategies of native speakers of English have been compared with those of non-natives, but I was unable to find any study about native English speakers' evaluation of refusals in English by non-native speakers. The purpose of this study was to identify American English speakers' preference for refusal strategies and to contribute to the teaching of refusals in English in classroom settings. Evaluation of native English speakers' appropriate politeness level of refusals brings a better understanding of refusals in English. The detailed description of Japanese refusals in English by the native English speakers in this study can allow us to identify the areas of instruction for Japanese learners of English (i.e., incorporating research findings into classroom teaching). This can provide insights for pedagogical procedures; the problems that Japanese speakers have in refusing in English, use of appropriate refusal expressions in English and general patterns of native English speakers' manner of refusing, which is useful to the classroom teacher and in the development of materials.

## **Review of Literature**

### *Communicative Competence*

Hymes (1972) first introduced the notion of "communicative competence," which included not only the concept of usage and grammaticality but also the use and appropriateness of language. He emphasized that the speaker's knowledge of grammar is not enough for appropriate communication in different situations with different interlocutors.

Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence, and it is further developed in Canale (1983). They identified four kinds of competence underlying the systems of knowledge and skill required for communication:

- 1) Grammatical competence: the ability to understand the language code features and rules of the language, including vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling, etc.
- 2) Sociolinguistic competence: the ability to use language in different sociolinguistic contexts, depending on contextual factors such as the status of the participants and the purpose of the interaction.
- 3) Discourse competence: the ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text.
- 4) Strategic competence: the ability to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies such as paraphrase and clear reference that are required to deal with communication breakdown or to enhance communicative effectiveness.

This model valued the fields of second and foreign language acquisition. To become competent communicators, EFL learners need to gain these kinds of knowledge and the ability to perform appropriately in each situation, leading to communicative competence.

#### *Pragmatic Competence in EFL Learners*

An important aspect of communicative competence is pragmatic competence, which requires knowledge of sociocultural rules. Cohen and Olshtain (1994) mentioned sociocultural ability as “the respondents’ skill at selecting speech act strategies that are appropriate given (a) the culture involved, (b) the age and sex of the speaker, (c) their social class and occupations, and (d) their roles and status in the interaction” (p. 145). Second language learners are required to have the ability to use language and to recognize the intended meaning appropriately in accordance with the sociocultural context.

Thomas (1983) defined pragmatic competence as the ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context. Pragmatic competence refers to the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge necessary to perform speech acts such as apology, request, complaint, and refusal appropriately, along with the ability to access that knowledge. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) defined “pragmatic transfer” as employment of first language (L1) sociocultural communicative competence in performing second language (L2) speech acts or any other aspects of L2 conversation, where the speaker is trying to achieve a particular function of language.

Thomas (1983) also defined misinterpretation of an utterance in a context as pragmatic failure. It is caused by a lack of pragmatic competence; thus it can be defined as “the inability to use language effectively and to understand what is meant by what is said” (p. 91). Pragmatic failure occurs when foreign language learners do not understand the (pragmatic) functions and the meanings behind the (linguistic/grammatical) forms, they do not know what to say, or they say

something inappropriate. It becomes strong evidence for the importance of pragmatics in foreign language learning.

For EFL learners, acquisition of pragmatic competence and understanding of socio-cultural norms hold the key to successful communication. It is important to understand native speakers' refusals in order to develop materials and strategies for classroom teaching to reflect the native English speakers' way of speaking, by incorporating the patterns most commonly used by the target language speakers in specific situations. Acquiring appropriate refusal strategies according to situations helps students avoid pragmatic failure.

### *Studies on Refusals*

According to Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Welts (1990), refusals are a major cross-cultural difficulty for many nonnative speakers. Refusals require a high level of pragmatic competence. This competence is important for second language learners. By refusing, the refuser runs the risk of offending the initiator. Due to this risk, the person who refuses may need to mitigate the force of the refusal. In other words, the second language learner needs to be able to say "no" in a way that is appropriate and expected in the target language culture.

Various refusal pragmatic studies in many different languages in comparison with English have been carried out. These studies showed learners' L2 proficiency and their native language's socio-cultural norms affect their use of refusal strategies. When socio-cultural rules in L1 differ from those in L2, the learners' transferring of their cultural norms to the target culture of the L2 often causes misunderstanding or offense, resulting in communication breakdown (Wolfson, 1989).

Beebe et al. (1990) investigated refusals in the English of Americans and Japanese to people of higher, equal, and lower status, using a discourse completion test (DCT). Their findings showed that compared to Americans, Japanese frequently used expressions of regret, such as "I'm sorry" with people of higher status, but expressions of regret were used less frequently with lower status people. Also, Japanese refusals started with expressions of regret followed by an excuse, such as "I'm sorry I am busy." On the other hand, American refusals started with a positive opinion, such as "I'd really like to help you but," and then regret and excuse in that order. Japanese excuses were often less specific than those of Americans, whereas Americans favored an "airtight" excuse, such as "I have to meet Mr. Brown at 6:00 PM." By contrast, Japanese used excuses that were extremely vague: for example, "I'm busy" or "I have work to do." They found three examples of pragmatic transfer with Japanese speakers of English: less use of specific statements to make excuses, more use of statements of principle such as "I never

yield to temptation,” and more use of statements of philosophy like “Things with shapes eventually break.”

Kitao and Wakamoto (2000) studied Japanese speakers’ refusals of request in English and Japanese using a discourse completion test. Their study compared refusal strategies between close friends and acquaintances. In both English and Japanese, participants commonly used an expression of regret and a reason. Participants sometimes used “no” in large requests directed at friends in Japanese. Their study found no differences between English and Japanese for expressions of negative willingness or giving reasons or explanations. On the other hand, saying “no” and statements of regret were much more common in Japanese, regardless of size of request or distance: how close the relationships were. The results showed that Japanese used direct expressions of refusal more frequently in English than English-speakers do.

Matsumura (2011) investigated the features of 425 university-level Japanese EFL learners’ speech act realization strategies, with a focus on the interaction between their understanding of native English speakers’ realization strategies and their preference for a native/non-native realization strategy in a specific situation. He used a multiple choice preference questionnaire and a multiple choice knowledge test. The findings showed that knowledge and preference were associated with each other. However, the degree of association was not high enough to conclude that L2 learners’ preferred strategies were dependent on whether or not they knew native realization strategies. As a whole, students who had knowledge about the native speech act realization strategy and whose preferences converged with it were the most frequently observed type in the speech act of refusal. Students who did not have knowledge about the native speech act realization strategy nor whose preferences converged with it followed. The results also indicated that the intentional divergence represented by students who did have knowledge about native realization strategies but opted for different strategies was more frequently observed in refusal than in request and apology. This suggests that L2 learners do not always want to behave like native speakers of the L2, even though they know how to do so, especially when making a refusal. Because of the resulting shift in relationship between the speaker and the hearer in the realization of refusal and students’ considerations about living in Japan’s hierarchical society, the power differential between the speaker and the hearer seems to affect the choice of strategies in refusal. That is, there exists the fundamental notion of Japanese sociocultural norms and values, particularly the importance of harmony with others as a means of developing a good relationship in refusal.

Those studies showed evidence of pragmatic transfer in Japanese speakers’ refusals in English. Japanese speakers used a direct expression of “no” and a vague reason more frequently

than native English speakers did. In spite of their knowledge of native speakers' realization strategies, they preferred their Japanese realizations of refusals. When communicating with native English speakers in English, non-native speakers should consider the sociocultural norms of the target language culture. EFL teachers need to encourage students to understand expressions that would help them maintain their relationships with native English speakers.

## **Research Questions**

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do Americans evaluate the appropriateness of typical refusals by Japanese speakers in English?
2. What are the characteristics of refusals that are rated as being less polite than appropriate?

## **Methodology**

### *Overview*

This study investigated the appropriateness of Japanese refusals in English as evaluated by Americans. The participants were given situations with refusals taken from Japanese participants' responses in the DCT and asked to evaluate the refusal on a semantic differential according to its appropriateness and how they felt about it in terms of American sociocultural norms.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were Americans because American English is the mainstream of English education in Japan. In addition, the United States is one of the most popular destinations to study abroad for Japanese students. Fifty Americans participated in this study. To obtain a sufficient amount of data, they were gathered in several parts. A contact who was studying in the United States gathered data from her classmates of 21 university students and 2 teachers, and then sent them back to me. The questionnaire was also filled out by 5 foreign students at Doshisha Women's College and 18 foreign students at Doshisha University in Japan. Another contact who teaches English at a junior high school in Japan gathered data from 3 instructors and 1 travel agent in Japan. Thirty-five participants were female and 15 were male. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 28 to narrow the age gap between American participants and Japanese participants as much as possible. They all participated in the study on a voluntary basis.

### *Materials*

All fifty participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire on which they were asked to evaluate

the appropriate politeness levels of refusals in English by Japanese speakers (See Appendix). This questionnaire was developed based on the refusals collected on the written DCT by Japanese participants in English. The study involved 52 participants, who were all first year students majoring in English at Doshisha Women's College, and their level of English proficiency was intermediate. The questionnaire contained two requests, two invitations, two offers, and two suggestions, with one large and one small size of refusal of each. All situations were a refusal from a close friend of equal status. On the DCT for Japanese participants, the instructions and the explanation of each situation was written in Japanese; the request, invitation, offers, or suggestion and the response were written in English. Participants completed the questionnaire at the beginning of an English writing skills class. Refusal statements were chosen from Japanese responses and each situation had two refusals: typical indirect response and typical direct ones. For each refusal statement in each situation, participants responded to two items: (1) a five-point scale for indicating the level of appropriateness of the politeness (ranging from "1" as impolite to "5" as too polite with 3 being appropriate) and (2) an open-ended question on feelings about the refusal statement.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The following two descriptive statistics were computed to analyze appropriate politeness level: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD). Mean of a numerical level of appropriateness as evaluated by Americans was represented. The size of SD indicated the extent to which the participants' ratings of appropriateness varied. In conjunction with the means, this information would be useful in providing a picture of appropriateness level and rating congruity across participants.

Statements of participants' feelings at three politeness levels, impolite, appropriate, and polite, were examined to discover characteristics that might contribute to the appropriateness ratings given. The observed characteristics of each group could be compared to find out participants' evaluation criteria of Japanese refusals' politeness levels.

Data for males and female were analyzed together because major differences were not found between them.

## **Results and Discussions**

### *Overview*

This study yielded quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative data were approached by calculating the means and standard deviations for ratings of appropriateness. Qualitative

analysis of this study allowed for a more in depth look at strategies that Japanese learners of English should acquire in order to refuse appropriately in English. The purpose of these analyses was to understand aspects of how Americans evaluate Japanese refusals in English.

#### *Ratings of the Appropriateness Level of the Refusals*

To obtain a general picture of the appropriate politeness level of Japanese refusal, the means and standard deviations (SD) of each refusal statement were calculated (See Table 1 below).

**Table 1**

*Means and SDs of American evaluation of the appropriateness of the politeness level (n=50)*

| Items                | M    | SD    |
|----------------------|------|-------|
| 1a: Borrow money     | 2.31 | 1.223 |
| 1b: Borrow money     | 3.50 | 0.715 |
| 2a: A part time job  | 3.42 | 0.613 |
| 2b: A part time job  | 1.85 | 0.825 |
| 3a: Some coffee      | 2.92 | 0.846 |
| 3b: Some coffee      | 1.92 | 0.895 |
| 4a: Join tennis club | 3.13 | 0.841 |
| 4b: Join tennis club | 2.35 | 0.911 |
| 5a: Some popcorn     | 1.23 | 0.660 |
| 5b: Some popcorn     | 3.81 | 0.842 |
| 6a: Concert ticket   | 2.65 | 1.062 |
| 6b: Concert ticket   | 3.04 | 0.713 |
| 7a: Shopping         | 3.44 | 0.681 |
| 7b: Shopping         | 2.19 | 0.842 |
| 8a: Summer trip      | 3.42 | 0.613 |
| 8b: Summer trip      | 3.02 | 0.758 |

The purpose of examining individual refusal statements was to investigate what Americans considered the appropriate politeness level of refusal to be. In Table 1, the means showed that five out of 16 refusal statements (1a, 2b, 3b, 5a, and 7b) were judged as being impolite by Americans. Four statements (3a, 4a, 6b, and 8b) were judged as appropriate refusal, as they were close to “3.” Statement 5b was rated as being too polite. To capture the judgements more



precisely, how the average reflected individual variances, standard deviations were analyzed. This analysis showed that almost all judgments, except 1a and 6b, had low SDs. This revealed that participants had fairly consistent ratings in almost all judgments of appropriateness of refusal statements. Considered together, the means and SDs indicated that Americans evaluated Japanese refusal responses 2a, 3b, 5a, and 7b as less polite than would be appropriate and they considered 3a, 4a, 6b, and 8b as especially appropriate. The mean of 1a indicated that it was considered inappropriate, but the SD indicated that participants' individual ratings varied. These observations were helpful to explore characteristics of refusal statements and features of judgments to individual differences.

### *Participants Comments on Japanese Refusals in English*

Participants were also asked to comment on the refusals, and their reactions to the refusals rated as being impolite help illuminate the reasons these were considered impolite and identify characteristics that might contribute to the low politeness level, and the same analysis could be done for refusal statements considered appropriate and too polite. These refusals at each politeness level may have certain features in common that caused them to be considered by participants to be judged as impolite, appropriate, and polite. In regard to the politeness level and language use in accordance with the interlocutors' feelings, it was necessary to look into the participants' actual responses. The following five refusal statements were judged as impolite: 1a, 2b, 4b, 5b, and 7b. The refusals and some typical participants' reactions follow:

1a: No. Money will cause trouble of friendship. And you can buy another day when you have more money!

"The response is too forthright, yet truthful at the same time."

"Very direct with a very deep reason."

2b: I don't work on Sunday.

"Though it's honest, it's hurtful."

"It's a little rude with no reason given, really."

3b: No. I want to go home quickly.

"I'd want to know why."

"I don't like this unfriendly response, maybe I will not ask her again to my house."

5a: Be quiet! I'm watching a movie now.

"Downright rude."

"No specific reason given, just plain rude to the offer."

7b: No. I want to stay at home.

“Sounds like a lie tone.”

“A little more explanation would be good.” (sickness, work, exhaustion in general)

Participants’ actual responses suggested that they judged the speaker as being rude. One observation about the refusals rated as impolite was that they generally lacked a clear explanation of reason and therefore caused the refusals to sound obscure or unaccounted for. American participants really needed specific reasons that Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) referred to as “airtight” excuses. Japanese learners’ tendency to use vague reasons seems to be related to pragmatic transfer. As shown in this study and Kitao and Wakamoto (2000), Japanese responses often included direct expression of “no.” Impolite refusal statements also included judging or criticizing or doubting the requester, as in 1a. This finding indicated that the participants thought honesty was good, but not too much directness, and they preferred some softening.

Participants judged 3a, 4a, 6b, and 8b as appropriate. The following are the refusals, with typical comments:

3a: I’m sorry. I’m busy today.

“It’s a very common response, even if she/he is not busy. Either way, truthful or not, no feelings are hurt.”

“I would understand, but a more specific response would be better.”

4a: I’m sorry. I belong to another club.

“Disappointed, but I understand.”

“It’s an OK answer, she/he is not being impolite, she/he is explaining a reason.”

6b: I’m sorry. I have a plan.

“Doubtful, but O.K.”

“Like the ‘appointment with mom’ reason, good to say that there are other plans.”

8b: I have already planned to go on a trip with another friend.

“Honest answer, it is OK because she/he made previous plans with another friend, but could tell me in a nicer way.”

“Add ‘I’m sorry’ and I’ll feel even better about it.”

Specific reasons, such as explanation of the plan or the appointment, were preferred. The reason Japanese refusals were judged as impolite was primarily that they were too direct and they included only vague reasons. Paradoxically, the results indicated that Japanese participants tended to say “no” clearly, but the reason for refusing was often not stated clearly. Since it was interpreted as lacking in consideration for the interlocutors’ feelings, their refusals were considered impolite. Also, vague refusals have been interpreted as being dishonest. Beebe et al.

(1990) indicated that American refusals started with a positive opinion. Japanese learners of English need to acquire this strategy to make their refusals more appropriate.

5b was judged as being a little too polite. Participants expressed their feelings about polite refusal statements in the following examples:

5b: No, thank you.

“It’s a little polite for a close friend, but okay.”

“It’s the most acceptable.”

The responses of Japanese EFL learners sounded a little formal for the situation when a speaker was communicating with a close friend. This may be due to the fact that Japanese participants applied L1 socio-cultural strategies and transferred them to verbal performance in L2. In addition, because of lack of second language knowledge, Japanese participants may have had a small repertoire of expressions which were appropriate for this situation. Therefore, a set pattern, “No, thank you” was likely to be used for this situation.

In summary, observed characteristics in my study of impolite refusals and appropriate/polite refusals were as follows (See Table 2 below):

**Table 2**

*Characteristics of Japanese Refusals in English*

| impolite             | appropriate / polite |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| too direct           | common response      |
| hurtful              | no feelings hurt     |
| lack of clear reason | specific reason      |

Inappropriate Japanese refusals in English may be due to lack of pragmatic knowledge, their uncertainty about the second language sociolinguistic rules in refusal speech acts or influence from the transfer of L1 pragmatic knowledge. It is clear that Japanese English learners had difficulty in making appropriate refusals in English and need to improve their ability to use a variety of refusal strategies in English.

### **Practical Implications for EFL Teachers**

These findings give rise to some implications for EFL classrooms: to help EFL learners better understand the sociopragmatic aspects of speech acts of refusal in English, and to assist teachers in enhancing pragmatic teaching in the language classroom.

