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Feature Article
Making Friends with the Present Perfect

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Abstract

While the present perfect is difficult for English Language Learners (ELLs) to master, this study seeks to provide evidence of its integral pragmatic function in the social task of initiating and developing relationships. Through analysis of the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, the frequency of the present perfect, the pragmatic functions of the present perfect, and its ease of replacement with the simple past are examined. Results show that while the present perfect does occur somewhat more often when developing a friendship, there were no significant patterns in how the present perfect is used. It was also found that though it is rarely necessary to use the present perfect rather than the simple past, a speaker's choice to do so has important pragmatic implications.

Key Words: *present perfect, corpus linguistics, simple past, pragmatics*

Introduction

The present perfect is a particularly tricky concept for English language learners (ELLs) in terms of form, meaning and use. As a periphrastic structure, there are two components to deal with, and irregular past participles can be difficult to memorize. As for meaning, the present perfect and simple past are semantically indistinguishable in their decontextualized form as both refer to an aspect of priorness, and the differences are only made evident through use and context (McCoard, 1978). Usage of the present perfect creates a whole other slew of complications as its use may coincide with the simple past or refer to incomplete states or actions. These uses may overlap or have specific syntactic demands that curtail certain adverbial use and entail specific semantic constraints.

Meanwhile, the present perfect is declining in frequency of use and has been doing so for centuries (Schaden, 2009; Yao, 2014). It is being supplanted by its main competitor, the simple past. Today, perfects (overwhelmingly represented by the present perfect) make up only 5%-10% of spoken American English verb use, and are even less prevalent in speaking than writing (Biber, Leech, Conrad & Finegan, 1999). As infrequently as the present perfect occurs in speech, ELLs hear it even less because irregular past participles can be auditorily indistinguishable from the simple past for many, especially when paired with regular past participles (Yao & Collins, 2012). The actual and perceived absence of

the present perfect creates a fairly low level of input and few opportunities for noticing. This can lead to lower motivation concerning the present perfect and to student complaints that "Americans don't use the present perfect, so why do we have to learn it?"

With all of these obstacles, how do ELLs navigate the use of the present perfect? Generally, the present perfect is introduced through adverbials of time. Students are instructed to use the present perfect with adverbs like *before* and *since*, but not with specific past times like *yesterday* and *last week*. While this is a sensible starting point, too often comprehension, and even instruction, ends there. This tends to lead to a limited understanding of adverbs rather than acquisition of the present perfect (Moy, 1977). Furthermore, despite learning these rules, incorrect formations and use often persist (Bardovi-Harlig, 1997). Another flaw of tying the present perfect to adverbial use is that more often than not, the present perfect is used without temporal adverbs, particularly in writing (Schlüter, 2002). With all this confusion, many learners are left intimidated and may use avoidance strategies when confronted with the present perfect (Moy, 1977).

This is a loss for ELLs. What the perfect aspects share is the idea of connection between two points in time; with the present perfect connecting the past to the present. When we as English speakers talk about who we are as individuals, we understand that we are the sum of all our prior experience. It is through the present perfect that we make our pasts relevant to who we are today. The present perfect changes a simple statement such as *I swam with sharks* into an implication that the listener should take note. It is a way of saying *this is my experience and by knowing this about me, you can know me better as a person*.

Such implications are especially relevant to ELLs. Being able to interact with native speakers is one of the main motivations for learning a language, particularly for those with an integrative orientation (Lambert, 1974). Moreover, interacting, and even befriending native speakers, is an authentic way to develop language proficiency. Not being able to employ the present perfect appropriately and neglecting the pragmatic implications intended by others leads ELLs to miss out on one of the most important tools for bridging the divide between strangers.

In fact, the present perfect may be the first tool. Even before two people embark on getting to know one another, the present perfect is often used to initialize discourse. Upon meeting a native speaker, the ELL's country of origin is a likely topic. To get a conversation going on this topic, an ELL might ask one of the following questions:

      1. Did you go to my country?

      2. Have you been to my country?

Question 1 is a poor choice and could lead a listener to wonder what misunderstanding led the questioner to believe she had gone to this country. The reason for this is that the

use of the simple past relies on shared knowledge, and sentences in the past tense are often "anomalous as a discourse-initial assertion" (Michaelis, 1994, p. 122). *Did you* indicates that the questioner has reason to believe that such an action or circumstance may have taken place. In order to ask a question when there are no such assumptions, it is necessary to use the present perfect. Without this tool, ELLs are bound to encounter awkward exchanges or misunderstandings that only increase the anxiety associated with talking to native speakers.

Once a conversation is underway, the present perfect continues to be useful. It serves as an excellent device for negotiating topics (Nishiyama & Koenig, 2008). *Let's talk about X* or *I want to talk about X* can be overly direct when speaking with those we do not know well. Instead, H*ave you seen (movie)?* or *Have you been to (place)?* are adept ways of offering up a topic of conversation or steering conversation into more familiar waters. This is a handy way of maneuvering between topics for anyone, but especially so for nervous ELLs.

Once two people begin talking, they must determine how far they would like the interaction to go. Here, the existential, or experiential, form of the present perfect serves an important purpose. It serves to establish the qualifications of both speakers so that they may determine the next step in the conversation—or even in the relationship. If both speaker A and speaker B have been to Mexico, they share a common experience to discuss. This past experience is relevant now for their discussion and serves as a qualification for conversation, developing the relationship, and even becoming friends. Just as the present perfect is ideal in sharing one's experience and qualifications in a job interview, it has a very similar role in the subconscious interview process that leads to friendships.

All of this is not to say that we cannot form new acquaintances or friendships without the present perfect. It is, however, asserting that the present perfect is a useful tool in such a task. Having knowledge of and confidence to use such resources would most certainly be directly useful and indirectly serve to lessen anxiety for ELLs when talking to native speakers.

Purpose of the Study

Considering these factors, this study explored the present perfect's pragmatic role in conversational language related to making friends and developing relationships. Through a better understanding of this function, instructors can better teach and motivate learners to apply the present perfect in such situations and enter conversations with greater confidence. To this end, corpus analysis was conducted to determine

- if the corpus supports the use of the present perfect in making friends and acquaintances

- how the present perfect is used in such circumstances
- if the simple past can be used easily to substitute for the present perfect

Corpus analysis was employed because it moves us beyond our assumptions about language and objectively examines how language is used.

Methodology

This study used the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, which is comprised of both conversational and task-based speech and is available in recorded and transcribed forms. The recordings were released by the University of California, Santa Barbara's (UCSB) Department of Linguistics in four parts from 2000-2005 (Du Bois *et al*., 2000-2005). The Santa Barbara Corpus is mainly representative of spontaneous spoken American English in the larger International Corpus of English, and as such, was chosen for this study. Each conversation is a sampling taken "not randomly but avoiding the (more self-conscious) initial portion" (J. Dubois, personal communication, July 22, 2017). The result is a "snapshot" of conversation on topics that have emerged naturally and are discussed without any evident self-monitoring.

AntConc, (Anthony, 2014), a freeware concordance tool, was selected in order to perform searches for the present perfect on the Santa Barbara Corpus. It is a freely available and easy-to-use program created by Laurence Anthony out of Waseda University in Tokyo.

Based on the summary descriptions available on the UCSB Department of Linguistics website, the 35 recordings labeled as conversations were uploaded into AntConc and a wildcard search of *related contractions* was performed, resulting in over 1,450 hits. This list was then manually searched for instances of the present perfect. Perfect formations (*have* or *has* plus the past participle) that would be considered future, continuous, modal, or infinitive were not included in the final list, nor were constructions such as *have got to*. While such examples share the structure of the present perfect, their meaning and function are quite different.

After reading through the texts to check form within context, 396 instances of the present perfect remained. Next, the 35 recordings were listened to in order to get a better sense of the interactions between the participants. Based on these interpretations, the recordings were divided into two categories: *related* and *unrelated*. Recordings were deemed *related* if the interactions involved getting to know each other (in the case of strangers) or further developing a relationship as with friends or family members. In other words, these conversations were *related* to the purpose of the study. Conversations that were considered *unrelated* occurred between participants who already had a close relationship and whose conversations did not seem to afford any opportunity for furthering the relationship. Such conversations were often comprised of complaints, daily minutiae,

and superficial exchanges of information; ultimately, there seemed to be no change in the closeness of the participants. This resulted in18 *related* recordings and 17 *unrelated* recordings.

These two groups, *related* and *unrelated*, were then measured for frequencies of the present perfect as well as for averages. Because the transcriptions of the Santa Barbara Corpus include numerous prosodic annotations and detailed time counts, it was not possible to do an exact word count for the purposes of normalizing the data. Therefore, an approximation was done by subtracting the standard time counts from the overall word count. As a result, all frequencies and averages are approximations that are useful for comparing conversations within this corpus but are not accurate measures of the present perfect overall.

The *related* group of conversations that featured elements of developing relationships was then analyzed further for the types of present perfect being used. The categories were labeled *introduction/negotiation*, *experience*, *relevancy*, and *other* (mainly grammatically necessitated uses that had little relevance to the study).

Finally, all instances of the present perfect in the *related* group were again reviewed to determine if they could be replaced by the simple past. Examples in which replacement with the preterite form would result in no change in meaning received a three; those that would be slightly affected or would benefit from further syntactical tweaking received a two; and a score of one was given to those that would be significantly altered by a replacement with the simple past form. These numbers were validated by a second reader and conflicting ratings were settled by a third rater, all of whom are native speakers of American English. The second and third rater were supplied with target utterances and links to the full transcript and recordings. All ratings were done blindly with no knowledge of the others' scores. Figure 1 shows the process by which the instances of present perfect were sorted for the purposes of this research.

Results

The primary question in this study was whether the present perfect plays an important role when people are getting to know one another or developing a relationship. Analysis of the Santa Barbara Corpus indicates that it does. In the 18 conversations that exemplified such interactions, the present perfect was used in 266 cases, averaging 0.23% of said conversations. In the 17 recordings that did not exemplify the target interaction, there were 130 present perfect uses, less than half the number in the first group, with an average of only 0.13%. Based on both the overall frequency and average, it seems the present perfect is employed more often in conversations in which people are trying to form or further a relationship.
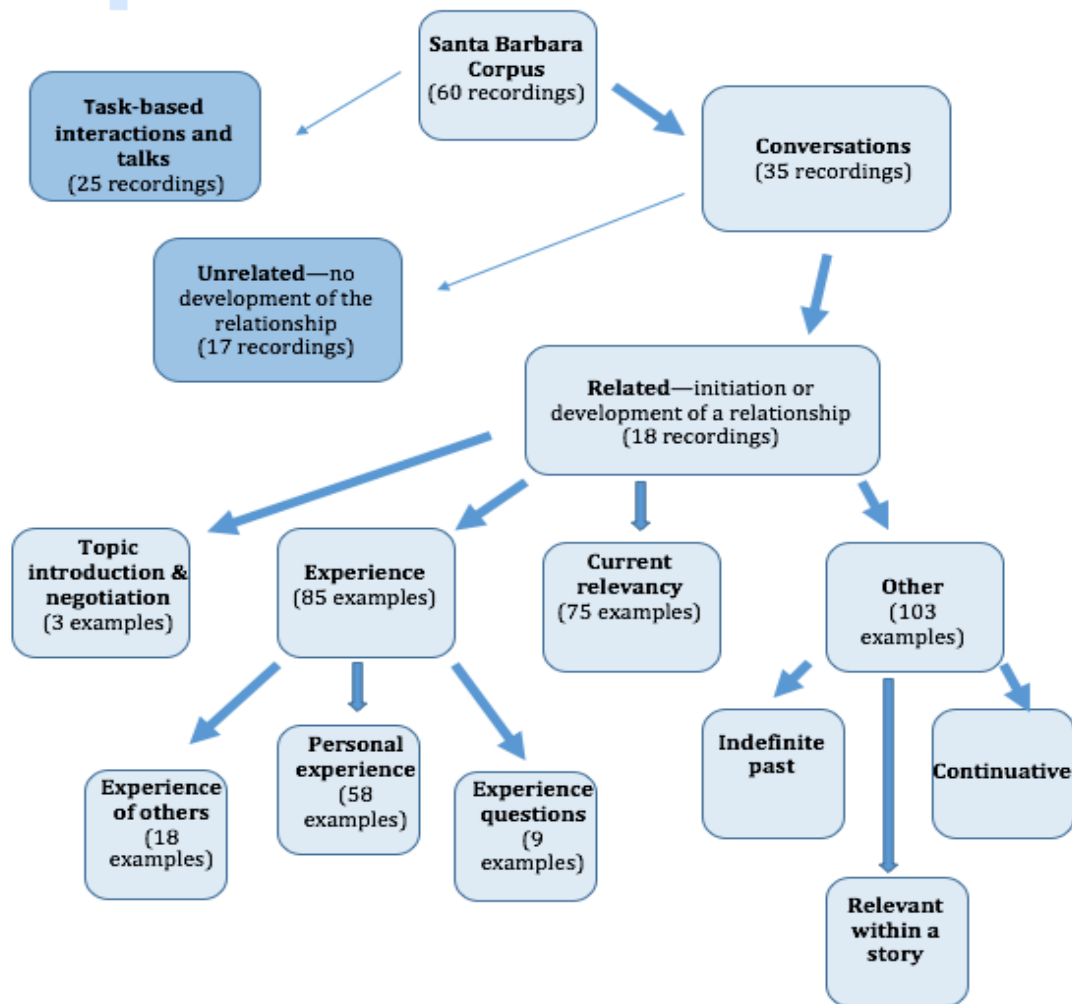
Figure 1—Organization of Categories