It is necessary for teachers to raise EFL students’ awareness and understanding of differences

in sociolinguistic variables between their native language culture and that of the target language. The findings of this study showed the norms of Japanese were often transferred into English when Japanese EFL learners produced an interlanguage refusal. The Japanese speakers' refusals lacked explanations, or at least specific explanations. In the Japanese language it is commonly understood that indirect and vague forms of expressions rather than those of direct expressions are preferred. The American's responses often showed the necessity of the explanations to avoid a negative evaluation. They also interpreted it as being possibly untruthful. In addition, American participants mentioned that adding "I'm sorry" was better. Americans preferred efforts to show the difficulty of agreeing with the hearer to avoid the negative evaluation by the hearer.

Also, Japanese refusal responses were often formed by the utterance of "no." American participants evaluated that as being hurtful. Direct expressions were frequently used in Japanese refusals in English, apparently because they mistakenly believe that Americans are more direct in refusing than they actually are. This may have come from the belief that English is a more assertive language than Japanese, principally. In addition, since English was not their native language and they lacked experience of communication in English, they may have tried to make their intentions obvious and clear. It is essential for EFL teachers to understand appropriate refusal strategies in English and help students acquire indirect ways to say "no" to avoid hurting the interlocutor's feeling. Sociocultural differences can cause miscommunication and pragmatic failure. In order for EFL learners to avoid these, the sociolinguistic role of the degree of directness and expressions of reason in justification in making refusals should be explicitly taught.

Promoting EFL learners' awareness and understanding in both L1 and L2 cultures by giving an overview of the sociolinguistic patterns behind the refusal speech act would help them communicate more successfully in the target language. EFL learners who are surrounded by their native language and culture and rarely have the opportunity to use L2 outside of the classroom, need to be given as many opportunities as possible to practice their communicative competence in the language classroom.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated how Americans evaluate Japanese refusals in English. The findings of the study were divided into two parts: the appropriate politeness level and participants' feelings about refusal responses. Half of the Japanese speaker refusals were deemed somewhat impolite in the questionnaire. This could result in pragmatic failure, particularly when Japanese

speakers refused in a more direct manner than was considered polite by Americans. The reason Japanese refusals were judged as impolite was primarily that they were too direct and they included only vague reasons. Since they were interpreted as lacking consideration for the interlocutors' feelings, their refusals were considered impolite. In addition, vague refusals may have been interpreted as being dishonest.

When refusing in English, speakers are expected to offer an explanation with a specific reason. Japanese speakers of English need to learn to refuse something in more indirect ways to mitigate the negative consequences and at the same time to offer more specific justification. Japanese EFL learners need to understand the function of English in which there are some indirect strategies to express "no."

### **Limitations and Further Research**

This study revealed general results, however there were some limitations. The evaluations of Japanese refusals in English by American participants were limited to communication with a close-friend in this study. It would be useful to gather data from different situations with different status interlocutors. In addition, this study analyzed the responses from female participants and male participants together. Comparing female and male data would produce more interesting results. Furthermore, actual refusal responses by native English speakers could be investigated.

This study showed that Japanese direct refusal statements "no" and vague reason were judged as impolite by Americans. Other studies have shown that Japanese use a limited repertoire of refusal strategies. Exploring additional refusal statements in a wider variety of situations would produce further insights. Since Japanese speakers had less variation of refusal strategies in English, this kind of study would be very useful to obtain more refusal strategies and to understand appropriate refusals for various situations. In addition, such a study can provide information about situations in which particular refusal strategies are regarded as appropriate by the target language speakers and the patterns most commonly used by the target language speakers in specific situations. These demonstrate a need for further study of second language learners' acquisition of refusals.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

**Instructions:** Please read the following 8 situations. In each situation, you are talking with a close friend who is a Japanese non-native speaker of English. Try to imagine an actual conversation and answer the question that follows about your close friend's responses. If there is no reason given, for the question about truthfulness, circle NA.

**1. You are shopping at a department store with your friend. You are \$10 short.**  
**You:** I really want these clothes but I don't have enough money to buy them. Could you please lend me \$10? I'll pay you by next week.

**a. Close friend:** No. Money will cause trouble of friendship. And you can buy another day when you have more money!

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: I'm sorry, I can't. I don't have much money, either.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

**2. You have a part-time job at restaurant and your friend also works there.**

**You: I cannot work this Sunday because I have some urgent business. Could you work in my place, please?**

**a. Close friend: Sorry. I have already appointment with my mom. Could you ask someone else?**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: I don't work on Sunday.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

**3. You and your friend (who lives near you) are on your way home.**

**You: Why don't we have some coffee at my house?**

**a. Close friend: I'm sorry. I'm busy today.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: No. I want to go home quickly.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**4. You are a member of the tennis club.**

**You: I'd like to invite you to join my tennis club.**

**a. Close friend: I'm sorry. I belong to another club.**

How appropriate is the level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: Oh, don't you know how I hate sports?**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**5. You are watching a movie with your friend at your house.**

**You: Do you want some popcorn?**

**a. Close friend: Be quiet! I'm watching a movie now.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate



How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: No, thank you.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**6. You are a member of an orchestra.**

**You: I have a ticket for our concert Saturday night. Would you like it?**

**a. Close friend: Thank you, but I'm not interested in music.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: I'm sorry. I have a plan.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**7. You are talking to a friend.**

**You: Shall we go shopping this weekend?**

**a. Close friend: I'm sorry but I have a lot of assignments.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite      1      2      3      4      5      too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: No. I want to stay at home.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

**8. You are a college student. You are talking to your classmate, a close friend of yours.**

**You: Let's go on a trip this summer!**

**a. Close friend: That sounds good, but I don't have enough money.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

**b. Close friend: I have already planned to go on a trip with another friend.**

How appropriate is the politeness level of this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

How would you feel about this response?

impolite    1    2    3    4    5    too polite  
                                 appropriate

## **Investigating the Implementation and Development of Undergraduate English-Medium Instruction Programs in Japan: Facilitating and Hindering Factors**

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### **Abstract**

English-medium instruction (EMI) of content classes is growing in Japan with nearly 1/3 of all universities currently offering some undergraduate EMI. These programs are developing in response to both national-level drives to internationalize higher education and local contextual factors motivating individual universities. This exploratory study seeks to identify local factors in the university community which facilitate or hinder the implementation and development of EMI programs. Results are based on documentary evidence and interview data collected at eight universities. A total of 15 stakeholders from eight undergraduate EMI programs shared their experiences and insights in semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that implementation and development of EMI programs are influenced by a set of eight overlapping factors: questions of status and position; issues of territoriality; the overall health of the institution; the pace of change; external validation; issues connected to staffing; available support structures; and communication issues. These factors have implications for curriculum design and implementation and may provide an initial roadmap for program planning.

**Keywords:** English-medium instruction, Japanese universities, Internationalization of higher education, EMI program implementation

### **Introduction**

Teaching content in English to second-language students at universities with a different traditional instructional language (English-Medium Instruction, EMI) is growing around the

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world. The trend is driven by both international and national-level political, economic and social factors and by local contextual factors at individual universities.

Regardless of the forces behind this trend, actual implementation of EMI may be problematic. Along with the generally change-averse nature of universities, a difficulty facing any curriculum innovation (Fullan & Scott, 2009), EMI poses special socio-political and practical questions. Politically, a change of instructional language often raises questions of national identity and fears of domain loss for the home language (Wilkinson, 2013; Phillipson, 2006). Practically, difficulties commonly experienced when initially planning for and implementing EMI include the following: lack of language skills, interest, confidence or willingness among faculty and students; difficulties in finances, logistics and administration; issues of equity and fairness between local and international students; and questions of pedagogy and assessment (Coleman, 2006).

This study explores the issues of implementation and development of undergraduate EMI programs at universities in Japan. Because the Wilkinson (2013), Phillipson (2006) and Coleman (2006) studies cited above were conducted in European EMI contexts, it is not clear to what extent the issues they raise are influencing EMI developments in Japan. With that in mind, this study seeks to identify factors which facilitate, or hinder, the implementation and development of EMI in Japan. The aim is to provide information for EMI program stakeholders; a roadmap, albeit incomplete, for program design and implementation.

### *The Position of EMI in Japan*

EMI at Japanese universities has been growing in recent years. Official government figures show that as of 2013, 262 universities, just over 1/3 of all universities in Japan, offered undergraduate EMI, up from 171 universities in 2005 (MEXT, 2015). This is a 53% increase in a decade and the expansion of EMI programs is continuing. Current estimates indicate that as many as 275 universities offer EMI at the undergraduate level. Earlier research (Brown & Iyobe, 2014) has shown that Japanese EMI programs are structured in various ways. A limited number of campuses, generally smaller universities, run entirely in English and approximately 30 larger, comprehensive universities offer some full-degree English-taught Programs (ETPs) at the undergraduate level. Some universities also offer EMI courses to suit the needs of short-term international students on exchange or semester-abroad programs. However, it seems that many undergraduate EMI programs are relatively small, elective components of the domestic students' mainly Japanese-medium degree programs.

### *Drivers of EMI Development*

Universities implement EMI for various reasons. For one, it can be seen as part of the overall push towards internationalization of higher education in Japan. The Japanese government has been moving towards greater internationalization for decades and pushing universities in particular to attract international students since the early 1980s (Hood, 2001). The government at that time set a goal to increase the number of international students 10-fold, to 100,000 (Umakoshi, 1997). By 2003, the goal was reached and as of 2010, more than 140,000 international students were studying in Japan (JASSO, 2013). Interestingly, as discussed below, EMI does not appear to have been important in this inflow of international students, as the vast majority of them studied in either Japanese language courses or mainstream, Japanese-medium programs (Aspinall, 2013).

In recent years, an even more ambitious goal has been set. As part of the drive to make Japan into an “Asian Gateway” (Council for Asian Gateway Initiatives, 2007) to the rest of the world, what Knight (2014) refers to as a hub for international education, the government has set a target of attracting 300,000 international students by 2020. The aim is to have 5% to 10% international student mobility (Ninomiya, Knight & Watanabe, 2009). As discussed below, this second phase of internationalization seems to be more relevant to the current growth of EMI in Japan.

In part, this internationalization can be seen as a response to the demographic crisis facing universities in Japan. With an aging population, Japan’s university-aged cohort is declining and higher education is approaching universality (Altbach & Ogawa, 2002); that is, virtually all high school graduates who want to enter university can do so. In this context, many universities find themselves with excess seats, unable to meet enrolment quotas. In addition, much of Japan’s higher education capacity is in private institutions, largely funded through student tuition and fees. In this context, the internationalization of higher education can be seen as a survival strategy, perhaps the only viable way to attract new students.

Additionally, Amano and Poole (2005) explore a structural and educational crisis facing Japanese universities. They argue that major reforms, including greater internationalization, are necessary considering the structural problems facing universities and the general perception, both internationally and at home, that Japanese higher education is not of world-class quality. Yonezawa (2007) also argues that internationalization is necessary for Japanese universities amid increasing cross-border academic collaboration, changes in how academics work in light of developments in IT, and growing competition from other East Asian universities.

This drive towards internationalization can also be seen as an attempt to open up domestic students to new ideas and possibilities. Recently, there has been a strong government discourse on the need for *global jinzai*, globalized human resources, in Japan. In the past, government language policy called for schools and universities to cultivate Japanese with the ability to use English. However, with the growing emphasis on internationalization and globalization in government discourse, this has changed to a focus on fostering "human resources who can positively meet the challenges and succeed in the global field" (MEXT, n.d.). Beyond language learning, this globalized focus is seen as a way to overcome a perceived inward-looking tendency of Japanese youth and thus improve Japanese competitiveness.

As a result, this focus on internationalization of universities and globalization of students has been one dominant theme of official discourse on higher education reform in recent years (Yonezawa, 2010). EMI is seen to have a central position in this strategy. As a recent policy statement says:

Amid ongoing globalization, in order to develop an educational environment where Japanese people can acquire the necessary English skills and also international students can feel at ease to study in Japan, it is very important for Japanese universities to conduct lessons in English for (*sic*) a certain extent, or to develop courses where students can obtain academic degrees by taking lessons conducted entirely in English (MEXT, 2009b p.17).

This discourse has had a strong effect on recent developments in EMI, both by creating a social and political environment where initiatives can develop and by providing direct support for important programs.

In 2008, for instance, the government set a goal to recruit 300,000 international students for Japanese universities and proposed designating 30 universities as centres for internationalization. The program is known officially as the Global 30 Project – Establishing University Network for Internationalization and colloquially as the Global 30 Project, or simply the G30. While the government initially budgeted for 30 Core Universities, only 22 applied for the funding. Of these, 13 large, well-known universities were selected.

The core universities, which received funding and support for curriculum innovation, faculty and administrative hiring, expansion of facilities and student recruitment, were encouraged to develop full degree EMI programs for international students as a step towards meeting the 300,000-student goal. There are currently more than 35 different EMI undergraduate degrees available through the G30 including programs in: Natural Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Environmental Sciences); Social Sciences (Governance, Regional Studies,

Economics and Politics); Humanities (Liberal Arts and Japanese Studies); and technical fields (Engineering, Medicine and Communication Technology).

If the G30 provides EMI programs for international students, the Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development, the Global *Jinzai* (Globalized Human Resources) Program can be thought of as a parallel project for domestic students. A total of 42 universities are now receiving funding under this program. While Global *Jinzai* supported projects can be somewhat broad, including improved language classes, study abroad programs and investments in e-learning, EMI classes are seen as a major component of many of them.

More recently, the Top Global University program began funding internationalization projects in 2015. Universities in this program were chosen based on their commitment to greater internationalization. Full-degree English taught programs and other EMI courses are a significant element of Top Global projects. The participating universities have also committed to hiring a larger number of international faculty, who will presumably be teaching in English, not Japanese.

While it is clear that the government initiatives described above drive many EMI programs now in development, it can be argued that these national-level forces, being relatively recent developments, are not directly tied to much of the growth of EMI seen up to now. Note that the government's largest to date support for EMI, the G30 program, funds less than 2% of universities and was not announced until 2008, by which time a quarter or more of Japanese universities were already offering EMI. Earlier EMI programs had developed in response to a number of local contextual factors faced by individual universities.

One seemingly obvious factor driving EMI initiatives would be the rapid rise in the number of international students in Japan between 1990 and 2010. In Europe for example, Wachter and Maiworm (2008) found that one motivating factor for developing English-taught degree programs was appealing to linguistically-diverse international students when the university's home language is not widely studied abroad. However, the situation in Japan seems to be different.

Firstly, international students in Japan are not actually linguistically diverse. According to the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO, 2013), 92% come from Asia, China alone accounting for more than 60%. These students have a strong background in a writing system similar to Japanese and many have studied Japanese before they arrive. Aspinall (2013) shows that this has led to most international students studying in Japanese language programs or in Japanese-medium content programs which allowed "Japanese universities to accept them

without having to introduce any serious internationalization of the curriculum or teaching methods” (p. 162).

Also, 72% of international students study at private universities (JASSO 2013) many of which are considered to be of low academic level (Goodman, 2007). Many of the major universities accepting international undergraduate students are small-to-medium-sized private universities which have limited, or no, EMI offerings. In fact, comparing a list reported by Goodman (2007) of the top 20 universities accepting international undergraduates, calculated as a proportion of total student enrolment, with an unpublished MEXT list of universities known to offer EMI, only 3 universities are on both lists and only at one, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, is EMI a significant part of the curriculum.

Thus, attracting large numbers of international students does not seem to have been a driving force in the growth of EMI in Japan up to now. However, Aspinall (2013) argues that the situation has changed as Japanese universities can no longer rely on their traditional sources of international students. The number of self-funded Chinese students studying abroad seen since 2000 has plateaued and there is a clear preference in China for English-speaking western universities (ACA, 2012). This perhaps implies a greater linguistic diversity among international students in Japan in the future and thus less ability for them to study in mainstream Japanese-medium programs, leading to a greater role for EMI. The government seems to see EMI in this light (MEXT, 2009b).

A recent study (Brown, 2014) indicates that the bulk of students in current EMI programs may in fact be domestic Japanese students and that universities are implementing these programs in response to local factors. Firstly, competition and rivalry among universities is important. Universities are reluctant to fall behind, so when a university thought of as a leader develops an EMI program, other institutions follow suit. In addition, EMI programs are assumed to help maintain or improve a university’s position on domestic and international rankings. Also, EMI is potentially an important public relations tool, giving the university an international allure or an appearance of academic rigor. Of course, EMI is also seen as a potential benefit to students, preparing them to study abroad or for the increasingly globalized job market. Finally, EMI programs are sometimes seen by faculty members as a potential benefit, giving them an opportunity to explore new modes of teaching and raising their status in the university community.



## The Current Study

Amid a growing and diverse range of EMI programs implemented for a variety of reasons, many stakeholders are looking for models or roadmaps. However, such studies are not yet common in the literature on EMI in Japan. This exploratory study aims to partially fill that gap by identifying factors in the local context of universities that facilitate or hinder the implementation and development of EMI.

### *Data sources and methods*

Data for this study was collected from publicly-available documents and generated through semi-structured interviews with EMI program stakeholders. The study began with a cursory overview of all universities known to offer undergraduate EMI and moved on to a more detailed look at a selected sample of 12 universities. These universities were chosen to represent EMI programs in a variety of contexts and to see a range of possible models of implementation (see Table 1).

Table 1

### *Criteria for Categorizing Universities*

| Criteria        | Grouping  |
|-----------------|---|
| Size            | Small (< 2500 students)                                       |
|                 | Medium (2500 - 10,000 students)                               |
|                 | Large (> 10,000 Students)                                     |
| Status          | University / Junior College                                   |
|                 | Public / Private  |
| Position of EMI | Established / Newly-forming                                   |
|                 | Positioned as language / content program or multiple programs |

For each of the universities in the sample, an archive of publicly-available documents related to their EMI program(s) was collected (see Table 2). This included promotional materials, in-house documents available through the university website and academic work published by program stakeholders.

Table 2

*Archival Materials Collected from Selected Universities*

| <b>Archival data type</b> | <b>Typical documents</b>  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Promotional materials     | Pamphlets, brochures, web pages, welcome letters  |
| In-house documents        | Syllabi, class descriptions, faculty-development reports, time tables, grant applications |
| Publications              | Papers, presentation materials from conferences and symposia                              |

Following a review of archival material, EMI program stakeholders from the 12 selected universities were identified and contacted. In the end, 15 stakeholders at eight universities (see Table 3) agreed to participate in the study. The data set includes both a public university and private institutions, large and small universities, four-year universities and a two-year junior college, ETP and non-degree programs, well-established and newly-forming EMI programs, and EMI programs positioned within content and language-learning departments.

Table 3

*Profile of Universities and Participants*

| <b>University</b>   | <b>Informant</b>              |
|---|-------------------------------|
|   | Pseudonym (Gender) - Position |
| A    Medium-sized, private<br>(junior college)<br>Single, established EMI program | Carl (M) – Faculty member     |
| B    Small, private<br>Single, established EMI program                            | Janice (F) – Program head     |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| C | Large, private<br>Multiple EMI programs                    | Peter (M) – Administrator<br>Takahiro (M) – Program head<br>Naomi (F) – Faculty member,<br>administrator<br>Keiko (F) – Faculty member,<br>administrator |
| D | Large, public<br>Multiple EMI programs                     | Paul (M) – Program head  |
| E | Large, private<br>Single, established EMI program          | Sarah (F) - Faculty member<br>Jane (F) - Faculty member<br>Eric (M) - Faculty member<br>Alan (M) - Faculty member<br>Tomoyuki (M) -Program head          |
| F | Large, private<br>Multiple EMI programs                    | Robert (M) - Faculty member  |
| G | Medium-sized, private<br>Single, newly forming EMI program | Albert (M) - Faculty member  |
| H | Medium-sized, private<br>Multiple EMI programs             | David (M) - Faculty member   |

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Semi-structured interviews were chosen to generate data at this stage of the study on both practical and epistemological grounds. Practically speaking, as this is an exploratory study, semi-structured interviews allowed flexible data collection. The interviewer could guide the conversation to pre-identified areas of inquiry but also allow unpredicted context-specific issues which the participants deemed important and relevant to arise (Willis, 2008). In addition, as this was the initial meeting with many participants, the casual, conversational nature of semi-structured interviews was seen as an opportunity to build trust and establish open dialogue.

Epistemologically speaking, semi-structured interviews were seen as a way to generate appropriate data. The implementation of a new curriculum, especially one which changes the medium of instruction, is not simply a policy issue. It is a social process and as such, stakeholders' interpretations and understandings of their experiences are valuable, relevant issues to explore. Also, as a social process, much of the discussion surrounding curriculum

change may never be formally recorded. Participants' individual accounts may be the only source of data available. In addition, curriculum change can be tied to questions of identity and will inevitably involve workplace micro-politics. These can be emotionally-charged issues so the respondents' actual language use was seen to be important. A final, overriding factor was the desire for what Mason (2002) calls the "depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness in data" (p.65) available through semi-structured interviews.

The initial interview topics were developed drawing on a review of relevant literature and the archives described above for each participating university. These included issues of motivation, process and outcomes. Personal experiences working at a university implementing an EMI program led to the development of additional questions on positioning and controversy.

Interviews, conducted face-to-face in English, ranged from 1 to 2.5 hours. While interviews were based on the interview schedule, questions were not asked in any given order. Rather, interviews began with an invitation to "tell me about your university." Some care was taken to ensure that all relevant areas were explored, but the participants' own experiences and interpretations were given priority following Seidman's (2006) advice to "avoid imposing [one's] own interests on the experience of the participants" (p.92).

All interviews were recorded, with the participants' permission, and transcribed. Following the interviews, transcripts were summarized and information from these summaries was added to the archive of publicly-available documents to create an overall profile of how and why the programs developed - a kind of narrativization of the program. As a final step, in what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as "member-checking" (p. 246), interview participants were given a written copy of the narrativized summary so they could both fact check the contents and correct any possible misinterpretations. This member-checking continued into the analysis and write-up phases of the project with participants being given access to drafts of papers in which their data was used before they were submitted for publication. Two participants took advantage of the member checking process to ask for changes to how their comments were characterized at the summary stage and one asked for minor revisions in a draft paper. One participant also asked for minor changes to how certain statements were characterized in this paper.

Data analysis was based on what Kvale (2007) describes as meaning condensation. From the interview transcripts, natural meaning units were identified. These were chunks of speech often containing an important insight or a particular point the participant was trying to make. But also, these were sometimes pieces of information or ideas that the participants themselves, as an insider, may have not found important or surprising. From these natural meaning units, central themes were identified by the researcher. Then, the transcripts were reviewed again looking for

meaning units that at first glance seemed insignificant, but in light of newly-identified central themes took on new importance. Through several iterations of this process relevant themes emerged from the data.

It should be noted that the document archive prepared for each participating university was often helpful in both the actual interviews and the interpretation of results. In some cases, analysis of this archive provided valuable insights into the scale of EMI programs, entry requirements and courses of study. It was also possible, in some cases, to learn about motivations of key stakeholders and internal debates on program development. Understanding the background and current structure of programs allowed for targeted questioning during interviews, especially in follow-up questions and probes. Perhaps more importantly, this information also provided helpful context for understanding and interpreting participants' responses. However, in other cases, the publicly-available information was unhelpful, limited in scope or consisted only of vague promotional documents and general policy statements.

## Findings and Discussion

Since the interviews conducted for this study were very fairly wide-ranging and exploratory in nature, a large number of themes emerged. Themes connected to motivations for developing EMI programs have been dealt with in Brown (2014) and themes related to structure and organization of programs are covered in Brown and Iyobe (2014). For this paper, eight themes relating to the implementation and development of EMI programs were identified (see Table 4).

Table 4

### *Themes Emerging from Interview Transcripts*

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#### Themes

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Status and position

Territoriality

Financial health of the institution

Pace of change

External validation

Staffing

Support structures

Communication

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Results are presented and discussed below categorized by theme. Not all themes emerged at all participating universities, but where possible, each theme is described in terms of how it was relevant at each university and how it was seen to facilitate or hinder EMI program implementation and development. These descriptions will be supported with extracts from participants' interview responses in order to better present their actual voices and their understanding of the program in which they work.

### *Questions of Status and Position*

According to Kennedy, Doyle and Coh (1999), educational innovation is as much driven by emotional and political factors as it is by rational, pedagogical concerns. As such, understanding social and political contexts is key for successful implementation of EMI programs. At Japanese universities, like in many other higher education contexts, questions of politics and status are inseparable. There is a rigid formal hierarchy of decision making power with decisions passing through certain committees, often more than one, and being approved by both faculty and administration stakeholders. In addition, as is common to many Japanese organizations, there is a rather strong respect for age, leading to an unofficial hierarchy of seniority. However, it can be argued that these hierarchical structures exist on the surface while the real power is determined by the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989) earned and brought to bear by the various stakeholders.

Poole (2010) argues that in order to understand how symbolic capital comes into play at a Japanese university, one must understand the distinction between what he calls *uchimuki* (inward looking) and *sotomuki* (outward looking) faculty perspectives. An *uchimuki* point of view sees the university faculty as a community, largely cut off from the wider social world and based on internal cooperative collegiality. There is a family-like atmosphere and a sense of egalitarianism and decision making is based on consensus building, implying that even a single dissenting voice, if vocal enough, can derail plans. Change and reform are taken on, somewhat reluctantly, as a bottom-up reaction to changing realities. Status is gained through cooperative administrative work (i.e. committee duties) and through visibility on campus and the appearance of being a busy and popular teacher (i.e. the number and size of classes). Research output or the actual quality of one's teaching practice is of less value. University administrators are seen as having significant symbolic capital due to their intimate knowledge of university regulations, visibility on campus and control over resources and the flow of information.

From a *sotomuki* perspective on the other hand, the university is a workplace like many others, interacting competitively with other institutions. Faculty members exist to provide services to

students so teaching is highly valued. Research output is also valuable but administrative committee work does not significantly contribute to one's status. Accountability is valued, so objective measures of performance, such as promotions (i.e. a position as full professor), student evaluations, prestigious publications and successful grant applications, garner status. One's relationships outside the university, including activities with academic associations, government appointments and appearances in the mass media are highly valued. Change and reform can be rapid and are often proactive top-down measures. University administrators have little effective symbolic capital.

This *sotomuki* – *uchimuki* dichotomy seen in Japan seems to have a great deal of resonance with the notions of cosmopolitan or local faculty members at western universities as described by Manning (2013). Cosmopolitans are faculty members who shape their identity through their disciplinary community at the national or international level. They are less involved with administrative duties or campus politics in their workplace. They consider their peer group to be others in their discipline, regardless of where they work. Locals, on the other hand, are not so involved in disciplinary activities. Rather, they are more focused on their own campus. Their professional identity is tied to their workplace and their relationships there. Their focus is on institutional service and campus politics.

It could be argued that in Japan the *uchimuki*, or local, perspective is the traditional way of operating a university and the *sotomuki*, or cosmopolitan, view is a new way of seeing things. In fact *sotomuki* perspectives are gaining ground, especially amid recent government mandates for greater transparency and accountability and shifts to more centralized administrative control of universities. However, it should be noted that, as Poole (2010) argues, both views are represented on campuses. In fact, individual professors are not limited to a strict black-or-white dichotomy. The inward vs. outward looking distinction is better conceived of as two ends of a continuum, with a great deal of grey between them. As Poole says, "Though certain professors may epitomize one or the other models, there is considerable 'straddling'. Depending on the situation, individual actors may strategically embrace one or the other ideology." (p.85).

In terms of on-campus innovation, it should also be noted that the tension between inward and outward looking perspectives may lead to unaligned incentives among faculty. Things which motivate some may be irrelevant or even demotivating for others. For instance, Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) report that, from a faculty perspective, benefits of an EMI program may include personal gains in language proficiency, academic gains in access to teaching materials and classroom gains in the motivation and commitment of students along with lower class sizes. While these are likely to motivate a Japanese faculty member with a

largely *sotomuki* orientation, an *uchimuki* oriented faculty member may be less likely to value them.

Accordingly, to understand how questions of symbolic capital influence the development of EMI programs, one must look at the status and position of relevant stakeholders as well as understand their view of the university. Establishing EMI can both require support of high-status people with a great deal of symbolic capital in the community and it can also be a path to obtaining such capital and higher-status positions.

At University D, the idea of status was an important consideration on several fronts. The relative status of the stakeholders determined the eventual positioning of the university's ETP program while at the same time, association with the program influenced the status of some stakeholders.

Initially, the task of developing the ETP was assigned to the language/communication department by university leadership. This department did not have a degree program of its own, but rather acted as a service department, providing language programs for other departments and faculties. This meant that, as a whole, the department had little status within the university community. Paul reported that at University D, "As in many Japanese universities, only teaching English [language classes] is seen as being lower status than having [content classes]."<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with findings from a wide variety of settings which show that language teachers, particularly English teachers are often relegated to lower positions (see for example, Arkoudis, 2006). For a minority of professors in the department, the assignment to develop an ETP was seen as an opportunity. Starting a new program could associate the department with the university leadership's plans for internationalization and bring the department into the mainstream of the university community. However, such a plan would necessitate increased workload and represent a risk of failure. In addition, the potential benefits of the new program, greater external recognition and improvements in educational offerings, may have appealed to *sotomuki*-oriented faculty members, but they held little value to the traditionally-minded *uchimuki* faculty, the majority of the department.

Consequently, the plan to establish an ETP in the languages department was rejected by the faculty. Following this, the university leadership shifted focus to the international center, which was not even a department of the faculty, simply an administrative unit within the university. There was a sense that since an ETP would serve international students, positioning it within the international center made sense. Also, with even less status than the language department,

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<sup>12</sup> In the description of findings, all direct quotes are taken from interview transcripts with the speaker identified by pseudonym in text.



the international center was seen as lacking sufficient power to refuse the university leadership's directives. It could be, in Paul's words, "burdened with the ETP" without the ability to oppose top-down decisions. And so, at present both the non-degree EMI program and the full-degree ETP program are administrated by the international center.

On a personal level, Paul was able to parley developments in University D's EMI programs into personal advancement. As part of taking the lead on developing the new ETP, he negotiated a position as program head and a promotion to full professor, both high status accomplishments from a *sotomuki* perspective. However, he found that his actual power as program head was somewhat limited. As a relatively young, foreign faculty member, he found himself outside the normal *uchimuki* power structures. He lacked detailed knowledge of how decisions were actually made outside the official hierarchy and was thus unable to implement some decisions he considered appropriate to his position.

University E also had several issues connected to status and symbolic capital when it established its EMI program. The program has a relatively long history, nearly 20 years, and has developed under the direction of a committed course coordinator, Tomoyuki, for that entire time. However, the program has only recently developed sufficient status to be officially recognized in the university curriculum. Initially, the EMI program was envisioned by foreign language teachers as a Content Based Instruction (CBI) model of language teaching. Tomoyuki was, at the time, a young, inexperienced faculty member newly hired and having just returned from his own graduate studies abroad. His experiences as a student in the west made him open to the idea of using a CBI paradigm. However, he found that his colleagues in the faculty had a much more traditional idea of language learning and CBI was simply "beyond their paradigm". Facing resistance and lacking sufficient symbolic capital to push his ideas forward, Takahiro was unable to officially implement the program.

However, the EMI program stakeholders were able to establish a "stealth EMI" program by taking advantage of the strong tradition of faculty autonomy at University E. As at many universities in Japan, there is very little oversight of class contents. As Tomoyuki said, "The outside of the curriculum was the same as before but the inside? Nobody cares, nobody checks." Taking advantage of this autonomy, the EMI teachers taught classes in American Studies and Intercultural Communication even though the classes had labels such as English Communication I or English Writing II. This continued for a long part of the history of the program with periodic unsuccessful attempts to bring the program into the open. Only as the program coordinator, and others, whom Jane referred to as "friends of the program", aged into higher status and developed sufficient symbolic capital, was the stealth EMI program officially

recognized as part of the curriculum.

Participants also reported issues of status arising from the fact that the EMI faculty at University E are exclusively foreign teachers. Eric is a content specialist in American Studies but the others are primarily language teachers who also have responsibility for some EMI classes in Cultural Studies. In the past, Japanese faculty, including the course coordinator, have occasionally conducted EMI classes but this has not been a long-term feature of the program. Tomoyuki sees this focus on foreign faculty as a strength, as it makes the program popular among students and creates an authentic need for English use. However, it has also, unfortunately, lowered the status of the EMI program in the university community and weakened its position since foreign teachers are not considered full faculty members by virtue of their qualifications, position or ethnicity. As Jane said of foreign faculty at University E, “We are not qualified enough, not involved enough and not Japanese enough”.

Firstly, as Jane explains about University E, foreign teachers are often not considered qualified to be full-fledged faculty members. This is interesting because foreign teacher posts have as a minimum qualification, a Master’s degree in Applied Linguistics or a related field and a Master’s level degree is generally sufficient for a faculty position at a Japanese university. The distinction may be in what constitutes a valid degree in the minds of many faculty members. Language teaching is often thought of as having a “curriculum as practice” (Reid, 1992, p.7) orientation, focusing on the process of learning or skills development. However, other teachers often see “curriculum as institution” (p.7), focusing on disciplinary norms and codified content knowledge. This leaves language teachers, without a “clearly defined propositional knowledge base” (Creese, 2002 p. 612), in a less authoritative position.

Japanese teachers of English often do not self-identify as language teachers. Rather, they are first and foremost specialists in their own disciplines, often Literature, Linguistics or American or British Studies. Their role as language teachers is incidental (Hawley-Nagatomo, 2012). However, foreign language teachers are often required by the terms of their employment to be language education specialists. This forces them into the curriculum as practice mold and potentially lower-status positions.

Secondly, as is common at many Japanese universities, foreign teachers are generally hired on term-limited contracts, often 4 years at University E. As short-term teachers, they are not considered full-fledged faculty members, which is reflected in their working conditions. Foreign teachers are not given private offices but have shared work rooms. In addition, it is common at University E for foreign teachers to be assigned classes in both the first period of the morning and late evening sessions, creating a work day of more than 12 hours, something

not required of Japanese faculty. Also, as short term employees, their salaries are capped and they have no opportunities for advancement and limited research funding.

University E does have a few full time, permanent foreign faculty members. However, they are hired in a special category which excludes them from administrative duties. The faculty members themselves may be happy to avoid seemingly onerous committee duties and administrative responsibilities. As Eric said:

I don't have to go to regular committee meetings. And I don't have to go to the faculty meetings also, which is nice. I do get paid less for that. But for me, time is worth more than money in a lot of cases.

So, Eric sees his special designation as an advantage. However, this leaves him cut off from the only real route to developing status and acquiring symbolic capital in an *uchimuki* environment.

There are also clear indications that at University E, foreign teachers are of lower status due to their ethnicity. Hall (1994) spoke of the problems of foreign faculty at Japanese universities as a kind of “academic apartheid”. While much has improved since Hall wrote in the early 1990's, participants at University E feel that some of the separateness continues on their campus. Jane related the story of a colleague who earned a full-time, permanent position at the university and was one of the very few to become a regular faculty member with administrative duties and a seat in the faculty meeting. After speaking his mind about an issue under discussion he was chastised by an older, Japanese colleague and told that it did not matter what title he got, he was not ever going to be a real faculty member and so should simply shut up during meetings. As Jane said, he was simply “not Japanese enough”.

These three factors, the qualifications, position, and ethnicity of the teachers, combine to mean that the EMI program at University E is staffed by people who tend to have very low status in the institution. And thus, the EMI program itself is of low status. If the teachers in the program are not considered to be real faculty then the program itself cannot have any real validity. And thus, the program has been open to repeated attacks and has had a very difficult time developing. Tomoyuki described the relationship with a rival department by saying “They tried to crush us.”

On the other hand, when program stakeholders have status and sufficient symbolic capital, EMI implementation may be conducted smoothly. At University G for instance, Albert reported that the plan to institute an EMI program was met with some initial grumbling but eventually passed without incident. The teachers in the program are a mix of Japanese and foreign faculty, many with qualifications as content specialists rather than language teachers. In addition the program received very strong public support from the president of the university. University G is a private institution, controlled by a single family and a close family member of the university

chair works as part of the administrative team for the EMI program. She lends her status to the program and acts as a very visible symbol of the importance of the program to the overall strategy of the university leadership. So, according to Albert, when the program received this strong and visible top-down support from the owners, the faculty had little choice but to “fall into line”.