The eighteen exemplary conversations were then analyzed and placed into the categories of *topic negotiation*, *experience*, *relevance*, and *other*. There was a total of three examples of *topic negotiation*, one of which follows. In it, the speaker uses present perfect in an abrupt change in topic.

1. Wess: "Yeah the long sticks are venison, and the cold meat's venison, and there's another cold meat sausage."

   Cam: "So have you talked to Mary Lou?" (*You Baked*, 1231.041 1239.771)

(Note: All samples taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus have been edited for ease of reading in that all annotations have been removed.)

The category of *experience* totaled 85 examples (32% of present perfect use) but was further divided into *personal experience* (58 hits), *experience of others* (18 hits), and *experience questions* (9 hits), as exemplified below.

2. "I've put a few of those [furnaces] in." (*Ancient Furnace,* 765.180 766.200)

3. "My dad has done it." (*What is a Brand Inspection,* 702.878 703.735)

4. "You've never seen a Bette Davis movie?" (*A Book about Death,* 413.50 415.89)

Utterances whose main purpose was to provide past information that was relevant to the current situation but did not seem to be evidence of experience was labeled *current relevance* and comprised 75 of the present perfect structures, or 28% of present perfect use.

5. "We haven't been able to reach him. (*Handshakes All Around,* 1011.900 102.862)

The group entitled *other* encompassed forms of the present perfect that did not fit into the first three categories and included uses that referred to general indefinite past or continuative past. While this group was the largest (39% of present perfect use), it was not further broken down because indefinite and continuative anteriority have the strongest links to a purely syntactic function of the present perfect and were of least interest to this study. Though higher uses of the first three categories was anticipated, the dominance of the *other* category is in keeping with other findings (Nishiyama & Koenig, 2006) regarding the frequency of the continuative form of the present perfect. Making or furthering a friendship does not seem to affect which type of present perfect is used. Of course, categorizing types of present perfects is not an exact science. The uses often overlap, especially when dealing with current relevance and experience (Michaelis, 1994). In fact, most often experience is touted because of its relevance.

Finally, instances of the present perfect in the collection of *related* conversations were examined to determine how easily the simple past could be substituted for the present perfect. Most uses of the present perfect were easily replaced by either direct substitution with the simple past or substitution and a minor alteration elsewhere in the sentence. Of the 266 instances of the present perfect, 141, or 54%, received a rating of three, meaning a substitution of the simple past resulted in no change in meaning as seen below:

6. "That's what I've read." (*Deadly Diseases*, 1094.38 1095.570)

The difference between #6 and the simple past form of *That's what I read* is negligible at best.

Fifty-nine, or 22% were rated a two and deemed somewhat suitable for a substitution of the preterite form. Such examples necessitated slight changes of wording elsewhere in the sentence.

7. "I've never been back." (*Shaggy Dog Story*, 496.287 497.314)

In the above example, a simple change in tense would have an awkward result.

8. *I never was back.*

However, an additional lexical substitution with the verb *go* results in a natural sentence with a meaning similar to the original.

9. *I never went back.*

A rating of one was assigned to 63 instances, indicating that 24% of the present perfect utterances could not be changed to the simple past without changing the meaning or creating ungrammatical sentences. Three of the 266 examples could not be rated as they were incomplete formations.

These examples refute the hypothesis that the present perfect is essential in initiating friendships. It was initially thought that the simple past's inability to initialize discourse would render it unfit for such circumstances and so the present perfect would be predominant and necessary in such interactions. There are very few examples of the present perfect—particularly *have you* questions—that begin a discussion or change the topic of a discussion. This may in part be due to the lack of conversation beginnings in this corpus. Regardless, this study cannot verify the hypothesis that the present perfect is necessary to start of a conversation with a potential friend.

Discussion of Results

Does the present perfect play a role in building relationships?

It seems that the present perfect does play a role in making friends and deepening relationships. There was an increased presence of the present perfect in the conversations that were selected for their features relevant to this study. Two conversations stood out as having an average of more than 0.4% use of the present perfect: *Shaggy Dog Story,* with an average of 0.49%, and *A Book about Death* with 0.45% contained the highest percentage of the present perfect. In the first recording, a man tells his coworker, Jon, about his travel experiences. While Jon does most of the listening, Alan seems to earnestly want to give Jon a better sense of himself. The second conversation, *A Book about Death,* is of a much more personal nature. While in bed before sleeping, Pamela tries to explain her view of the world and her fascination with death as her husband Darryl tries to make sense of it. Such conversations would certainly seem to result in people having a better understanding of one another.

An average of 0.2% to 0.34% present perfect use characterized nine of the conversations and occurred between a diverse range of relationships including new

acquaintances, friends, family members, and neighbors. The present perfect averaged 0.17% or less for seven of the conversations with the lowest average being 0.05%.

While the differences in averages supports the hypothesis that the present perfect is prevalent in language used in relationship development, the contrast is not overwhelming, with 10% higher use of the present perfect in the related conversations as opposed to the conversations unrelated to forming and developing a relationship.

How is the present perfect used?