Similarly, at University F, the current EMI classes in the general education program began as an experimental program in a single department led by two Japanese faculty members. They developed the program and are now overseeing its expansion into a more central role in the curriculum. It is interesting to note that, despite some doubt and resistance among peripheral stakeholders, this implementation and expansion has largely been smooth. The two key stakeholders straddle *uchimuki* and *sotomuki* perspectives and have considerable symbolic capital within and outside their institution. From the *uchimuki* perspective, both have seniority and stable positions in the university community. Both are well-respected and popular teachers. From the *sotomuki* perspective, both are considered leaders in their field and are active in academic associations. In addition, both have sat or currently sit on government advisory panels on education and are involved in national-level innovations in language testing.

Another factor to note at University F is that while both faculty leaders are involved in language education, neither is a language teacher. Rather, both are specialists in Education, a fully codified discipline. In addition, the program is staffed by a balance of foreign and Japanese teachers, many of whom are primarily content specialists rather than language teachers. This creates a more solid base for building the status of the program than the all-foreign teaching staff in the EMI program at University E.

### *Territoriality and Defense of Turf*

The success of EMI initiatives is very closely tied to questions of territoriality and turf. These issues often work to block innovations, including EMI programs. Becher (1989) and Becher and Trowler (2001) describe disciplinary groups in a university in terms of tribes and territories. Once an academic is socialized into the norms of their discipline, those norms color their perceptions and influence their reactions. The borders between academic disciplines can be as real as physical borders and crossing them to work amid what Klein (1996) calls the shadow structures that exist between disciplines can be daunting. In such a context, change which is seen as threatening to the integrity of one's discipline can be seen as an attack and will be met with strong resistance. In fact, any change can be met with skepticism or suspicion, leading to conflict which can block development. As Trowler (2010) says of academics' resistance to

change, “Turf wars and other squabbles result in stalled initiatives” (p.1).

However, in other work, Trowler (Trowler, 1998; Trowler, Saunders & Bamber, 2012) argues that these disciplinary norms, while still important, are not the overriding factors in how one responds to change. These disciplinary characteristics do influence academics’ response to change, but other factors also contribute to the academic culture in which they work. These other factors include the institution they work in, their employment conditions, their relative power in their community, their age, gender, personal identity, social background, political views, and so on. All of these things are often seen through the frame of a discipline, but Trowler argues that the discipline colors the view rather than controlling it. This is especially true in what Rogers (1995) calls homophilious systems, in which colleagues have shared norms and values, similar social, cultural and political backgrounds, which lead to cultural convergence. This description seems to have a great deal of resonance with Poole’s notion of an *uchimuki* faculty perspective.

The idea of turf and territoriality was a key feature in developments at University E. When the EMI program was first introduced, it was positioned within a Liberal Arts department which was later split into two smaller more specialized departments. The EMI program was positioned within the Cultural Studies Department and ran parallel to English Language programs in the Language Education Department. Following the split, conflicts quickly arose between the two new departments. In particular, the Language Education Department felt a sense of ownership over all language-related programs which, at that time, included the EMI program since it was running as a “stealth program” with EMI classes being taught under the cover of what Tomoyuki called “traditional, conservative-sounding course names”. In addition, Tomoyuki characterized the Language Education Department as extremely conservative, with traditional views on language pedagogy. They fundamentally disagreed with the very existence of the EMI program on pedagogical grounds. These conflicts, described independently by 3 program stakeholders as a “turf war”, continue even now, more than 20 years after the split between the two departments.

Notions of turf were not, however, entirely negative at University E. Within the Cultural Studies department, where the EMI program is positioned, other faculty were initially indifferent to the program. Jane, who was present when the program began, says that the use of English as a medium of instruction, rather than an object of study, was simply “beyond the paradigm” of most of the faculty members and “they really did not understand it”. This indifference continued until attacks from the Language Education Department began. At that point, the situation changed and, though they still did not understand or value EMI, in the us-

against-them “turf war” Jane reports that her colleagues “circled the wagons” to defend the EMI program.

University H also had issues of turf and territoriality associated with EMI although the issues were not discipline or department specific. David described the faculty as being highly factionalized between Kyoto and Tokyo factions. These divisions are based on the professors' own alma mater universities. In Japan, the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University are the two leading universities and the rivalry between them is strong. At University H, faculty members, regardless of their own discipline, have formed cliques based on which of the two universities they graduated from. The current president of the university, a strong supporter of EMI developments, is a member of the Tokyo faction. And thus, the Kyoto faction almost universally opposes EMI and questions its value.

University A had a different experience with territoriality and turf. Though the EMI program is positioned in a low-status department, vulnerable to opposition, there does not seem to have been any significant controversy about it. This may have a connection to the history of the relationship between A's college and university branches. The EMI program is positioned within the junior college curriculum. Though the college is now based on the same campus as the university, when the program started, the two were separated. The university expanded and moved to a new campus several years before the junior college did so. At that time, the isolation gave college stakeholders freedom to implement ideas without university-level turf wars. As Carl said “we were far away and not very important”. This may have allowed the EMI program to develop without scrutiny or interference despite its lack of high-status stakeholders. Carl believes that if a similar program were proposed now, there would be more controversy and resistance.

Other universities were able to avoid, or at least temper, territoriality by creating links between the EMI program and other departments or programs. This strategy has helped ensure buy-in from a variety of faculty. At University F, Robert reported that when the EMI program moved from an experimental phase to wider implementation within the curriculum, the program leaders were careful to create links to a newly-constructed Self Access Learning Centre and the Language Education Centre. This was seen as lending the EMI program more credibility and legitimacy. However, interestingly, the EMI program was not linked to a long-established ETP offered in a different department.

At Universities C and D, the EMI programs are structurally similar and both have developed ties to faculty in a variety of departments due to that structure. Neither EMI program is situated within a specific department; rather they are tied to an international centre and have no faculty

of their own. EMI classes are offered by faculty, mainly Japanese, from departments throughout the university, or by adjunct faculty recruited specifically to teach EMI classes. According to Peter, University C made a conscious effort to recruit EMI teachers from various specialties to create a wide, though shallow, EMI program which allows students from various disciplines to feel that their needs are being met. University D follows a similar pattern. While the intention of this curriculum design is connected to meeting students' needs, it has the side benefit of creating an interdisciplinary and inter-departmental community of EMI stakeholders, thus lessening problems related to territoriality.

### *The Overall Health of the University*

One additional factor connected to the development of EMI is the overall position and stability of the university. EMI programs may be readily accepted when there is a greater urgency for change. This can be seen in a contrast of the experiences of Universities D and G. Both EMI innovations began as top-down directives from university leadership but the faculty reactions differed considerably.

University D developed its ETP and expanded its non-degree EMI programs in response to developments at other universities. The decision came as a result of a top-down directive growing out of a sense of competition with rivals. In a short period of time, the university was rejected for a prestigious grant, saw rival universities moving ahead in the drive to internationalize, and experienced a dramatic drop in its position on international ranking tables. Paul reported that these events were seen as “a wound” and “a shock to the system” which prompted the development of an ETP.

However, as a large, well-established publicly-funded institution, University D was never in any real danger. Seeing other schools move ahead in EMI programs may have been “a wound”, but it was largely a wound to their pride, not their bottom line. As such, the level of urgency felt by the university leadership may not have passed down to individual faculty members. And so, as discussed above, when the university tried to establish an ETP in the language teaching department, the plan was rejected by the faculty and ultimately, the ETP was established elsewhere. It can be argued that, feeling secure in their positions, the faculty felt free to reject the university leadership's plan.

In contrast, University G, a medium-sized private university, is not generally considered academically rigorous. Though the university is relatively well-established, it is vulnerable to the demographic crisis facing many Japanese universities. Albert described implementing EMI as a necessary reinvention. Discussions among faculty were framed in terms of survival.

So if we can say we are a center for English education, it might attract students who want to work for foreign companies or want to study abroad. It's a sense of survival. It provides an exciting alternative to the mainstay of Japanese education.

Thus, the EMI innovation may have been greeted with some resistance. The English department “may not be too keen on it because it steps on their territory.” There were also “nay-sayers” from other faculties and departments who question whether the students who typically attend University G will be capable of studying in EMI. However, with the innovation positioned as a survival strategy, resistance never rose above the level of “minor grumbling” amongst the faculty.

### *Pace of Change*

Rogers (1995) advises that innovation should not be implemented too quickly. Success depends on the innovation being small enough to be easily tried, modified, and if necessary, abandoned. Among the EMI program stakeholders interviewed for this project, there is a consensus that a slow development from a small start, evolutionary rather than revolutionary change, is key. At University D for instance, Paul reports that innovations have to fit into an existing framework first and then develop:

“At least at large, public universities like [University D], people don't like revolutions. You can't knock something down and start again. You have to plop a little new thing in the middle of the mass of bureaucracy and then take the resources from somewhere else bit by bit until you have enough critical mass to make it work”.

Robert from University F also says that a slow start and gradual development are important. The EMI classes in the general education program started as an innovative elective program in a single department and slowly developed. Robert argued that this was important to allow the program to evolve to suit the existing framework of the university. He said that given the current popularity of EMI in Japan, some universities (especially high-level administrators) are looking for a quick start up. However, flexibility to experiment at the early stages is important so a small-scale project is a better option initially.

At University C, Peter and Takahiro both reported that their EMI program developed slowly. They began their EMI program more than 10 years ago as an independent “bubble” but they had an “implicit strategy” to become more integrated over time. The EMI program is now well linked to most other parts of the university but Peter felt it was unlikely that a plan involving such integration at the outset would have been approved. Along with questions of approval,



systems needed time to develop. It took time to establish a smooth, well-organized system that actually meets students' needs. The system currently runs two overlapping EMI programs: one for international students, and one for domestic, Japanese students. Takahiro reported that he feels confident that their systems now work well for international students but classes for domestic students are still "a bit rough". He says that the University C EMI program needs, at minimum, five more years to develop their systems.

Therefore, a slow pace of development is seen as being key to the success of EMI. However, a slow pace of change can also hinder program development. Institutional inertia may make it difficult to implement innovations and necessary changes if decision makers do not understand the different needs of the EMI program and/or cannot change bureaucratic systems to account for new realities. At University D for example, the decision to implement a full-degree ETP was made and the schedule was set by university leaders. However, the mid-level bureaucracy was unable to change quickly enough to meet the schedule. For example, important documents, including the admissions policy, application procedures and scholarship details, could not be publically released until they had been approved by several committees, some of which only meet a few times per year. It proved impossible to speed up the pace of the approval process and so, key information was not available to potential students in a timely fashion. In addition, it proved impossible to change the application deadline for international students. The university bureaucracy could not readily approve an earlier application deadline and so international students and domestic students now have the same application and acceptance schedule even though international students need several additional months lead time to complete visa applications and other necessary preparations.

### *External Validation / Legitimacy*

External validation and legitimacy were also seen to be important in successful implementation of EMI. As seen above, EMI initiatives often face resistance based on territoriality or questions of status. In addition, as in any innovation, there is inherent uncertainty about the risks and rewards of implementing a new program. This is consistent with the context of innovation seen in business and other large organizations where innovations often face resistance from "people who do not understand the potential benefits or feel they will lose out as a result of the innovation" (Birkinsaw & Moll, 2006, p. 86). However, innovations can be validated by external stakeholders, whose status as outsiders gives their input more perceived value. To some degree, this external recognition of innovations can mitigate resistance.

In business, the role of external validator is often an active one with innovation stakeholders

calling in academics, consultants, and others to provide an objective analysis of the innovation. Peripheral stakeholders can be swayed, if not to support an innovation, at least to neutrality by such external validation. In this study, external validation is seen to be more passive. It arose in relationships between participant's institutions and their competitors, and in funding structures.

As seen in previous research (Brown, 2014), a desire to keep up with rivals is a major motivator in the development of EMI programs. If a prestigious rival implements EMI, it is seen as a challenge or threat and other universities follow suit. Participants from Universities C, D, G and H all described a similar feeling among peripheral stakeholders. EMI itself was not necessarily well-understood or valued but there was a clear sense that not having an EMI program of some kind would leave the university falling behind.

Apart from direct competition with rivals, university ranking lists were also seen to provide external validation of EMI innovations. Japanese universities are very concerned with their position on international and domestic ranking lists (Yonezawa, 2010). Such rankings are linked to a university's sense of identity and are seen to influence relationships with partners, both at home and abroad, as well as student recruitment.

Decision makers at some universities are proceeding on the assumption that EMI can contribute positively to their ranking. At University D, for example, rankings were a major factor in the decision to implement an ETP and expand current EMI offerings. As discussed above, Paul reported that a poor showing on a major international university ranking list was seen as a "massive jolt to the system" and led to the university bringing in an external consultant on internationalization in higher education. One of the consultant's main recommendations was the expansion of EMI offerings. In this case, the review bodies publishing university ranking tables are seen as passive external validators of EMI programs and the consultant is a more active form of external validation.

Not just individual universities, but Japan as a whole is also sometimes seen to be falling behind educationally and so external validation from other countries can also be a factor. EMI programs for domestic students are growing in China and are mandatory at universities in Korea, two neighbors which are seen as rivals. In addition, Japan has long looked to Europe for innovations in education and EMI is now a common part of school and university curricula there. As Robert, from University F, said, "There's a lot of media focus on Finland and other Scandinavian countries that do CLIL so I think now there will be more institutional pressure [to increase EMI]".

In terms of funding, at University A, EMI was the cornerstone of a successful application for a prestigious external grant for curriculum innovation. Beyond the funding itself, the mere

existence of the grant was seen to give the program legitimacy both within the department and the wider university community. According to Carl, even though the actual funding term has expired, the relationship between the EMI program and the grant is often mentioned.

At University C as well, the EMI program received external grant funding. However, in this case, the funds were for expansion of an existing program. When the EMI program was established there was a feeling among faculty, according to Takahiro, that “we won’t make much of it”. This lack of confidence contributed to initial problems with faculty and administration buy-in. However, there is currently more acceptance of the program and recognition of its value. The exact role of the external funding in this change is unclear but it is seen by both Takahiro and Peter as being a factor.

Of course, it is not always necessary for a program to actually receive grants in order for such funding to provide legitimacy. At University G for example, the fact that other universities are receiving such grants is seen as a justification for moving forward with an EMI program. Also, University D applied for a major grant to support development of a full-degree ETP and was rejected. Paul refers to this rejection as “a wound” which, along with the poor rankings results discussed above, motivated the university to develop its EMI programs.

### *Staffing*

Staffing is seen as an important issue in the development of EMI. Along with the issues of status and position discussed above, the qualifications of EMI faculty seem to be important. Paul from University D says that good academics in the field, not just people who can teach in English, are necessary and that “that is ultimately where the strength of the program will be”. Speaking of his current colleagues in the full-degree ETP, he says “I think we’ve got a team together that can really do something special despite all the bureaucratic nonsense.” He contrasts this with another prominent university he is familiar with where the ETP appears to be staffed by language teachers taking on additional content classes, which he feels illegitimizes the program. They “basically used their English teachers to teach their BA programs. I think there is something pretty unethical about that, actually.”

At University A, Carl is also concerned about staffing and qualifications. Many EMI programs in Japan are taught by EFL specialists and Carl worries that from the outside, those may not be seen as real classes. “If people outside are thinking ‘is this person really qualified to teach that class?’ then prospective students may also be hearing this from maybe their high school teacher.” That kind of impression among external observers would be very damaging for the program. Similar sentiments about the necessity of qualified faculty, and the dangers of un- or under-

qualified faculty, were heard from all of the universities studied here.

Thus, staffing EMI programs is seen to be key; however, it tends to be difficult, as teachers require a mix of specialist knowledge of content, language skills and teaching experience as well as a willingness to take on a greater workload than either an L1 content class or a language class would normally require. Also, at many of the schools studied here, EMI classes are assigned beyond the regular faculty teaching load. Finding a teacher with the right balance of attributes who is willing to take on the extra work can be very challenging.

Structural issues can also make staffing difficult. Japanese universities often offer limited-term contracts for new faculty members, which can make it difficult to attract quality candidates. Paul and Jane both reported that this was a staffing challenge for their universities. This issue also arises when the EMI program is funded through a short-term external grant. Naomi and Keiko at university C are both employed under such terms and are uncertain of their long-term positions. This uncertainty can also lead to long-term instability for the program as a whole. Institutional memory can be compromised as faculty members come and go regularly. Jane thinks of this in terms of the death and rebirth of the program:

Every time the faculty turns over, the program dies. Everything [they] bring to the program they take away with them. There is nothing left behind; it's completely undone. There is nothing to guide the incoming staff, so the program dies. It's very tenuous.

### *Support Structures*

EMI can be a challenge for students, and programs which provide student support are more likely to develop smoothly. In this study, several universities are seen to provide such support structures and at those which do not, stakeholders notice the lack of support.

Entry requirements can be an important support structure. For the ETP at University D, there is a clearly defined admission policy including strict language-testing benchmarks. Students must provide proof of language proficiency through internationally recognized tests such as the TOEFL iBT (minimum score 79) or IELTS (minimum Score 6.0). And at Universities C, D and G, the non-degree EMI programs have a series of benchmarks which allows relatively low English-proficiency students to enter and improve as they move through the program. At University D for example, students may enter the EMI program as first year students with a TOEFL iBT score of 61 but must improve that score to 70 by the end of the second year and are expected to have a score of 80 or higher upon graduation.

These benchmarks, apart from serving a gate-keeping function, are seen as a value to students and the program. They provide clear information about the demands of the program and help

students make an informed choice about joining. However, not all EMI programs have such benchmarks. At Universities A, B and E, the EMI classes are open to all students and are required for students in some departments. Sarah from University E said that this leads to students who are “unprepared for the challenges” joining EMI classes and not getting full educational value from them. This is also, of course, more difficult for the teachers and problematic for the program. A high dropout rate or a large number of failing students may be seen as evidence of the failure of the program as a whole.

Prerequisite classes and language preparation are another support structure which EMI stakeholders seem to feel would be important. However, these are generally not in place. Domestic Japanese students have English-language classes as part of their general education requirements; however, for most students, these classes are general English rather than English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and they have little or no connection to EMI classes students may join later. Participants at Universities A, E, C and H noted that this makes it difficult to know whether a given student is prepared for EMI. Sarah from University E explained that students’ preparedness for second year EMI classes “depends on who taught them in first year”. All participants at University E mentioned the possible value of required EAP classes and regretted that they were unable to make them part of the program.

At University C, one EMI program serves both domestic and short-term international students. Domestic students have required English classes but, as at other universities, these are not linked to the EMI program. The preparation of international students is unclear since they come from a variety of home institutions but Peter and Takahiro report that there is a general sense among EMI stakeholders that the international students are better able to handle EMI. They both feel that required EAP preparation classes would be a good, though politically and logistically difficult, addition to their current program.

### *Communication and Coordination*

A final factor seen to be important in the success of EMI is communication among both direct and peripheral program stakeholders, which can be a strength of a program. However, where it is lacking, stakeholders regret that lack. At University G for example, there does not appear to be a clear sense of development or curriculum planning across the 4 years of the program. As Albert said:

It will be thrown together in the sense that there will be individual classes which are taught in English but they will be fragmented. What the students get out of it is what the students get out of it.

The success of the program is seen to depend on the quality of individual teachers, though there will be little coordination or monitoring of quality. There does not seem to be a sense that the faculty involved in the program are a team, though Albert believes that this would be a good step towards success. At University H as well, there is little communication or coordination among teachers involved in the EMI program. David reported,

The effort that goes into designing courses is very secretive. I can't remember a single time where one of the [faculty] shared. They seem very secretive and hesitant to talk in detail. Basically nobody talks, or if they do, they don't develop [programs] together. There's no collaborative effort going on.

On the other hand, at both University C and D, EMI faculty do communicate and there is some coordination of classes. In both cases, the EMI program does not have dedicated teachers. Rather, a central administrative office recruits faculty members from different departments to teach individual EMI classes. This opens up communication channels, which allows for some coordination. However, among the EMI programs studied here, only University F actively promotes communication and collaboration. There are formal teachers' meetings twice per semester as well as regular social occasions for program stakeholders. In addition, there is a detailed EMI program manual. This has created an inclusive, collaborative and supportive environment. Also, the program leaders communicate well with the teachers. Robert reported good two-way communication, noting that it is always clear to whom questions or suggestions should be directed.

Perhaps due to the overall lack of communication, there is some confusion about the point of EMI programs for many universities studied here. In particular the relationship between language and content learning is sometimes unclear. Interestingly, all of the participants in this study mentioned this clarity of goals as a key factor for success while acknowledging that such clarity is hard to achieve.

At University E, different stakeholders gave completely different descriptions of the purpose of the program. For example, Jane and Sarah both reported that a main goal of the program was language learning, while Eric said that the students' language skills were at best "periphenomenal" - a hoped for, but not planned for, side benefit. Takahiro acknowledged that language learning was previously a goal but said that in the current program, language was not a priority at all.

At University G, Albert sees the program as being positioned as a "holistic English experience for students", the point being their English education. In this view, the classes are referred to as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) rather than EMI and are positioned primarily

as language learning. However, it is not clear that all faculty involved in the program necessarily agree with this. For some, content may take priority. The EMI program is still in the early stages of development and this issue is not yet resolved.

One extreme example of unclear goals can be seen at University H. David reports that in his department, the initial impetus for EMI has disappeared, leaving the program somewhat rudderless. The program was initially developed to prepare students before a mandatory semester-abroad program in their third year. As such, the EMI classes were positioned in the students' second year. However, the study abroad program shifted to the students' first year while the EMI classes remained as they were. It is unclear what role EMI is now meant to play.

Even at University F, with good communication among participating faculty, the purpose of the EMI program is muddled, leading to unclear assessment criteria. Some EMI classes are graded as if they were Content-Based Instruction of language while others are graded solely on content, leading to confusion among both faculty and students.

### **Limitations**

The findings of the current may be limited by the fact that six of the eight universities studied were represented by a single interview participant who shared their own personal experiences and perspectives. In addition, interview participants were largely international faculty members. While the voices of administrators and Japanese faculty members were not entirely absent from the findings one important group of stakeholders, students, is not included here at all. Thus, the findings do not necessarily represent the range of experiences surrounding the implementation of EMI and may lack the multiple perspectives needed to “create a portrait of complicated processes” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.5). Also, all of the participants in this study were EMI stakeholders who were invested in the success of the program. The perspectives of those opposed to or questioning EMI were presented only indirectly. One final limitation is connected to the ethnicity of the participants, the bulk of whom are not Japanese. As discussed above, foreign teachers may have issues of status and full participation in the faculty which may limit, or at least colour, their understanding of the issues raised in this study.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This study explored factors influencing the development of undergraduate EMI programs in Japan. It was initially assumed that some factors would facilitate and others would hinder development. However, from the findings described above, it seems that the same factor may facilitate EMI in some contexts but hinder in others. In some contexts for instance, stakeholders'

status in the university community is the main stumbling block, in others it is the key to a successful program. In some contexts, a slow pace of development was a key factor in success, while in other contexts, slow administrative changes stood in the way of EMI developments. The same can be said of many of the factors identified here.

The factors identified above can be categorized in two broad groups, with admittedly a great deal of overlap. Questions of status and position, issues of territoriality, the overall position and financial health of the institution and the value of external validation seem to be related to the decision to implement an EMI program. The initial stages of implementation may be easier and smoother in a university where: EMI stakeholders occupy higher status positions in the university community; the implementation of EMI does not threaten the turf of an established group or powerful individual; there is a genuine need for innovation recognized by administrators and faculty; and the EMI program is compared positively to innovations outside the university.

Once an EMI program is in place however, other factors, including the pace of change, issues connected to staffing, available support structures and communication issues, may become more dominant in the development of EMI programs. EMI programs may develop more smoothly and effectively if program stakeholders start small and slowly expand the program, recruit qualified faculty of sufficient status, provide support and benchmarks to students entering the EMI program and encourage communication among EMI stakeholders.

Looking at these factors together, a set of questions for EMI program planners can be developed. The answers to these questions may necessarily be context specific; so there may

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Checklist of Questions for Consideration in<br/>EMI Program Planning and Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Who are the key stakeholders? What are their positions in the university community?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How does the EMI program fit into the university community and the wider curriculum?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Why is the EMI program being implemented?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How quickly can the EMI program be established?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How will administrative structures adapt to deal with EMI?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How will the EMI program gain validity and acceptance in the eyes of the university community and external stakeholders?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Who will teach EMI classes?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What entry benchmarks will be established?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How will communication and coordination be achieved?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How will the relationship between EMI and English-language classes be managed?</li></ul> |
|---|

*Figure 1. A program design checklist for EMI implementation*



not be a single correct answer to any given question. However, by working through the checklist (see Figure 1), EMI stakeholders can see for themselves how the factors identified in this study may play out in their local context. Rather than a set of answers, the aim here is to provide a set of talking points to be addressed in program planning meetings. This can be an initial roadmap for program planning, and perhaps a guide for curriculum reform as well.

- Who are the key stakeholders? What are their positions in the university community?

The status and position of key stakeholders is an important consideration for program implementation. Those in charge of program design and implementation will need to have status in the university community sufficient to allow them a significant voice in decision making. And those teaching the EMI classes will need to have sufficient qualifications, and a position in the university community that allows the EMI program to be seen as valid by both internal and external stakeholders. In particular, decisions need to be made about how language teachers will participate in the EMI program, and what their status might be.

- How does the EMI program fit into the university community and the wider curriculum?

Planning for a new EMI program needs to account for its positioning in the university. Stakeholders will need to be prepared for roadblocks arising from issues of territoriality and turf. Concerns may include: resources being allocated to the EMI program; *good* students being funneled into EMI courses; and greater attention paid to EMI in university marketing strategies. All of these have the potential to alienate colleagues and create friction surrounding the EMI program. Stakeholders may want to create a university wide network of faculty members and administrators affiliated with the EMI program in order to alleviate these issues.

- Why is the EMI program being implemented?

While this may seem like a simple question, it is often anything but. Different stakeholders may have very different views on the question and a shared understanding of the purpose of the program may be difficult to achieve. This has very direct implications for goal setting and program evaluation so stakeholders should try to come to a shared sense of direction early on in program planning.

- How quickly can the EMI program be established?

The pace of implementation is a key issue for consideration. Many universities are feeling pressure to establish EMI programs quickly amid the rising number of competitors and rivals already teaching in EMI. However, a slower, more deliberate and well planned implementation is likely to have greater long term benefits. Especially at larger, more established universities, an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, change may be called for.

- How will administrative structures adapt to deal with EMI?

While developing an EMI program may be primarily a pedagogical or curricular challenge, it is not independent from the administrative structures of the university. Attention must be paid to issues including student recruitment procedures and schedules, and promotional and marketing pathways. EMI stakeholders also need to be aware of how credits earned in these courses will apply to the students' wider university program.

- How will the EMI program gain validity and acceptance in the eyes of the university community and external stakeholders?

While EMI programs are growing in scope and number, it is still not universally accepted that EMI is pedagogically appropriate for higher education in Japan. EMI stakeholders must consider how the program will earn the acceptance of the university community and external stakeholders, including high school teachers, potential students and their parents, and others. Program stakeholders will have to consider what sources of internal and external validation are available.

- Who will teach EMI classes?

This is a serious, if somewhat obvious question; however, not all of the implications of this choice may be readily transparent. If existing content specialist faculty members are recruited for EMI courses serious questions of their qualifications, professional development for them, their workloads, and their incentives arise. If new faculty are to be hired, the questions of whether they will be full or part-time, and permanent or temporary need to be addressed. In particular, if the EMI program is to be staffed with part-time faculty, their status and voice within the university community becomes a concern. And if the faculty are to be temporary, or on term-limited contracts, the program's institutional memory may be compromised. Also, if language teachers are to be asked to teach EMI classes, their status within the faculty community needs to be considered.

- What entry benchmarks will be established?

Program stakeholders need to consider how the language proficiency of incoming students can be assured. For students entering an EMI program directly from secondary school, an external test such as TOEFL or IELTS may provide an appropriate benchmark. Or, the university may establish an in-house testing system. For students joining EMI courses from within the university, completion of a preparatory English for Academic Purposes course may be a prudent requirement. However, it seems that, at present, few universities in Japan have established clear language proficiency benchmarks or language preparation courses for their EMI programs.

- How will communication and coordination be achieved?

Communication and coordination among faculty members can be problematic at the best of times but it becomes especially challenging when EMI programs recruit faculty from different departments or from outside the university. Communication and coordination strategies that work for the EMI program's local context will need to be explored.

- How will the relationship between EMI and English-language classes be managed?

Given the language-proficiency challenges faced by students in EMI courses, a close coordination between EMI classes and language classes, and clear communication between EMI teachers and language teachers, seems to be called for. However, it seems that in many EMI programs in Japan, this is not happening. EMI program stakeholders may want to explore options for greater opportunities for the two groups to work together to meet the needs of the students.

Looking to the future, these factors and questions will be explored in a follow up case study of EMI programs in Japan. Looking at universities with newly-implemented and well-established EMI programs will provide insight into how these, and potentially other, as yet unidentified, factors play out across the implementation and development of undergraduate EMI programs in Japan.

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## Opening up Dialogic Spaces: Rethinking the Prescriptive Paragraph Structure in L2 Writing Pedagogy

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### Abstract

Effective argumentation requires not only the presentation and demonstration of propositional information, but also the ability to open up dialogic spaces with an audience, guiding the reader, meeting their expectations of how a text will be organised, and acknowledging their views. Oversimplification in the teaching of paragraph structure with a focus on support for, rather than development of, a controlling idea can sometimes elide these interpersonal elements of writing instruction. This paper explores the impact of teaching a prescriptive paragraph structural model on L2 undergraduate writers' successful argumentation. Identified problems leading to an unsuccessful development of argument were grouped into three main areas: 1) failure to justify support in relation to claim; 2) weak internal argument; 3) lack of criticality/analysis and these were then analysed applying Hyland's (2005a) interpersonal metadiscourse model. Using a small corpus of 22 paragraphs, the findings show that following a 'topic-sentence + supporting sentences' instructional model led to primary focus being placed on propositional content with subsequent reduced rhetorical consciousness and metadiscoursal awareness. Although limited by the size of the study, I suggest that these findings point to the need to re-evaluate and advance the teaching of paragraph structure to meet the demands of more complex writing required in undergraduate study and to consider the value in encouraging the understanding of metadiscoursal use in our L2 writing classrooms.

**Keywords:** Argumentation, metadiscourse, paragraph writing, L2 academic writing

### Introduction

Argumentation in academic written texts is a construct that entails establishment of position, organisational structure, and rhetorical choices. These work together to maintain a dialogic interaction with academic audiences that is foregrounded by the critical thinking and reading necessary for the 'transformation' (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) of content knowledge into writing. Effective argumentation requires an awareness of audience and reader-friendliness on

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the part of the writer if this interaction is to be realised, together with an understanding of the need to *both* demonstrate content knowledge *and* argue well. Student writers are expected to be proficient in critical thinking and developing an argument, but an emphasis on subject knowledge or propositional content means that often they are not provided with the strategies and skills they need to achieve this (Andrews, 2010), or with instruction on how to develop their skills in the context of their discipline.

For second language writers, simplified types of argument development taught and practised in previous English entry exam or EAP classes can encourage a view of argumentative essay structure as ‘one size fits all’ (Bacha, 2010), and a focus on product that fails to provide strategies for managing the more complex skills required at university when writing from sources (Dovey, 2010). A focus on *support for* rather than *development of* the main argument in classroom pedagogy can lead to essay writing that lacks criticality and analysis (Wingate, 2012), with oversimplification in the teaching of paragraph structure disguising the importance of the interpersonal or metadiscoursal elements of writing (Hyland, 2005a) in fully progressing and developing an idea.

The topic sentence + supporting sentences prescriptive model is commonly replicated in EAP writing textbooks and will be familiar to many EAP classroom teachers in the teaching of paragraph writing. However, whilst this exemplifies the basic elements of a well-structured paragraph in an easily understood form, this paper argues that it fails to adequately make transparent the linguistic resources that are needed for the writer to progress and develop an argument. A socio-constructionist perspective argues that in a successful academic text, writers make use of language to “acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations... [rather than] simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality” (Hyland, 2004b, p. 5). Without the use of linguistic resources to express this interpersonal relationship between reader and writer, the writer’s thinking fails to be transparent, and as a consequence leaves the reader unable to ‘*cohere*’ (Bublitz, 1999) the intended argumentation. As Hyland (2004b) posits “put succinctly, every successful text must display the writer’s awareness of both its readers and its consequences” (p.5). Metadiscourse is the concept used to refer to various non-propositional elements or markers that function to support text organisation, establish relations between reader and writer, and realise the attitudes of a writer towards text or reader.

Previous studies of metadiscourse use have mainly researched larger corpora exploring, for example, the frequency (e.g. Lei, 2012; Shaw, 2009), the misuse (Crewe, 1990; Field, 1994; Field & Yip, 1992; Flowerdew, 1998), or particular functions (Alonso Belmonte & McCabe, 1998; Green, Christopher, & Mei, 2000; Groom, 2000a; Hyland, 2000; Jones, 2010; Petric,

2007) of metadiscoursal devices. Noble's (2010) study, in contrast to these, advocates smaller 'local' classroom-based corpus research as having particular value to academic writing pedagogy. Rather than enable generalisations, findings from such local corpora, she suggests, can provide examples which can be used to inform future pedagogy. Noble advocates the creation of a learner corpus as a starting point from which to improve students' academic argumentation as well as a resource for relevant teaching examples.

This study is motivated by my own experiences teaching L2 university student writers and a desire to understand the difficulties these students had in successfully developing an argument at the level of paragraph, despite adherence to the aforementioned prescriptive framework. This small-scale exploratory study shares examples from paragraphs of essays written by L2 undergraduate business students, presented here to enable examination of problems with argumentation evidenced in students' writing. In the first section of this paper, the relationship between argumentation and metadiscourse is considered and Hyland's (2005) conceptual model (see also Hyland and Tse (2004)), used to underpin analysis, is discussed. In the second section, examples from the corpus are presented and evaluated to suggest how and why a breakdown in argumentation has occurred with reference to the linguistic resources that explicitly realise interpersonal or metadiscoursal meanings, and the potential influence of a prescriptive paragraph pedagogy on this. Specifically these problems were:

- failure to justify support –evidenced in a lack of warrant to justify argument from grounds to claim;
- weak internal argument – evidenced in the use of transitions to order external propositional material rather than develop an internal argument;
- lack of criticality/analysis – overreliance on attribution resulting in writing that is descriptive rather than analytical.

In the final section of the paper, implications for learning and teaching are discussed and some practical pedagogical outcomes suggested.

### *Argumentation and metadiscourse*

Evidencing critical thinking is a key requirement of successful university essays. Several studies of the realisation of argumentation in student writing have taken approaches based on Toulmin's (1958/2003) three part model – grounds, claims, warrants (Bacha, 2010; Stapleton & Wu, 2015). Although criticised by some researchers as an inappropriate pedagogical framework in the construction of argument at the macro-level (Bruce, 2016; Riddle, 2000; Wingate, 2012), Toulmin's model has been suggested as having merit in the examination of single claims (Wingate, 2012). Andrews (2000) suggests that much of the misapplication of Toulmin's

argumentation model results from the misunderstanding of its purpose which is to describe a process (development of argument) rather than product (the argument itself), and that instead a focus on the linking of the propositions in the model (grounds, claim, warrant) and how these are signalled to the reader is the key to understanding how successful argumentation can be achieved in writing.