There seems to be nothing of particular note in how the present perfect is used in friendship making, as opposed to other types of conversation. Most often the present perfect did not denote experience, relevance, or an attempt to introduce or negotiate a topic of conversation. Instead, most uses were textbook variety examples of the present perfect used to indicate a simple indefinite past or were of a continuative nature. In fact, there were only 15 of the *have you* questions that are indicative of Michaelis's (1994) assertion that the present perfect introduces information which can then be elaborated on by the simple past. In fact, none of these *have you* questions in the related conversations even necessitated the present perfect. Nevertheless, that there were not many of these examples may be a symptom of the Santa Barbara Corpus itself. In an effort to provide speech samples that are free of self- conscientiousness and monitoring, the beginnings of a meeting or interaction are almost never included. Perhaps enough common ground had already been established to negate the need for the present perfect in this sense.

An additional and unanticipated trend in the group of conversations that exemplified the target interaction was how prevalent the present perfect was in conversations that were dominated by one or two individuals. Four of the five highest-averaging conversations can almost be described as monologues. It seems that these people were trying to develop their friendships by impressing their listeners. These conversations tended to have some the highest uses of experience-type perfects.

Can it be easily substituted?

Linked to this notion that the present perfect opens up the possibility of conversation between two people who do not know one another is the idea that the present perfect cannot easily be replaced by the simple past in such a context. However, as the corpus provided little to no such context, this question will have to be deferred for now.

In other contexts, nevertheless, the simple past could replace the present perfect with little to no change in the rest of the sentence and with no alteration of core meaning. This may prove quite meaningful. In many cases where speakers could choose the simpler, less marked simple past, they did not. Instead, they deliberately (though perhaps unconsciously) opted for the more marked form. This speaks to the implicative nature of

the present perfect. Frequently, the selection of the present perfect—and often paired with a time adverbial—added emphasis and weight to whatever was being said.

10. "But I have really, probably, in my whole life, have enjoyed the last two years more than anything." (*Handshakes All Around*, 1573.185 1582.529)

Frequently, this emphasis implied pride, sometimes to the point of bragging. The present perfect is a rational choice as it is a way to make past accomplishments relevant to the current situation.

11. "I've always been very independent." (*He Knows*, 58.261 60.754)

Another way that the present perfect added emphasis in these recordings was to give a pejorative connotation to a statement or imply judgment.

12. "This uh, thing he's put up?" (*Handshakes All Around,* 855.717-858.092)

This was said in response to a question about a fence that the neighbor had recently built and began an anecdote about a disagreement that led to the fence building.

Complaints were another common theme when employing the present perfect.

13. "It's always been like that." (*On the Lot,* 106.898-107.951)

This was part of a discussion about unfair treatment at work. The present perfect paired with *always* ensures that the incident spoken of was not seen as unique, but rather a pattern of treatment.

Many such examples, including #10 through #12 were determined by the author and the second rater to be sentences that could easily be substituted for by the simple past. It is therefore meaningful that the speakers intentionally chose *not* to use the simple past.

Perhaps it is the additional wording provided by the present perfect's periphrastic structure, its markedness as a structure, its implication of relevance, or a combination of all three that adds weight to a speaker's words. This aligns with Scheibman (2002) and Verhagen's (1995) assertion that language choices and syntactical patterns are not objective, but are motivated by how we want our listeners to perceive our communications. So, while the present perfect has lost out to the simple past as the dominant structure to communicate past events (Schaden, 2009) generally, it has found an important niche role in subjective expression.

Implications for Teaching

So, what does all of this mean for our learners? For lower level instruction, it may mean that we devote less time to the present perfect. An understanding of adverbial patterns and constraints should suffice at this time. However, for higher level learners seeking to attain true proficiency, instruction and learning must extend beyond this. As

such, dogmatic gap-fills that encourage learners to look for adverbs that signal verb tense should be minimized. Not only do such exercises not lead to acquisition (Moy, 1977), but the discrepancies between the raters' assessment of when the simple past could be used in place of the present perfect suggest that there is also a great deal of flexibility in terms of the simple past's pairing with adverbs and other lexicogrammatical items once prescribed to the present perfect. Instead, as Moy (1977) advocated a contextual approach conducive to noticing and consciousness-raising, activities and exercises that call attention to the present perfect's subjective role as an emphasizer of pride, judgment, complaint may prove useful for ELL's in their acquisition process. Listening activities that include authentic uses of the present perfect might be used for practice in drawing inferences or noting a speaker's tone or attitude. Learners should also be encouraged to use the present perfect in communicating such perspectives with activities that promote use of the target grammar. Activities such as skits or role-plays that incorporate boasting, judging, or complaining paired with the present perfect and attendant intonation to provide emphasis could prove fun and useful. Ideally, such activities will increase learner awareness of the present perfect's inferential quality and encourage them to adopt it as a tool in their own communication.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine through corpus analysis whether the present perfect plays a significant pragmatic role in the process of friendship making, how it is specifically used, and if the same function can be performed by the simple past. In a comparison of conversations that exemplified people making and furthering relationships and conversations that did not, the present perfect was present in 0.23% of utterances compared to 0.13%. This is an indication that the present perfect serves a pragmatic role. It should be noted here that though these numbers are of interest and imply significance, they do not carry the weight of proven statistical significance. Because of the nature of the Santa Barbara Corpus and the need to approximate word counts, a true sample size could not be obtained. To do so, one would need to comb through each transcript to remove all time markers and prosodic annotations. It would also be ideal to have another researcher confirm the classification of the *related* and *unrelated* conversations.

As to how the present perfect is employed in this process of relationship development, this study found no strong patterns, and the expected uses did not make a significant appearance and proved difficult to investigate. In part, this again may be due to the corpus itself. Most of the conversations occur between close friends or family members, offering few examples of strangers conversing. Moreover, in an effort to capture natural dialog that is free of the self-consciousness of being recorded, most of the recordings omit the initialization of conversation, which was of most interest to this study. A similar analysis of Switchboard Corpus, which contains phone recordings between

strangers, could provide greater clues as to whether and how the present perfect is used to provide common ground between strangers.

The hypothesis that the present perfect is essential in these target interactions and cannot be replaced by the simple past was also refuted as it was found that 54% of the present perfect uses could easily be substituted for by the simple past with no change in meaning. While the initial prediction proved to be incorrect, the resulting findings exposed important implications regarding why people choose to use the present perfect when it is not necessary to do so. Examples revealed that speakers often seem to select the present perfect as a way to give weight and import their words, supporting the notion that communication structures are far more subjective than objective. Such findings indicate that in teaching the present perfect to learners, instructors have a responsibility to call attention to this function and urge students to make use of this tool in their own communications, whether for the purpose of forming friendships or otherwise.