There has been much recent theoretical and empirical interest in the interactive and rhetorical characteristics of academic writing, examining how writers use language to both position themselves and to acknowledge and negotiate social relations with their reader (e.g., Adel & Mauranen, 2010; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland & Sancho Guinda, 2012; Hyland & Tse, 2004). The ability to interact in this way is now considered a critical element of writing successfully in an academic context (Hyland, 2004a). Metadiscourse (meta-text or text reflexivity) is the realisation of these interactions between writer and reader. Articulated through linguistic devices or metadiscourse markers which explicitly “organise a discourse or the writer’s stance towards either its content or the reader” (Hyland, 2005a, p. 4), metadiscourse relates text to context by directing readers to retrieve the preferred organisation, connections and interpretations of the writer. Metadiscoursal, or non-propositional elements of a text can function to both guide the reader through the internal argument of the text, as for example, with transitions expressing logical development, contrast, causality or additional information (e.g. then; however; therefore; additionally), or endophoric references (e.g. the aforementioned; see Section 2), and to involve the reader in the text, as in the use of hedging or attitude markers. (See Table 1 for categories and examples of metadiscourse markers from Hyland’s (2005a) model).

Interactivity and dialogical awareness are also key features of successful argumentation. These require an understanding of how arguments are operationalised, and the way in which knowledge is validated by particular audiences. The content of students’ writing – the propositional material – needs to be understood not only as individual ideas and information, but also in terms of the relationship between those ideas and how the surrounding text unfolds and develops. The writer needs to “take responsibility for the coherence and clarity of their writing” (Hyland, 2009, p. 6), to make their ‘thinking’ or line of reasoning transparent for the reader, so that in turn, the reader is able to retrieve, recreate and ‘cohere’ the writer’s intended development of argument. This collaboration requires audience-sensitivity or reader-friendliness, awareness of the metadiscoursal resources available to achieve this and an understanding of the rhetorical structures to realise this. These are aspects of academic writing that novice writers, and particularly L2 student writers can often struggle with (Bitchener &

Basturken, 2006; Chang & Schleppegrell, 2012; Chen, 2010; Wu, 2006).

Metadiscourse has informed many textual analysis studies of academic L2 student writing. These studies have shown metadiscourse markers to be an essential feature of argumentative and persuasive writing (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Hyland, 1998). Hyland (2004a) (see also Hyland and Tse (2004)) compared the use of metadiscourse markers in dissertations written by L2 masters and doctoral students, finding that metadiscoursal devices were more often used by the latter group, suggesting development and awareness with experience. Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) in their study of metadiscoursal devices used in L2 student writing found that higher scoring essays generally demonstrated more frequent (in all categories except for connectives), accurate and diverse use. Similarly, Noble (2010) in her small classroom-based corpus research found that higher scoring essays used a much greater range and higher frequency of the metadiscoursal markers of logical connectors (e.g. therefore; moreover; however), frame markers (e.g. firstly; finally), code glosses (e.g. in other words; i.e.) and self-mention (e.g. my; we) than lower scoring essays. Additionally this study found a marked difference in the way metadiscoursal markers were used in developing argument with analysis revealing that marker usage in lower scoring essays tended to result in a more narrative-like than analytical-like structuring.

In many models of metadiscourse, a distinction is made between categories of *textual* metadiscourse signalling the organisation of text, and *interpersonal* metadiscourse signalling the stance of the writer in relation to the reader and to the content. Hyland (2005a) (see also Hyland and Tse (2004)) however, takes an interactive perspective that views *all* categories of metadiscourse as “a coherent set of interpersonal resources used to organise a discourse or the writer’s stance towards either its content or the reader” (p.109). This interpersonal model, which informs this current study of L2 student paragraph writing, is based on a functional approach in which metadiscourse is realised in the ways the writer refers to the reader, the text or themselves. The model draws on three principles which are that: (1) metadiscourse is distinct from propositional aspects of discourse; (2) metadiscourse is realised through aspects of text which embody writer-reader interactions; and (3) metadiscourse is realised only in relations which are internal to the discourse.

Although a distinction is made here between propositional material and metadiscourse, it is important to note that both elements are realised together in texts and as such are crucial to the reader’s ability to ‘cohere’. Metadiscourse does not “simply support propositional content: it is the means by which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible and persuasive to a particular discourse [...] it is a part of the message, not an entirely different one” (Hyland, 2005a,

p. 39). Previous categorisations that position textual metadiscourse as being distinct from interpersonal metadiscourse are problematic, Hyland and Tse (2004) suggest, and instead they argue that textual metadiscourse is actually another feature of the interpersonal aspects of the text. For example, transitions or other conjunctive markers can be oriented towards *either* ideational meanings – organising texts as propositions by relating statements about the world - *or* interpersonal/interactional meanings – as metadiscourse by relating statements to the readers.

An important characterisation of interaction relevant to this interpersonal model is the distinction between two main types of interaction – *interactive* and *interactional* - acknowledging the contextual specificity of metadiscourse (G. Thompson, 2001). The categories and functions of this model are illustrated in Table 1. Interactive resources influence the reader-friendliness of the text by managing the information flow, anticipating readers’ needs and expectations, and their likely reactions, whereas interactional resources are more personal and represent the writer’s “overt performance in the text” (Hyland, 2005a, p. 44).

**Table 1**

*An interpersonal model of metadiscourse*

| <b>Category</b>      | <b>Function</b>                                  | <b>Examples</b>                          |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Interactive</b>   | <b>Help to guide the reader through the text</b> | <b>Resources</b>                         |
| Transitions          | Express relations between main clauses           | In addition; but;<br>thus; and           |
| Frame markers        | Refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages     | Finally; to conclude;<br>my purpose is   |
| Endophoric markers   | Refer to information in other parts of the text  | Noted above; see<br>Fig; in section 2    |
| Evidentials          | Refer to information from other texts            | According to X; Z<br>states              |
| Code glosses         | Elaborate propositional meanings                 | Namely; e.g.; such<br>as; in other words |
| <b>Interactional</b> | <b>Involve the reader in the text</b>            | <b>Resources</b>                         |
| Hedges               | Withhold commitment and open dialogue            | Might; perhaps;<br>possible; about       |
| Boosters             | Emphasize certainty or close dialogue            | In fact; definitely; it<br>is clear that |

|                    |   |                                      |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Attitude markers   | Express writer's attitude to proposition  | Unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly |
| Self-mention       | Explicit reference to author(s)           | I; we; my; me; our                   |
| Engagement markers | Explicitly build relationship with reader | Consider; note; you can see that     |

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*Note.* From Hyland (2005a, p. 49)

In accepting that textual items can realise either propositional or interpersonal functions depending on the context, a means to distinguish between their primary function is needed. Hyland (2005a) (see also Hyland and Tse (2004)), therefore, differentiates between their function to either organise discourse as *argument* (internal) or to represent *experiences* as a series of events (external) (Martin, 1992). In the case of, for example, transitions, which are central to academic writing in assisting the reader to recover how the writer has linked an argument, these must mark transitions *in the argument* rather than linking *events in the world* beyond the text to qualify as metadiscourse. To some degree this reflects Halliday and Hasan's (1989) distinction between the 'text internal' and 'text external' functions of items.

### *Researching argumentation and metadiscourse*

An awareness of the role of metadiscourse in developing an argument seems to be a key element, therefore, in improving L2 academic writing. Previous textual analysis studies have substantially focused on the development of argument across the whole essay or specific linguistic or rhetorical devices that contribute to it. Wingate (2012) has argued that many student problems with essay writing derive from a lack of understanding of the need to develop a main argument and from an inability to adjust prior learning of formal essay writing schemata. Andrews et al. (2006), in their study of argumentative skills in first year undergraduate writing found that students' previous experiences of essay writing were often predicated on simplified types of argument structures that did not prepare students adequately for these more complex skills of argumentation required at university, often resulting in purely descriptive rather than analytical development of ideas. Lack of criticality or analysis is a common criticism of student writing, evidenced in either a failure to integrate evidence successfully into an argument, or as Riddle (2000) found, in a failure to understand the importance of providing justification to progress the argument from evidence or grounds to claim.

The signalling of relations between propositions of critical statements with transitions or logical connectives has also been the subject of previous research examining the realisation of

argumentation in student writing. Studies have explored students' misuse, underuse and overuse of transitions (Crewe, 1990; Field & Yip, 1992; Flowerdew, 1998; Lei, 2012; Shaw, 2009), their explicit use (Hyland, 2000; McNamara, Crossley, & McCarthy, 2010), and frequency of use as interactive metadiscourse markers (Hyland & Tse, 2004) expressing relations between main clauses. Typically students are familiar with the valuable role transitions play as "explicit reading cues" (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 106), but as Basturkmen and von Randow's (2014) study found, lower scoring writers did not necessarily select appropriate transitions nor integrate them well when synthesizing ideas. In EAP classrooms transition signals are typically categorized and taught functionally (Crewe, 1990), which while pedagogically convenient, has been shown to lead to a use of transitions as 'surface-fillers' (Crewe, 1990) neglecting their function in guiding the reader through the logic of the developing argument.

Although textual analysis of attribution realised in citation practices and its role in argumentation has generally focused on expert texts as models (Hyland, 1999, 2005b; Thompson & Ye, 1991), more recent studies have begun to show interest in student writing. Hyland (2012) has suggested that a focus on features in EAP classes which help students to express experiential and logical meaning can at the same time preclude a focus on the interpersonal aspects of language, so that academic writing, rather than engaging and interacting with an audience, is perceived as being impersonal and centred on simply the presentation of facts. This can result in the presentation and attribution of these facts as evidence to support a claim being seen as the sole purpose of academic writing. Borg (2000), in a study comparing citation practices of undergraduate and postgraduate writers, found that although both L1 and L2 students had difficulties integrating sources into their written arguments, L2 writers were less competent at establishing textual voice. The establishment of 'stance' through the use of metadiscoursal markers as "self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 37) has been shown to be an essential element in construction of argument and critical thinking (Andrews, 2000; Nesi & Gardner, 2012); Bruce's (2016) study of the construction of critical stance in university essays in English literature and sociology evidences how a range of interpropositional relations used together with metadiscourse devices crucially served to develop argument across these texts.

Current EAP textbooks (and also English composition textbooks in general) tend to advocate prescriptive structural models for the teaching of paragraph writing (Duncan, 2007) which can also serve to decontextualize the paragraph from its function in the overall coherence of a text. The merits or otherwise of such prescriptive structural theory as the five paragraph essay or the explicit first position topic sentence have been debated and discussed in previous studies (e.g.

Rico, 1988; Wesley, 2000). However, Duncan (2007) suggests that it is not the prescriptive structure in itself that is problematic, but instead it is that this structure is “often presented and understood as an end unto itself, instead of as a stepping stone” (p.471). Thus without expansion, the topic sentence + supporting sentences structural framework, whilst helpful in ‘laying the groundwork’ for a well-constructed paragraph, can also function to limit students’ ability to see how argumentation should be realised in the more complex academic writing expected of them in their degree programs and restrict their writing to a presentation of propositional material in support of a claim.

### **The current study**

In this current study, the aforementioned interpersonal metadiscourse model developed by Hyland (2005a) (see also Hyland and Tse (2004)) was employed in an analysis of a small corpus of paragraphs written by L2 students on a credit-bearing first year, first semester undergraduate course. This was used to explore how the pedagogical instruction of a prescriptive paragraph structure typical in EAP classrooms might have impacted the metadiscoursal awareness and the subsequent reader-friendliness of this small sample. In this regard, the aim of the study, therefore, is not one of generalisation regarding L2 student writers nor of one specific nationality of student writer, but rather to highlight the potential for re-evaluating and exploring further the current teaching of paragraph structure.

### *Data*

The primary data for this study were a corpus of 22 paragraphs taken from draft essays which were written by undergraduate students enrolled in a first year Language and Communication for Business course at an Australian university - a full credited course designed to improve international students’ language and academic literacy skills in a discipline-specific context. The cohort of this course consisted of over 400 students. Reflective of the make-up of the international student body in this university’s Business faculty, this cohort was multi-culturally diverse, although the majority of the students came from China. Each essay responded to a task which asked students to analyse and evaluate the leadership style of a business leader with reference to a specified theory. The assignment task required students to complete a draft essay on which they received feedback before submitting their final essay at the end of the semester. Pedagogical instruction in regards to paragraph structure followed the generic prescriptive framework as detailed above; for most students this reinforced prior EAP teaching.



### *Method*

Fifty-four draft essays were initially randomly selected from the course's electronic assignment submission database (approximately three draft essays from each of the eighteen tutorial classes run over the particular semester that had been facilitated by nine teachers). The large number of classes required to facilitate this course has meant that the curriculum, materials and delivery is highly standardised and feedback and grading moderated. Submissions on the database were identified numerically and therefore nationalities and background experiences regarding previous English writing instruction were not identifiable. Initially, draft essays that were incomplete or that had extensive sentence-level grammar and/or vocabulary errors, such that they 'blurred' intended meaning, were removed from the corpus. Subsequently, one paragraph from the same section in each essay was identified. Paragraphs that did not have an initial topic sentence were also removed from the corpus to allow for exploration of how and why, even with an apparent 'topic sentence, supporting sentences' paragraph structure, the development of argument was unsuccessful. After these exclusions, a smaller corpus of 36 paragraphs was arrived at.

These paragraphs were then analysed by the researcher as sole rater to identify problems that the students had had in achieving successful development of an argument. Firstly, teachers' electronic margin and summative comments were interrogated with the aid of the software NVivo 10 for those that specifically pointed to difficulties in argumentation, for example:

*"You have used the wrong linking word here."*

*"More cohesive devices needed"*

*"You need to develop this idea and tell me why or how this is significant"*

Given that in most cases, the feedback comments were aligned with the task's four discrete marking criteria: task fulfilment, coherence and cohesion, grammar, and vocabulary, each of which carried equal weighting on the marking rubric, less explicit problems related to argumentation were often not commented on directly in the teachers' feedback. Therefore, additional textual analysis was used by the researcher to refine the identification of paragraphs that evidenced problems with development of argument, resulting in a final corpus of 22 essay paragraphs (comprising a total of 4,429 words, with an average paragraph length of approximately 200 words).

Identified problems leading to an unsuccessful development of argument were then grouped into three main areas: 1) failure to justify support in relation to claim; 2) weak internal argument; 3) lack of criticality/analysis. The following section presents selected examples from this small corpus to illustrate each of these areas of difficulty. Examples are presented verbatim with no corrections made.

## Findings and discussion

### *Failure to justify support*

Toulmin's (1958/2003) theory evidences three fundamental parts to an argument: the claim (or proposition) based on grounds (or evidence) supported by a warrant (or justification). Previous studies (Bloor & Bloor, 2004; Wingate, 2012) have shown that despite a declarative knowledge of these components of an argument, students can often lack the procedural knowledge to actually put this into practice, resulting in logical reasoning that may be weak (Riddle, 2000; Stapleton & Wu, 2015). Textual analysis of the corpus revealed that one of the common reasons for a breakdown in the line of reasoning was the writer's failure to provide a justification in relation to the claim made, leaving the reader to 'fill in the gaps' and guess at the implication of the evidence or its connection to the paragraph's controlling idea.

In all the following examples, the writer makes a claim expressed as the controlling idea of the paragraph's topic sentence. In Example 2, this claim is further expanded on providing more details of how this leadership style is characterised; in the other two examples the writers move straight into presenting propositional content as evidence to support their claim. However, in all three examples, the justification or warrant, that would enable the reader to connect the supporting evidence to the claim, and thus revealing the writer's line of reasoning, is missing. In the case of Example 3, the supporting information seems to be irrelevant and fails to even support the initial position of the controlling idea. This failure to present a logical justification for the paragraph's controlling idea has also been shown to be an aspect of unsuccessful development of argument found in other studies (Andrews, 2009; Bacha, 2010; Mitchell & Riddle, 2000); indeed Riddle (2000) found that often underlying warrants or justifications are omitted by students assuming these to be known background knowledge and therefore unnecessary for the reader.

#### Example 1: Text 5

*As CEO of Burberry, Ahrendts **acts the Creator role successfully**. As we know, several decades ago, she was a little girl who liked fashion ... After graduating from university, she quickly found a job in several famous fashion companies ... Also these working experiences helped a lot and she was recommended to Burberry ... In addition, her bold and wise decision making helped to reverse the embarrassing situation of the company ... And at the same time she created a higher efficiency for the company and made the company get more profits.*

#### Example 2: Text 13

***Wei Jianjun the CEO of Great Wall Motors, could also be regarded as a Creator. Creators normally have high level of both assertiveness and emotional responsiveness. They are often enthusiastic and persuasive that can become strong motivation force** (Darling & Leffel, 2010). Wei Jianjun was able to create different types of automobiles such as Sedans, SUVs and Pickup*

*Trucks ... Also, Great Wall had foreign standards when it comes to safety and emissions; they also build their own crash-test track whereas the other automakers had to send their vehicles overseas.*

#### Example 3: Text 11

*Except Steve Ballmer is a director, **he is a creator too**. He worked 13 years in Microsoft. Steve Ballmer made every decision and it seems important departments or teams never get full plan ... Actually, these bring really good profit for Microsoft, but Steve Ballmer made some decisions so that the company experienced a failure many times and missed opportunities many times too. And 13 years ago was Microsoft had as high as 70% market share of IE browser but this was lost to the Firefox and Chrome .... Also he used too long time to achieve cross-platform collaboration within the company.*

As illustrated by these examples, support for the claim, in the form of examples or evidence, is perceived to be the main ‘content’ of the paragraph, and development as the connections between and within these ‘supporting’ sentences rather than as the progression of an overarching and logical line of reasoning. In Example 1, the writer provides a chronological list of statements about what Ahrendts *did*, but as readers we are left to make our own guesses as to *how* these events or actions led the writer to conclude that Ahrendts’ leadership style was one of Creator. Similarly, in Example 2, although lexically in the first supporting sentence the writer connects the controlling idea of Wei Jianjun as having Creator leadership style with his ability to “...create different types of automobiles”, for the subsequent evidence – that “*Great Wall had foreign standards*” and “*that they built their own crash test track*” again the reader is left to fill in the gaps, or in other words, to guess at *how* these facts support the controlling idea. Here then adherence to a ‘topic sentence, supporting sentence’ organisational structure has failed to realise the intended response from the reader and results in feedback comments that indicate a lack of logical progression.