While there is an abundance of literature on the present perfect and much of it claims to provide pragmatic analysis of this structure, there is very little research into its actual, specific use in day-to-day conversation, let alone in the specific area of friendship making. There is much to still be learned about this complex and still-evolving verb form.

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Special Extended Teaching Note

Incidental Instruction of English Oral Request Pragmatics: Why and How

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Abstract

Second language pragmatics are not easily acquired by second language learners for a variety of reasons including negative first language transfer, insufficient grammatical competence, and inadequate instruction. For adult learners living in the second language environment, adequate pragmatic knowledge is essential even for beginning level learners in order for them to be able to have positive interactions with speakers of the second language. Unfortunately, ESL curricula may not prioritize pragmatic skills or allow much time for extracurricular instruction. However, incidental instruction is one way to address this problem. This article suggests a number of ways that teachers can integrate English oral request pragmatics instruction into their interactions with learners: using various methods for responding to learners, integrating requests into classroom procedures, highlighting naturally occurring requests, inserting brief materials-light lessons, and connecting with course curriculum. Multiple approaches are suitable for every language level.

Key words: *intensive English program, incidental instruction, language pragmatics, oral requests*

Introduction

Working in an Intensive English Program (IEP) at a university in the U.S., I observed that regardless of language proficiency level, the IEP students often made direct requests, such as "give me". Knowing that they did not intend to be rude, I ignored the way they spoke until an IEP student told me about a traumatic and confusing experience she had suffered when she made a request using "give me" and received an angry response. Asking around, I heard additional stories including one about a local business complaining to the IEP that IEP students made requests rudely and needed to be educated about it. I realized that how English language learners make requests matters because it can impact their interactions with expert English speakers, access to goods and services,

and success in school and/or work. I decided to investigate why the problem existed and how it could be solved.

A variety of request strategies exists in languages, and these can be described on a scale from direct to indirect (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) identify three levels of directness:

- impositives (direct), such as "Give me the pencil"

- conventionally indirect, such as "I don't have anything to write with"

- hints or nonconventionally indirect (p. 18), such as "Could you hand me the pencil?"

Native speakers of American, Australian, and British English generally prefer conventionally indirect request strategies (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 103, 125; Ishikawa, 2013, p. 61; Tawalbeh & Al- Oqaily, 2012, pp. 89-90; Trosborg, 1994, pp. 225, 276-277) with native speakers of Australian English using *can/could* and *will/would* for the majority of conventionally indirect requests (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 49). Request strategies may also be accompanied by modifications such as "please" but in English these seem to be optional (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Request strategy choice by expert speakers is related to language pragmatics. In linguistics, pragmatic meaning is the meaning intended, as opposed to the literal meaning (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 5). For instance, "Give me the paper" literally asks for the item while "Could I have the paper?" literally asks if it is possible to obtain the item. However, pragmatically in American English, in most situations the first will be considered an order that is rude as a request, and the second a polite request. Pragmatic differences between languages can lead to negative transfer which is when second language learners apply rules from their first language to their second language when those rules do not work in the second language. For example, in Arabic, the imperative (e.g. "Give me the paper") pragmatically expresses solidarity (Alfattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010) and is generally considered acceptable and often preferred (Alfattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012), but when Arabic speakers apply this to English they tend to sound rude to expert English speakers.

Grammatical ability can also impact request strategy selection (Francis, 1997). Direct grammatical forms are easier for language learners (consider, "*Give me* the paper" vs. "*Could you hand me* the paper?") and even speakers of a language that generally uses indirect request strategies may tend to select direct request strategies in a language they are beginning to learn (Koike, 1989). However, advanced ESL learners can still be unable to make pragmatically polite requests in English (Halenko & Jones, 2011) which may be

related to a lack of pragmatic knowledge (Lee, 2011). Unfortunately, second language curricula tend to neglect language pragmatics (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 201), though learners may take ten or more years to learn second language pragmatics even with continuous exposure to the language (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985, pp. 310-322). Textbooks generally provide little information on request pragmatics (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 151) and without revision and practice, request pragmatics knowledge learned may be lost (Halenko & Jones, 2011).

My own IEP followed a packed curriculum focused on preparing learners to succeed in university classes and between the focus on curriculum, lack of time for extracurricular instruction, and tendency of teachers to become accustomed to learner speech and not notice pragmatically rude requests, request instruction seldom occurred. However, two IEP students who had learned English request pragmatics told me separately that they had learned it when a teacher responded to a pragmatically rude request with spontaneous instruction. I realized the problem could be addressed through incidental instruction – instruction inserted opportunistically into interactions with learners, whether part of a lesson or not, whether planned or unplanned.

Pedagogical Solutions

From the foregoing discussion, several important points emerge:

- Second language learners benefit from explicit instruction on making pragmatically appropriate requests in the second language and need ongoing input and practice to maintain request making skills.

- In American, British, or Australian varieties of English a request beginning with can/could/will/would is generally considered polite and modifications such as "please" are optional.

- Brief and even spontaneous instruction on requests may be adequate to improve request making skills.

What follows are a series of principled and research-based suggestions for integrating incidental instruction of English oral request pragmatics into ESL curricula. They are divided into two main sections: instruction through feedback, and integration of request instruction and practice into classroom procedures and lessons.

Instruction of Requests by Teacher Feedback

Immediate corrective feedback
Language level: Beginning to advanced).

If teachers observe a pragmatically rude request, they can provide immediate

corrective feedback, though this method may not always be appropriate in every situation. Once, when learners were arriving for class, one told me to open the window. I told him it was polite to say, "Could you" and wrote the corrected request on the board. He repeated it and I opened the window. In this case I felt immediate correction was appropriate because the learner was relaxed and focused, the correction did not disrupt an activity, I had a good rapport with the learner, and his classmates were not paying attention. If any of these factors had been different, immediate corrective feedback might not have been appropriate.

If the teacher decides to provide immediate corrective feedback on request pragmatics, there are two approaches that might be used. The first is elicitation of learner self-correction. For instance the teacher might say, "Could you say that again?" or "How do we say that?" or "Can you say that another way?" or "*Give me* the paper?" or simply "*Give me…*?" The other is teacher provision of the corrected language. The teacher may use a *recast* in which the learner's utterance is rephrased. For example, if the learner says "Give me the paper", the teacher might say "*Could I have* the paper?" or "*Could I have…*?" Alternatively, the teacher might use an *explicit correction* by stating that the learner's utterance was incorrect and providing a corrected form. For instance, the teacher might say, "No, *could I have* the paper," or "You just said *give me*, but that can sound rude in English. Let's try that again. Repeat after me."

Recasts and explicit corrections tend to be less effective than elicitations of self-correction (Panova & Lyster, 2002), but if learners cannot produce the desired language, teacher provision of language is necessary. Recasts do tend to be more effective when the learner's utterance is shortened to emphasize the correction (e.g. "*Can I have…*" rather than "Can I have the paper"), and learner noticing and repairing of errors can be improved by having them repeat the corrected language (Panova & Lyster, 2002).

You said – you meant
Language level: higher beginning and up

While monitoring learners working on an activity, the teacher writes down language errors made by selected learners and provides a correction for the language error, using a "You Said – You Meant" form (see Figure 1). Later, the teacher quietly gives the forms to learners and invites questions (A. Noonan, personal communication, January 2015). This approach is useful for providing individual feedback.

Language feedback time
Language level: higher beginning and up

Some teachers reserve a time, such as the last five minutes of class or a time period on a particular day, to provide feedback on any common language issues they observe.

Figure 1. You Said – You Meant Form Example

| Name ___Ali_____ | |
You Said	You Meant
Give me paper. (Impolite)	Could I have a paper? (Polite)

Such time could be used for instruction and practice of the pragmatics of requests. For revision and practice, this could occur on multiple days over time. Teachers can also solicit language concerns from learners by, for example, keeping a basket for learners to leave notes, or putting sticky notes on a page by the door for learners to write on. Teachers can then address these during language feedback time. In this way, learners can raise concerns they have about making requests as well as other topics.

Request Instruction and Practice through Classroom Procedures and Lessons

Dialogue building
Language level: beginning to advanced

Thornbury (n.d.) describes a technique he calls *dialogue building* which could be used to address request pragmatics. Basically, the teacher 1) draws a simple picture on the board which shows a situation, 2) elicits and co-constructs appropriate language from the learners, 3) practices the exchange with one learner, 4) has two learners practice the exchange, and then 5) has all learners practice in pairs simultaneously. To apply this technique to request pragmatics the teacher could, for example, draw a picture showing one learner wanting to borrow a pencil from another. Dialogue could be written off to the side with names before each utterance, like a play transcript. In fact, the play transcript style alone without a picture can be quite effective if the exercise arises from a question or situation that the whole class is privy to, thus eliminating the need to establish context. See Thornbury (n.d) for his variations on dialogue building.

Some additional considerations and variations on the dialogue-building theme, inspired by Thornbury, include the following:

- Practice the request and response sequence by chanting to build automaticity and practice intonation and prosody. Explore how intonation can change a sentence, for example "Could you hand me the pencil." (flat tone) vs. "Could you hand me the pencil?" and practice the intonation that is most likely to elicit the desired response.

- To raise learner awareness of the speech act, provide a dialogue in which a request received a negative response, and ask learners what the problem is and how to fix it. Once a solution has been reached, practice may follow.

- Present learners with two request scenarios, one of which was successful and the other unsuccessful, and have learners analyze the differences between them to raise learner awareness of the speech act. Analysis can be followed by practice.

- Have a dialogue with the class in which one (the teacher or the class) plays the requester, and the other plays the recipient of the request. This can be used to explore how what one person says influences the other, and to practice an extended dialogue, especially if the teacher plays a reluctant recipient.

Incorporating request practice into classroom procedures
Language level: beginning

Teachers may introduce beginning level learners to request making through the gradual introduction and use of phrases such as

- Can you repeat that?
- Can you spell (that)?
- Can I have (item)?
- Can I borrow (item)?
- Can I join you?

Appropriate responses, such as "Yes," and "Sorry, no," can also be introduced. These phrases not only introduce learners to requests but also give them opportunities for revision and practice in the classroom. The teacher may also expose learners to the "Can you [verb] [object]" form, at least passively, by asking learners to perform tasks such as turning the lights off or on.

Highlighting naturally occurring requests to raise speech act awareness
Language level: higher-beginning and up

Another way to instruct and practice requests is to highlight requests that occur naturally. For example, if a story used in the class includes an oral request, the teacher might ask what the requester asked and how the recipient of the request responded. Then the teacher could ask questions about what might have happened if the requester had phrased the request differently, or the recipient had given a different response. This could be followed by having learners practice request sequences in chorus and in pairs. Another approach would be to consider how the teacher makes requests and why, contrasting this with other situations and languages.

Teaching the request continuum to raise speech act awareness
Language level: intermediate and up

To teach the request continuum and raise speech act awareness the teacher can write "direct," "conventional," and "indirect" in columns across the board, then give the learners a request scenario and write different types of requests in the appropriate columns. For example, if the scenario is asking for a pencil, "Give me a pencil" might go in the direct column, "Could I borrow a pencil?" in the conventional column, and "I don't have a pencil" in the indirect column. Once learners are oriented, the teacher asks learners how the teacher makes requests in different situations and writes the learners' responses in the appropriate columns. Then the teacher asks learners how it might be appropriate for them to make requests in a variety of situations and adds them to the columns. Differences between situations and languages, as well as the role of "please" can also be discussed. Practice can follow. In addition, the same instructional approach could be used to teach culturally appropriate terms of address for gaining someone's attention before making a request (e.g. "Excuse me," "Hi," "Hey," the person's name, or nothing), and when and what it is appropriate to request of whom.

Connecting with a curriculum-based activity
Language level: higher-beginning and up

Request instruction can also be connected with curriculum-based exercises. For example, if learners are doing an interview activity, they can be instructed to approach each other and request to ask questions as if approaching strangers to do a survey. First, the teacher explains the task, and then elicits appropriate language from the learners, writing it on the board. If it does not come up naturally, the teacher should cover how to respond politely to a refusal as well as to an agreement, especially if the learners will actually survey strangers in the future. To ensure that all learners practice being both the requester and the request recipient, the teacher can give half of the learners one color of

paper and half a different color of paper. In the first round, one color can interview the other color, and in the second round they can switch. If the learners will actually soon be surveying strangers outside the class, it may be an appropriate time to also cover who and when it is appropriate to approach.