A suggested revision to make the interpropositional relations clearer in Example 2 might be:

*Wei Jianjun the CEO of Great Wall Motors, could also be regarded as a Creator. Creators normally have high level of both assertiveness and emotional responsiveness. They are often enthusiastic and persuasive that can become strong motivation force (Darling & Leffel, 2010). **Evidence of this leader’s drive and persuasiveness can be seen in some of the decisions Wei Jianjun took. Realising the potential of a particular market, Wei Jianjun was able to create different types of automobiles such as Sedans, SUVs and Pickup Trucks .... This led to .... Also, unlike their competitors, Wei Jianjun instituted foreign standards at Great Wall when it came to safety and emissions; they also built their own crash-test track whereas the other automakers had to send their vehicles overseas. This creative vision meant that ...***

This simplified two part structuring of an argument also evidences a lack of awareness of the importance of writer-reader interaction in argumentation. What is missing is not explicit metadiscourse as *observable* textual devices representing the writer’s awareness of audience in

the discourse (Hyland, 2005a), but explanations that make the line of reasoning clear for the reader. That these explanations are missing is illustrative of a lack of audience sensitivity and understanding of the critical importance of this interpersonal element in the development of a line of argument. Primacy has instead been placed on the ideational or propositional content, the evidence and examples, as if they in themselves are justification for the claim made. Without these explanations of the implications of the evidence in relation to the controlling idea, however, the reader is excluded from the writer's thinking and thus fails to retrieve the intended interpropositional relations which progress the argument. This creates an additional processing load for the reader who is left with many unanswered questions.

### *Weak internal argument*

Transitions or logical connectives play a pivotal role in development of a controlling idea or the *internal* argument in a paragraph and in realising writer-reader interaction that is necessary to ensure successful argumentation. Perhaps the most indicative example of the failure to distinguish between support and development, however, was in the overuse, misuse and underuse of transitions in the corpus paragraphs.

Transitions or logical connectives are commonly used in student writing as rhetorical devices to progress ideas (Crewe, 1990; Field, 1994; Jones, 2010). Usually learnt as lists of words according to function, these connectives (co-ordinating conjunctions such as 'and', 'or', 'so'; subordinating conjunctions such as 'because', 'although'; conjunctive adjuncts such as 'moreover', 'in addition', 'however') are typically taught with oversimplified definitions (Crewe, 1990) and are generally placed by novice writers at the beginning of the sentence (Jones, 2010), thus requiring little or no grammatical amendments to the structure. Where problems arose in the use of these logical connectives in the corpus, they were generally found to be with misuse, or underuse/overuse, all long-recognised problems in L2 novice writing (Crewe, 1990; Field & Yip, 1992; Flowerdew, 1998). Five cases of inappropriate or illogical connectives (misuse) were found in the corpus, and two paragraphs evidenced an underuse. In Example 5, which uses no logical connectives and thus reads like a bullet point list, the reader is left to guess at any possible relations between ideas in these sentences and thus the organisational structure of the paragraph.

### Example 5: Text 8 (underuse)

*Steve Ballmer is a Creator type of leader. Microsoft as the world largest computer software corporation needs to avoid competition from their competitors Google, Apple and IBM. [Therefore????/However???? ...] Steve Ballmer has his own thoughts "a great team, great*

*energy and great hard work will never make up for a bad idea” (Ballmer, 2008). [For example?? ...] Microsoft commenced their renovation, in 2009, Steve Jobs introduced Apple's iPad.*

Although, as has been evidenced in previous studies, less use of explicit transitional markers does not necessarily lead to a lack of coherence (Basturken & von Randow, 2014) or reduced writing quality (Hyland, 2000; McNamara et al., 2010), in Example 5, the ability of the reader to ‘connect’ the evidence with the central argument that ‘Steve Ballmer is a Creator type of leader evidenced by his innovativeness’ is limited by the lack of any such signposts. Of course, transitions are not the only issue with this paragraph, and simply adding them in as “surface-level fillers” (Crewe, 1990, p. 321) would not be the solution to the very obvious problems with coherence here. Overall, however, a complete lack of explicit logical connectives, such as in Example 5, was less common with only two paragraphs from the corpus being written in this way.

Overuse of certain connectives, as in Example 6, has been found to be common in L2 academic writing (Granger & Tyson, 1996; Shaw, 2009), and despite this being a rather extreme example of overuse, it does illustrate not only the preference for repeated use of additive functioning transitions in the corpus, but also the strong preference found with many novice L2 writers to place these logical connectives at the beginning of the sentence.

Example 6: Text 2 (overuse)

*Wei Jianjun's other leadership is an analyzer style. Based on leadership style, analyzer could be interpreted as people of a company who do the analysis. According to Bloomberg (2013) Wei went abroad, **and** he found the pickup is very popular in the United States, Europe, Southeast Asia and other countries. **In addition** the pickup models are quite fashionable and generous. **And also**, some of the big Chinese domestic enterprises focused on the saloon car, **and** they neglected the market for pickup truck. **Moreover**, Wei led their team to make a very detailed investigation of the pickup truck market. **And** he compared his firm and other competitor such as resources, mechanism, quality, promotion and so on. **In addition**, they got the results. **Furthermore**, in 1996, the Great Wall launched its first pickup truck (Bloomberg, 2013).*

Green et al. (2000) have shown that placing logical connectives in this way to introduce new information can often use up the ‘thematic potential’ (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) of the clause it precedes, taking over the position of a more expected element of information structure. In the case of Example 6, because there is no development of new information from the preceding Rheme, but rather the presentation of yet more new propositional content, these markers appear to function adequately to guide the reader through an *external* ‘list’ of actions and events which the writer believes support the controlling idea of the paragraph. However, despite being

cohesive, these devices do not contribute to coherence in terms of achieving the goal of developing the argument (rather than just supporting it), and yet again the reader is unable to retrieve the *internal* argument of the text.

Although the intention of this study was not to investigate the frequency of the use of transitions, it is interesting to note, that even though this was a small corpus, findings in the use of additives as transition markers concurred with those of previous much larger studies (Lei, 2012; Noble, 2010; Shaw, 2009). Table 2 shows the number of transitions used to signal semantic relations across the corpus (4,429 words; av/para 200 words) with transitions signalling addition being used more than other connectives. Following Hyland's (2005a) metadiscoursal model, frame markers used to sequence and order text (e.g., *then*, *next*) are also included in the table as a metadiscoursal device separate from transitions. This is because in almost all cases these were used in the corpus as a resource with the function of adding information.

**Table 2**

*Total number of transitions and frame markers*

| Relation/Resource | Total | Examples from the data  |
|-------------------|-------|---|
| Addition          | 43    | <i><b>In addition [ADDITION]</b>, Vu's company has been named the "Starbucks of Vietnam" and <b>then [FRAME MARKER]</b> Vu design something new that Starbucks or most of the other coffee shop does not have. <b>In contrast [COMPARISON]</b>, Vu has added the Vietnam style in which is entertainment: ... . <b>So [CONSEQUENCE]</b> Vu is also being a successful Director of the business since he has applied the effective skill of Director leadership styles.(Text 15)</i> |
| Frame markers     | 12    |   |
| Comparison        | 4     |   |
| Consequence       | 5     |   |
|                   | 64    |   |

Prior studies have suggested that this preference for an overuse of connectors in L2 writing can in part be attributed to previous English language instruction where explicit 'surface' cohesive devices are perceived as characterising 'good' essay writing (Field, 1994; Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995) and classroom or textbook instruction has typically oversimplified definitions of these logical connectives (Crewe, 1990; Granger & Tyson, 1996). Certainly, a preference for explicit connectors, especially those of addition was clear in this corpus. What is of particular interest to this study, however, lies not so much in the evidence of the more frequent use of additive connectors, but in the role these play in both the development of the *internal* argument

of the paragraph and in the necessary writer-reader interaction. By analysing the students' use of these transitions and frame markers as 'interactive metadiscoursal markers', it is clear that rather than developing the argument internal to the discourse, their primary role was to signal the sequencing of external events as illustrated in the following example.

#### Example 7 (Text 5)

*As CEO of Burberry, Ahrendts acts the Creator role successfully. As we know, several decades ago, she was a little girl who liked fashion ... **After** graduating from university, she quickly found a job in several famous fashion companies ... **Also** these working experiences helped a lot and she was recommended to Burberry ... **In addition**, her bold and wise decision making helped to reverse the embarrassing situation of the company ... **And** at the same time she created a higher efficiency for the company and made the company get more profits.*

Table 3 shows a comparison of the roles performed in the discourse using Martin and Rose's (2005) summaries of the differences between the internal and external roles of these devices. Examples to illustrate this from the data are also provided.

**Table 3**

*Internal and external roles of transitions and frame markers in the corpus*

| Relation | External          | (n) | Internal         | (n) | Examples from the data (External)   | Examples from the data (Internal)   |
|----------|-------------------|-----|------------------|-----|---|---|
| Addition | adding activities | 42  | adding arguments | 1   | <i><b>And also</b>, some of the big Chinese enterprises focused on the saloon car.</i> (Text 2) | <i>These efforts were all indicative key features of his creative leadership style. <b>Moreover</b>, they point to his efficiency during his leadership as CEO of BP.</i> (Text 22) |

|                     |   |    |  |   |   |   |
|---------------------|---|----|--|---|---|---|
| Comparison          | comparing and contrasting, events, things and qualities | 4  | comparing and contrasting arguments and evidence | 0 | <b><i>In contrast to Microsoft, other IT companies showed more reliance in market.</i></b> (Text 3)   | [no examples found in corpus]   |
| Consequence         | explaining why and how events happened                  | 3  | drawing conclusions or countering arguments      | 2 | <i>The Great Wall Automobile was changed into a limited company from the industrial company, <b>so</b> he took 25 percent as single shareholder and Nandayuan Township in Henan province took 65 percent and the enterprise staff took the rest.</i> (Text 1) | <b>Thus</b> his failure seems clearly based on the abandonment of these important markets after taking on the leadership mantle at Microsoft.(Text 4) |
| Time (frame marker) | Ordering events in time                                 | 9  | Ordering arguments in the text                   | 3 | <b><i>First</i></b> he became the largest shareholder and <b><i>then</i></b> he began changing the market focus. (Text 17)  | <b><i>In the first place</i></b> , Steve Ballmer failed to be an analyzer leader. (Text 4)  |
| Total               |   | 58 |  | 6 |   |   |

*Note.* Discourse roles as summarised by Martin and Rose (2005, p. 127)

The focus on propositional information – the evidence and examples that are used to support the argument - is most clearly seen in this extensive use of external transitions which function to sequence an unfolding of real world events rather than the internal argumentation. Thus an



alternative possibility for explaining the frequency of additive discourse markers in novice writers' texts, posited by these findings, is due to this primacy placed on organising propositional or ideational content.

As suggested previously, typical paragraph structural models of 'topic sentence, supporting sentences' can oversimplify the purpose of a paragraph, which is to *develop* a controlling idea or argument, that in turn serves to *develop* the thesis or main argument of the essay. If students are encouraged to find 'evidence and examples' to support their essay thesis, and to then structure content paragraphs simply so that this evidence is presented as the grounds for the claims made, with no consideration given to explaining the reasoning behind these conclusions, then there will be no development of argument. Instead, what results is a 'shopping list' of evidence as illustrated in Example 8, which fails to open up any space for dialogic writer-reader interaction.

#### Example 8 (Text 12)

*In addition to being a connector, Jun Sekine could also be a Director. In Darling and Leffel's (2010) framework, a director knows where they want the organisation to go. Jun Sekine accelerated growth by opening 50% more shops in the next fiscal year compared to 2014 fiscal year. Additionally 40% of Starbucks shops were in the Tokyo region so more shops could be open in other places. So next, Sekine opened many new stores in other places to increase profits and expand the company. These are the actions of a Director leader according to the framework.*

Whilst these transitions function adequately to chronologically order the external events presented as evidence to support the claim, what is missing from this example are the explanations that would serve to demonstrate to the reader *how* this information can lead us to the conclusion that Jun Sekine has a Director style of leadership together with the transitions that advance this argument in the text.

In EAP classrooms, the teaching of transitions is usually done functionally, that is to say by grouping transition signals according to the function they perform. Thus to express addition, students learn adverbs and conjunctions such as *moreover*, *in addition*, *furthermore*, or *and*, for example. However, no distinction is made between their primary function in the discourse as being one of either realising external (propositional) or internal (interpersonal) relations (Hyland, 2005a). It is this *internal* function, however, which realises the connecting steps in an exposition and the organisation of discourse as an argument that is crucial to successful argumentation. This interactive dimension of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005a) serves to help the writer set out their arguments so that the reader will recover the intended line of reasoning and reach similar conclusions. If transitions are used just to realise relations in ideational content, then this developmental process will not be clear to the reader.

The impact this lack of awareness of the polypragmatic function of transitions can have on the reader can be demonstrated by these two further examples from the corpus. In Example 9, the transition ‘moreover’, signals an *internal* conjunction, that is to say, the subsequent clause realises the reader’s expectation that this additive transition will *develop* the writer’s argument through expansion.

Example 9 (Text 22)

*These efforts were all indicative key features of his creative leadership style. **Moreover**, they point to his efficiency during his leadership as CEO of BP.* (Text 22)

In Example 10, however, this expectation of what will follow is not fulfilled. Instead, ‘in addition’ is used to realise external relations, that is to say, the subsequent clause is completely new propositional content, which means the previous argument remains undeveloped. The reader is unable to make sense of or ‘cohere’ (Bublitz, 1999) the text as the coherent relations are ‘misguiding’.

Example 10 (Text 9)

*None of Ballmer’s decisions seem to have provided important departments with a plan for products such as Windows XP, Xbox 360 etc. **In addition**, Microsoft users were reluctant to upgrade their systems* (Ovide, 2013).

*Lack of criticality/analysis*

The impact of the primacy placed on the propositional content in these ‘problem’ paragraphs was also seen in the lack of criticality or analysis evidenced in the students’ writing. The development of an argument or line of reasoning requires the ‘presence’ of a writer’s voice that will articulate the analysis and evaluation of the evidence to provide the necessary warrant or justification for the argument made. Thus, development of this position requires students to balance the use of ‘expert’ sources (Groom, 2000b) through citation, whilst at the same time have a ‘voice’ or ‘stance’ (Street, 2009) realised through the use of *interactional* resources (Hyland, 2005a). As evidenced in the discussions of the first two categories of ‘problems’ with argumentation, the students’ paragraphs comprised mostly of support for, rather than development of, their argument drawn from references to literature.

In Hyland’s (2005a) metadiscourse model, citations are classified as ‘evidentials’ which function to distinguish who is responsible for a position. Hyland advises, however, that while contributing to “a persuasive goal, [this function] needs to be distinguished from the writer’s *stance* towards the view” (p.52), which is categorised as an *interactional* rather than an *interactive* resource. Where provided, citation was used by student writers in the corpus exclusively to attribute information (i.e., with the rhetorical purpose of presenting information).

As evidenced by other studies exploring student use of citation (Alonso Belmonte & McCabe, 1998; Groom, 2000a, 2000b; Hyland, 2000, 2005b; Petric, 2007), attribution is a common rhetorical function and a general characteristic of student writing, because, as Petric (2007) points out, this function is the simplest way for students to demonstrate topic knowledge and familiarity with the literature. However, this overreliance on the voices of cited authors had led to patterns of ‘unaverred’ voice (Groom, 2000b) in the corpus, where writing was simply descriptive, and therefore, rather than advancing and developing an argument, merely listed examples attributed to authors. This again resulted in many paragraphs, similar to Example 11, which, with the exception of possibly the first ‘topic sentence’, consisted completely of attributed sources with little or no analysis leaving no space for dialogic interaction between writer and reader.

#### Example 11 (Text 19)

*During her work as the Finance Minister, Mulyani was a Creator type leader and the initiator of reforms to struggle crony capitalism in Indonesia. **According to Brummer (2011)** the Indonesian people didn't feel like participating in the decision-making process in the country. Mulyani's activities were very decisive and tough and more than 150 personnel, even more were fined in her unrelenting war (**Emmerson, 2010**). Her anti-corruption campaigns made her fight with rich and influential people of her country (**Emmerson, 2010**). Additionally these campaigns were an irritant factor for the elite and with the Mulyani high energy level as a Creator which provides additional intimidation towards people (**Darling & Leffel, 2010**). **According to Emmerson (2010)** it resulted in the fierce campaign against Mulyani and other technocrats in the Government, which led to her resignation.*

This lack of awareness of the relationship between attribution and averral, which Petric (2007) describes as “the basic notions for the organisation of interaction in written text” (p.100), can also lead to a breakdown in the contractual and dialogic relationship between reader and writer. Lee’s (2010) analysis of attribution in undergraduate persuasive essays revealed that higher graded essays successfully balance the ‘voices’ of attribution and averral, opening up these dialogic spaces. In contrast, writers of lower graded essays closed off interaction with the reader through overuse of attribution and an “externally authoritative discourse because they are essentially oriented to ... imposed monologic expressions” (p.200). Chanock (2008) offers an explanation of this with reference to Bakhtin’s monologic/dialogic characterisation of discourse suggesting that students often interpret source material as “single-voiced, authoritative fact” (p.8) rather than recognising discourses as dialogic – “that is, they draw on what others have said, respond to what others are saying, and anticipate what others will say” (p.8). If source material is viewed as monologic by students, Chanock suggests, where fact is fact but how that fact is presented (i.e. the interpretation or implication of it) is not considered, then attribution

which simply acknowledges the source, makes sense for the student.