Conclusions

Second language pragmatics take a long time to learn without instruction and their lack can create social problems. Fortunately, even with constraints of curriculum and time there are many ways for teachers to integrate incidental instruction of English oral request pragmatics into their interactions with learners of all language proficiency levels. The key is teacher awareness and an eye for instructional opportunities. Once, in a mid-beginning level class a learner asked me if "Here you go" meant the same as "Give me." I used this as an opening to explain the pragmatic meaning of "Give me" vs. other request forms. I wrote on the board:

Give me coffee. (Angry face.)

Please give me coffee. (Neutral face.)

Could I have coffee? (Smiley face.)

The class was uncharacteristically attentive and engaged, realizing they had been being accidently rude, but grateful for the instruction. It only took a couple of minutes and I knew they would be practicing it when they went to the coffee shop.

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Special Extended Teaching Note

Understanding and Utilizing Form-Focused Instruction in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

ESL/EFL teachers can face several challenges when it comes to a focus on language forms in the classroom. How should teachers integrate the instruction of structural language forms with meaning-based activities? How necessary is a focus on form for student language learning? In what contexts is an explicit focus on form in the classroom most appropriate? This article explores the answers to these questions and others. The article begins by looking at some relevant background on the use of Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) in the language classroom, and it considers FFI's relevance for today's learners. The paper also provides pragmatic examples for how to make use of FFI in practical and meaningful ways. In the end, the article argues that a theoretical and pedagogical awareness of FFI should be part of a teacher's repertoire of tools to enhance student learning in certain classroom contexts.

Key Words: *Form-Focused Instruction, FFI, Grammar instruction, Focus-on-Form, Focus-on-Meaning*

Introduction

English language teachers working in both ESL and EFL contexts are often faced with a pedagogical dilemma centered around the longstanding debate over how and when to include focused grammatical instruction in the classroom. Should teachers explicitly focus learners' attention on grammatical forms? If so, how and when should such explicit instruction occur? Alternatively, should teachers simply focus on creating classroom contexts where grammatical forms can be practiced in meaningful and authentic ways? Does a focus on authentic communicative language in the classroom necessarily preclude direct grammatical instruction?

These questions are not new to the field, nor have definitive answers been established. Decisions about the extent to which teachers ought to focus clearly on grammatical instruction in the classroom are largely contextual and vary from one class

type to another. This paper argues that teachers have a responsibility to understand and engage with the debate around Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), and to develop their pedagogic skill set to include ways to translate FFI theory into classroom teaching practice.

This paper will provide a working definition of FFI and a general overview of the various theoretical positions surrounding form-focused grammatical instruction. It will also consider the different contexts in which FFI might or might not be appropriate in the classroom, and present practical classroom applications of FFI as examples.

Definitions and Types of FFI

Collins (2012) identifies FFI as "any pedagogical practice undertaken by second language (L2) teachers with the goal of drawing their students' attention to language form" (p. 2187). Language forms in this case may refer to spelling conventions, punctuation, grammatical structures, or a range of other possibilities. Spada and Lightbown (2008) make the distinction between *integrated* and *isolated* forms of FFI. In integrated FFI, students' attention is drawn to language forms during communicative activities, whereas in isolated FFI, form-focused lessons are conducted independently and place meaning in a secondary role. As Spada and Lightbown argue, if learners are beyond early childhood and have exposure to English only in the classroom where learners share the same L1, both integrated and isolated FFI can be valuable.

Evidence suggests that FFI helps learners pay attention to forms in the input, and without the explicit focus, learners may fail to notice and take up new forms in the language (Ellis, 2001; Ellis, 2016; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Form in this case can be lexical (phonological and orthographic), grammatical, or pragmalinguistic (Ellis, 2016). There have been numerous attempts to distinguish FFI types, one of which is the distinction made by Long (1998) who argues there are three types: *(1) focus-on-forms, (2) focus-on-meaning, (3) focus-on-form* depending on the way attention to form or structure is approached in the classroom.

In differentiating between these three focal types, Long (1998) notes that *focus-on-forms* is now considered the traditional approach to grammatical instruction whereby teachers and course designers create lessons, materials, and textbooks centered on structural components of the language (phonemes, sentences patterns, grammatical structures, etc.). Classroom instruction and practice emphasize student understanding of the forms themselves and their related rules. Focus-on-forms instruction, where learning a preselected target form is the primary focus, has options of *explicit* and *implicit* instruction. Explicit focus-on-forms can be done deductively and inductively; the rule is presented by a teacher deductively, or learners inductively analyze the input and discover the rule by themselves (DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2001, 2016). DeKeyser (1995) noted that

implicit learning allows students to infer and acquire rules without awareness. Focus-on-forms can include a structured input approach (Ellis, 2001), with which learners are exposed to sufficient examples of the target structure and asked to be engaged in the tasks to notice and use the target structure. It is similar to the notion of *isolated FFI* and can be incorporated as preparation for a communicative activity.

Focus-on-meaning, on the other hand, represents "a radical pendulum shift: a shift of allegiance to Option 2, and an equally single-minded focus on meaning" (Long, 1998, p. 38). While a focus on meaning in the classroom has helped enable a transition toward more communicative-based approaches to language instruction, it has also created challenges, not the least of which is research suggesting that L2 learners progress more quickly in their language development when emphasis is placed on specific language forms (Ellis, 1994; Long, 1988).

The compromise then is what Long (1998) has termed focus-on-form. This approach avoids the binary choices inherent in the form-meaning debate, and instead emphasizes the act of drawing students' attention to specific language forms within the context of communicative and meaning-based activities. This might mean, for example, following up an information gap activity with a focused discussion of a grammatical form that emerged as a challenge during the activity. This approach allows for a level of responsiveness to student needs in the classroom that is not possible when materials are designed to address certain forms in isolation from one another. By embedding form-focused instruction within communicative activities, instructors encourage students to attend to both meaning and form. This focus-on-form can be either pre-emptive or reactive. Reactive focus-on-form can occur as corrective feedback, such as recast, clarification request and repetition. Pre-emptive focus-on-form instruction about what form to use can be introduced briefly before communicative activities. Both focus-on-form (pre-planned and incidental) correspond to integrated FFI (Spada & Lightbown, 2008), which draws learners' attention to language form when they are engaged in communicative activities.