Recognising this intertextual and dialogic nature of academic writing is, therefore, an important rhetorical function of citation, but one that is not always fully realised in student writing (Chanock, 2008; C. Thompson, 2005). Previous studies have shown that a better understanding of the rhetorical function of citation practices and a greater use of citation for non-attributive functions, demonstrating a stronger textual voice, can contribute to higher grades (Alonso Belmonte & McCabe, 1998; G. Thompson & Ye, 1991). Particularly for second language writers, who can have difficulties in constructing criticality when developing argument (Arsyad, 2000; Chang, 2012; Hirose, 2003; McCulloch, 2012), awareness of citation practice should, therefore, be given more attention in academic writing classrooms, rather than focusing just on the importance of mechanical accuracy.

The patterns of unaverred voice and extensive use of attribution found in the paragraphs in this study meant that the student writing was heavily descriptive. It was clear from the analysis that students generally had an understanding of the mechanical aspects of citation necessary to reference sources correctly. There was, however, evidence of a lack of an understanding of the function of citation in the construction of knowledge and development of argument which led to lists of attributed sources being used to *support* a claim rather than *develop* an argument. Use of citation in this way is often indicative of the novice writer unfamiliar with not only the integration of sources, but also in how to utilise this to develop argument. This can lead to ‘knowledge telling’ rather than ‘knowledge transformation’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) in their writing.

Examples 12 and 13, however, present extracts from texts from the corpus that suggest potentiality in students’ understanding of the rhetorical function of citation in realising criticality. Example 12 presents the proposition, *the right employees were important* [for the company’s competitiveness], followed by attributed support in the next clause, with the subordinate clause in the second sentence realising a concessive relation. In the final sentence, the writer presents the implication of this action. Although the relationship between the first and second sentence could have been strengthened by the use of a logical transition, the writer has used citation here to attempt to develop an argument. Placement of citation between clauses in this way was, however, extremely rare in the corpus.

#### Example 12 (Text 21)

*In order to make sure the company was competitive, Ballmer knew that the right employees were important. He took a part in recruiting technical staffs (Maxwell, 2003) although other companies might not use CEO for this. Thus, he hired the best future IT programmers.*

The development of argument in Example 13 is less coherent and logically transparent, but nevertheless, an attempt is made to use the cited evidence to build the argument that Hayward had an Analyser style of leadership exemplified in his actions to change the company as evidenced in the attributed source. This evidence is then interpreted by the writer and conclusions drawn in the final sentence.

#### Example 13 (Text 6)

*In addition Analyzers also prefer order and resist compromise when confronted with dilemmas. After Brown was CEO of BP, Hayward brought some changes to BP after systematic and precise observation and analysis. Hayward determined to associate BP more with efficiency, technical excellence as well as concentration on safety with the promise of “like a laser” on safe and reliable operations (Guardian, 2012). Such measures made BP more stable and ordered.*

In the EAP classroom, where approaches to using sources in writing are often ‘de-contextualised’, and source writing tools, such as paraphrasing or summarising, are taught in terms of surface changes, student writers can come to perceive the function of citation as one of simply ‘protection’ against plagiarism (Abasi & Graves, 2008). Combined with a view of the paragraph as evidence to support rather than to develop, promoted by the ‘topic sentence, supporting sentences’ schemata, this lack of awareness of the function of citation in developing an argument can result in poor use of source material and a failure to show criticality and analysis.

### **Pedagogical implications**

The examples from this study evidence paragraph writing that fails to provide justification for a particular line of reasoning, that principally organises ‘events’ external to the argument of the paragraph, or that fails to adequately integrate sources to develop argument. In all cases, the dialogue necessary for successful writer-reader interaction is ‘shut down’. The writer’s ‘thinking’ or line of reasoning is not transparent for the reader, and thus in turn, the reader is unable to retrieve, recreate and ‘cohere’ the writer’s intended argumentation. Findings also suggest that whilst the prescriptive structural model of topic sentence + supporting sentences has value in introducing the basic elements of structuring a paragraph, it needs to be expanded to accommodate the more complex requirements of academic writing.

An understanding of the purpose of a paragraph as being the development of rather than support for a controlling idea would be a good starting point for pedagogical focus to facilitate this. In my classroom, I now use the term ‘developing sentences’ instead of ‘supporting sentences’ when discussing paragraph structure. By drawing on a local corpus of successful

student argumentation for use in discourse analysis activities, students can see the different ways a controlling idea is developed beyond just examples and evidence from the literature. They can examine how a three part argument model is realised and how criticality and analysis is demonstrated through the interpropositional relations realised through linguistic resources. Various alternatives to the prescriptive topic sentence + supporting sentences structure that could be used by teachers are the P(T)EEL (position (topic), explain, evidence, link) or CJSI (claim (controlling idea), justification, support, implication) structural models both of which encourage students to evidence analysis and evaluation as well as description in their writing. Structural frameworks such as these can also be used by students to evaluate their own paragraph structures. (See Appendix A for an example of a classroom activity I have used for exploring paragraph development of argument).

In combination with classroom instruction, written feedback comments on drafts of student writing can provide mediation between writer and reader and provide another opportunity for bringing awareness of reader responses to text and for raising rhetorical consciousness. By being aware of how and why argumentation has broken down in a student text, a teacher's written comments can help to encourage a student writer to interact with their reader. The following example (Example 14) from my own classroom corpus with my written comments and a subsequent student revision (Example 15) are presented here to illustrate this. For the purposes of this paper, my comments are shown in brackets embedded within the student's text, although in practice, these comments would have appeared in the margin of the text. Comments such as these can explicitly 'voice' the reader's concerns as they interact with the text and help to open up these dialogic spaces.

#### Example 14 (draft with comments)

*In order for the success of a major international event, the decision-making of the event must include a large number of factors. [Your controlling idea is that decision-making is based on different factors, but you don't make it clear how your second sentence is connected to this claim. Is this going to be an example to illustrate the factors? If so, use a transition signal to tell your reader this] In 2010, the FIFA World Cup was held in Africa. It attracted lots of [precise data needed here] people to watch it (Shone & Parry, 2010). Thus, [is the relationship between these ideas really one of consequence? If so, how is choosing a location to host a world cup and the number of people who went to the 2010 World Cup connected?] a world cup is not easy, as it includes choosing a place to host it [Why/how is this difficult?] and many decisions are required of FIFA (Shone & Parry, 2010). [What kind of decisions? Why does this make it difficult?] Therefore, the good leadership, organisation and extensive communication using multimedia are the factors to ensure success. [How does your example demonstrate these three factors?]*  
**Your line of reasoning is not clear for the reader in this paragraph [student name omitted]. You need to name the three factors you will discuss as part of your claim/controlling idea.**

**Tell the reader that you are going to use the 2010 World Cup as an example. Take each factor in turn and analyse it using your example as a case study. You will need to develop this over more than one paragraph.**

Example 15 (revised student text)

*In order for the success of a major international event, the decision-making of the event must include a large number of factors **such as the good leadership, organisation and extensive communication using multimedia.** For example, in 2010, the FIFA World Cup was held in Africa. It attracted over 100,000 spectators to watch it (Shone & Parry, 2010). A world cup is not easy, as it includes choosing a place to host it **for so many people** and many decisions are required of FIFA (Shone & Parry, 2010). **These decisions require good leadership skills.** In 2010 World Cup, the leaders had to deal with many stakeholders and problem solving for many issues like building stadiums and accommodation (Shone & Parry, 2010). Therefore good leadership is important factor in successful international event.*

## Conclusions

This study has explored the impact of the commonly-used ‘topic sentence + supporting sentences’ model of paragraph construction and approach to teaching connectives on students’ ability to successfully develop an argument. The examples taken from a small corpus of paragraphs from L2 undergraduate thesis-driven essays have illustrated how problems may reflect a primacy of focus on merely supporting propositional content, and how, together with students’ lack of awareness of, or instruction in, the role of metadiscourse in writing, this can ultimately lead to an unsuccessful development of argument. Although limited by the size of the study and by the researcher as sole rater, it is hoped that the examples and analysis shared here will be helpful for teachers in identifying how argumentation has been constructed in their own students’ writing and how an understanding of metadiscoursal use can help their students make development of argument clearer for a reader at the paragraph level.

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## Appendix

Reorder the sentences below to create a cohesive and coherent argument which develops the controlling idea of the topic sentence following the paragraph structure we have looked at in class. The first sentence is provided for you:

Claim (make your point - controlling idea)  
Justification (unpack the controlling idea – explain; analyse; suggest to show why it is important)  
Support (theory; reference to literature; evidence; example; analysis)  
Implications (what is the significance of this support in relation to the controlling idea – how does the support demonstrate the main point; link to main argument of essay – ‘so what? factor’ – how does this example link to your main argument in your essay; link to next paragraph)

As a passionate and charismatic individual, Steve Jobs demonstrated many of the Creator leadership strengths categorised by Darling and Leffel (2010) in his personal leadership style.

1. These visionary approaches to potential market opportunities, therefore, clearly demonstrate Job’s Creator leadership style strengths.

2. One example of this is that Jobs’ focus at Apple was always on making innovative products rather than on profit maximization (Issacson, 2012) and this approach led to the creation of some of Apple’s most profitable and popular products.

3. Creator types of leaders are able to take risks and seize opportunities; they are able to inspire others with their visions for the future.

4. He was also able to make the most of opportunities in the market, as in the case of iTunes, the iTunes store and the iPod which revolutionized the music industry (Issacson, 2012).

Write the reordered paragraph below and underline any transition signals. Which of these transition signals is used by the writer to signal the internal argument of the text?

*As a passionate and charismatic individual, Steve Jobs demonstrated many of the Creator leadership strengths categorised by Darling and Leffel (2010) in his personal leadership style. Creator types of leaders are able to take risks and seize opportunities; they are able to inspire others with their visions for the future. One example of this is that Jobs’ focus at Apple was always on making innovative products rather than on profit maximization (Issacson, 2012) and this approach led to the creation of some of Apple’s most profitable and popular products. He was also able to make the most of opportunities in the market, as in the case of iTunes, the iTunes store and the iPod which revolutionized the music industry (Issacson, 2012). These visionary approaches to potential market opportunities, therefore, clearly demonstrate Job’s Creator leadership style strengths.*

## **Book Review**

*Global Englishes (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition).*

Jennifer Jenkins. London & New York: Routledge, 2015. Pp.1-296.

**Reviewed by Nooshan Ashtari**

*University of Central Florida, The United States of America*

Global Englishes: A Resource Book for Students by Jennifer Jenkins explores the linguistic, historical, and sociopolitical aspects of the English language from the seventeenth century until the current era. There are 8 units in each section which are knitted together following the main topic of each section. Section A, *Introduction: Key Topics in Global Englishes*, gives an overview of the field including important terms and definitions. This section covers a variety of topics such as speakers of English throughout history, pidgins and creole languages, English as a lingua franca to English in Asia and Europe and the future of Global Englishes. Tables, charts, and maps provide a clear picture of how the English language has spread in different countries. The units flow smoothly and prepare the readers for the next section of the book, Section B.

In Section B, *Development Implications and Issues*, the topics of colonialism, standards of English, characteristics of pidgin and creoles, and the future of English are discussed in more detail. There are different activities as part of each unit that require the readers to use their experiences and think about their orientation on the topic presented. For instance, colonialism and being a native and non-native speaker of English is one of the topics discussed in this section. In one of the activities, the author asks the readers to express their views on nativism in English and share any personal experiences they have had in regards to the negative attitudes toward non-native English speakers. These activities can be used by instructors for discussion questions in class or if not used as a textbook, individual learners can use them to develop their own interaction with the book content. Moreover, theories and articles of major researchers in the field are explored and readers are asked to ponder upon them and express their own opinions.

Section C, *Exploration: Current Debates in Global Englishes*, investigates the field further and provides language data. The English only movement in the US and the use of English in Africa are among the subjects that are examined in this section. Examples of language data from real-life resources such as newspapers and emails are provided in order for the readers to

investigate different aspects of the language, such as the specific features of written versus spoken English. One of the most important goals of this section is to increase learner autonomy and encourage academic thinking amongst the readers. The activity questions in this section are general and open-ended which help the readers to expand their learning horizon based on the knowledge they have gained in the two previous sections. For example, on the topic of the ‘English Only Movement’, one activity asks the readers to find second language learners and interview them about their experiences in learning English, perceived language identity, and attitudes about the English Only Movement.

The last section of the book or Section D is titled *Extension: Readings in Global Englishes*. Each unit of this section includes a selected reading from other authors who have explored topics relevant to those discussed in the previous three sections of the book. For instance, the reading in unit D1 is related to the information that was presented in units A1, B1, and C1. The purpose of these readings is to give readers alternative perspectives on the themes they have examined previously and also to guide them to form their own views on each topic. Additionally, each reading is followed by an ‘Issues to Consider’ component. Similar to the activities present in the previous sections, the ‘Issues to Consider’ components recommend students to think more deeply about what they have learned and examine whether they agree or disagree with what they have read in the unit. For instance, one of the topics in this section discusses how learning a second language (in this case, English) can alter one’s world view and sense of identity. The author then goes on to summarize what research on this issue has shown and then asks the readers to discuss their reflections based on the evidence that has been provided by the researchers. Jennifer Jenkins ends the book by providing the readers with a glossarial index and provides suggestions for further reading for those who wish to explore any of these topics of interest in more depth.

Overall, *Global Englishes: A Resource Book for Students* gives an overview of the English language, and it compares how, where, and when it was used in the past to the present time. The book is structured in a way that makes it very easy to follow and readers can choose to read only the parts of the book that interest them. For instance, if a reader is interested in the historical, social, and political aspects of the language she or he can read units A1, B1, C1, and D1 of each section, which all pertain to the same topic but explore it from different perspectives. The book is well-written and accessible for a variety of intended readers with different backgrounds, such as teachers, students, researchers, or general readers interested in learning more about ‘*Global Englishes*’. Another great feature of the book is the activity segment of each unit which promotes learner autonomy; and this section also has the potential to provide readers with

insightful ideas to explore on their own or assist them at developing research questions for their future studies.

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## **Book Review**

*Assessment Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching.*

Lia Plakans and Atta Gebril. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. 2015. Pp. 1-184.

**Reviewed by Raveewan Viengsang**

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The *Assessment Myths* is one of the *Myths* series exploring common misunderstandings on language assessment. The book highlights key assessment issues that play significant roles in language learning and teaching. Its intended readers are language teachers who are interested in the role of assessment in teaching.

In the introduction, key terms and concepts on language assessment are defined, after which eight widely held myths on language assessment are discussed. The authors argue that such myths are derived from three main concerns: their importance to language assessment, their theories and supporting evidence, and their significance to language teachers. The authors categorize these myths from three different perspectives: 'In the Real World...', 'What the Research Says...', and 'What We Can Do...', respectively. In the first perspective, the authors narrate their teaching experiences and their personal ideas. In the second perspective, theories and related research are explained. In the third perspective, several alternative approaches of applying language assessment in the language classroom are suggested.

Myth 1 clarifies the common notion that language assessment merely centers on writing tests and statistics. This chapter emphasizes assessment literacy concerning testing-related and need-to-know issues for language teachers. Indeed, there is an expectation that teachers should be equipped with the tools that enable them to choose appropriate tests for their students. Additionally, they are also expected to effectively apply assessment techniques in their classroom as well as develop valid and reliable tests.

Myth 2 focuses on alternative methods for teachers in evaluating students' performances. The authors propose that not only summative but also formative assessments should be applied in language classrooms so teachers are given more chances to determine how students are performing. Moreover, assessment for learning (AfL) and dynamic assessment (DA) are introduced for three reasons: to promote theories of classroom-based assessment (CBA) (with



an emphasis on how teachers should carefully plan for the application of these methods in language classrooms); to provide useful and encouraging feedback; and to allow students' involvement in the evaluation process.

Performance-based assessment is widely used in language classrooms because of its authenticity. Myth 3 describes how to score students' performance with more validity and reliability. Accordingly, a definition of and utilization procedure for creating rubrics for in-house tests are provided; and an analysis of rater consistency and a validation method for the rubric is also explained.

Myth 4 clarifies the misunderstanding that multiple choice questions (MCQs) cannot yield accurate information on students' proficiency by explaining that MCQs benefits are derived from their content coverage and objective scoring. A useful guideline on how to develop MCQ tests that are clear, valid, reliable, and effective for test takers is also given.

The idea that teachers should assess only one student skill at a time is scrutinized in Myth 5. The authors point out that it is more natural and authentic for teachers to integrate multiple skills into a test, as some skill(s) require other skills to support them during the performance of the initial said skill(s).

The commonplace misunderstandings of test validity is then explained in Myth 6. This chapter argues that teachers cannot just look at a test and judge whether a test item is valid or not. More profound traditional and contemporary concepts of test validity are required to ensure congruence between test tasks/items and their intended purposes. Methods to confirm the validity of tests are also described in this chapter.

Myth 7 emphasizes the significance of test fairness and describes tests using four perspectives: equality of the test, language use, content validity, and item format. This chapter sheds light on enhancing opportunities for students to perform according to their best practices. Some useful guidelines on fairness consideration are offered to raise teachers' awareness about the appropriate selection and design of test-items for in-house tests.

The final chapter, Myth 8, clarifies some teachers' conviction that good teachers should prepare students for a test. According to the authors, test preparation should have no impact on test scores. The authors discuss how and to what extent teachers can prepare their students for tests. Finally, the chapter is concluded by reiterating the importance of professional development on establishing and sustaining language assessment literacy.

All in all, *Assessment Myths* sheds some light on testing and assessment for language teachers by scrutinizing testing trends and practices as well as by sharing the authors' personal experiences with language assessments. The book is effective at maintaining the reader's

attention as one can easily relate to the experiences mentioned in the book. Additionally, the book lends necessary insights into language assessment in an easy-to-follow and comprehensible manner. It equips teachers with a tool that enables them to explore alternative approaches to language assessment, create tests for different purposes, design various test/task types, construct rubrics, and assess a test for its validity and fairness. These approaches can subsequently be applied in the language classroom to make assessments more effective, valid, and reliable in determining students' language proficiency and/or achievement.

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