Effectiveness of FFI

One of the pervasive findings from numerous studies is that the explicit use of FFI can promote language learning (DeKeyser, 1998, 2003; Ellis, 2001; Norris & Ortega, 2001; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). In Norris and Ortega's (2001) meta-analysis, effect sizes were calculated based on a review of 49 research studies looking at explicit and implicit instruction of language forms. The effect size of explicit instruction (both focus-on-forms and focus-on-form) was shown to be significantly larger than that of implicit instruction (both focus-on-forms and focus-on-form). In addition, Norris and Ortega illustrate that the difference of the effect size between explicit focus-on-forms and explicit focus-on-form instruction is small, which might suggest that any type of explicit

FFI works. Contrarily, according to Spada and Lightbown (2008), instruction in which attention is drawn to both forms and meaning is the most effective. Taken as a whole, the effectiveness of types of FFI depends on variables such as the difficulty of the target structures (complexity, salience, variation from learner's L1, etc.) and the learners' proficiency level and language aptitude (DeKeyser, 2003; Spada & Lightbown, 2008).

As Ellis (2016) emphasizes, FFI is not an approach but a procedure or task design feature. Therefore, teachers do not necessarily have to choose one specific FFI type, but they should choose the appropriate one according to the contexts and sometimes combine more than two types in one lesson. DeKeyser (1998) even argues that teachers should avoid using exclusively either forms-focused instruction or meaning-focused instruction. Form-and-meaning association should be made by making explicit knowledge proceduralized and, in the end, automatized through both forms-focused and meaning-focused instruction.

Research conducted by Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, and Doughty (1995) showed that "enhanced input" such as highlighting forms can help learners notice forms and subsequently use them. More explicit input enhancement is thought to facilitate learning more than less explicit input enhancement (Norris & Ortega, 2001; Takimoto, 2008). Ellis (2016) also states that if text enhancement is combined with other techniques, its effectiveness can be increased. Inductive rule discovery is especially beneficial because older learners can use their analytical ability better (DeKeyser, 2003), and the explicit knowledge acquired through inductive instruction is considered to be more accessible in communicative activities (Takimoto, 2008).

Conditions Affecting FFI Selection

There are conditions under which specific FFI types are considered to be more effective. Simple but non-salient forms can be taught more efficiently in explicit and isolated FFI because learners do not easily notice those forms in the input (DeKeyser, 2003; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). On the other hand, forms that are more complex and difficult to describe can be taught more effectively in integrated FFI with the context (DeKeyser, 1998, 2003; Spada & Lightbown, 2008).

In Norris and Ortega's (2001) study, the review of both short and long-term FFI interventions found short-term FFI to have a slightly greater impact on retention than long-term FFI. In this sense, short-term, intensive FFI can be appropriate before using the target structure meaningfully in a communicative activity. According to Jean (as cited in Spada & Lightbown, 2008), vocabulary learning can be better enhanced if it is taught in communicative activities. N. Ellis (1994b) also highlighted the value of implicit learning as beneficial for vocabulary. In addition, other factors that can affect the effectiveness of

FFI types are the learner's developmental stage and age, the nature of target structure (DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2001; Spada & Lightbown, 2008), and the materials (Ellis, 2001).

Another important consideration in the effectiveness of FFI is the sequencing of tasks, both within a classroom lesson and across units or textbooks. As Ellis (2016) argues, the focus-on-meaning, focus-on-form, and focus-on-forms types are not isolated entities but more of a continuum of FFI. Thornbury (1999) and Doughty and Williams (1998b) note that fluency activities (focus on meaning) should come before accuracy activities (focus on forms). Ellis (2016) suggests that focus-on-form is at the center of task-based language and teaching (TBLT). Focused communicative tasks are meaning-focused, have a goal to attain, and have a real-world relationship (Ellis, 2001). Ellis (2016) emphasizes that pre-teaching the target structures before a task can allow learners to be aware of the forms while engaged in the communicative tasks, which can facilitate more learning.

A final point in task sequencing is the notion of Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2007). This theory notes the inherent similarities in adult learning processes. At the outset, adults begin the learning process through primarily explicit means, and, with practice and time, can begin to internalize rules and move toward implicit mastery. This can also be thought of as a progression from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge, with the later constituting an unconscious awareness of how an activity is completed.

Classroom-Based Examples of FFI

To better understand how variations of FFI can be practically applied in classroom settings, it can be helpful to consider a couple of real-life activities. The following two examples each incorporate an FFI component in different ways. In the first example, a jigsaw reading focuses students on meaning first, and this is followed-up by form-focused and attention-raising activities. In the second example, FFI is integrated into communicative discussion activities to enhance the students' abilities to fully participate.

Example 1: Jigsaw reading to FFI (from meaning to form)

One example is a set of classroom activities whose task sequencing starts with a top-down focus (on meaning) first through a jigsaw reading, and then shifts to a bottom-up focus (on forms) afterwards. In the jigsaw reading, students read an allotted passage in groups with guided questions provided by a teacher. Each group reads a different portion of the overall text. They discuss the meaning of the passage in a group, individually create a short summary of the passage, and peer assess their summary with a checklist in groups. Then students form a new group with students who read a different allotted passage. Each expert explains their part to other members, using the summary they created. They confirm the understanding of the members, using guided questions. After

all the experts report their parts and students have the whole picture of the reading, the teacher asks comprehension questions and each group answers them. Throughout the whole jigsaw reading activity, *student attention is drawn to meaning*.

After this, students are given a homework handout that directs their attention to the forms from the reading. For homework, students read numerous examples which include the target structure (e.g., *wherever/whenever/however* structures), and they make sentences using the structure and/or draw pictures describing the meaning. Example sentences and sample pictures were given in the handout (e.g., *Whenever you go out, it always rains in the fall in Oregon*). Then, in the next lesson, students in groups give a quiz to each other showing pictures and have other members guess the sentence. Since this form (wherever/whenever/however SV) is salient but hard to explain and comprehend, the form-focused activity is contextualized with pictures and student-created sentences, which helps students' comprehension. Although students' attention is on the target structure, they are also engaged in the meaning, which gives the activity both FFI and communicative components. At this point, the teacher may also wish to provide some focused examples of the target forms as well. Finally, students have an opportunity to read the passages again to solidify their comprehension of both meanings and forms.

In example 1, meaning is foregrounded in the lesson, but the incorporation of FFI is clear as well. Students are not so much explicitly taught rules related to the target forms, but rather they are allowed to identify the forms independently and contextualize them within their own writing and drawing. The activities are primarily student-centered, allowing them to take some ownership of the learning process.

Example 2: Topic selection for presentation (FFI integrated into communication)

One example in classroom practice where FFI is integrated into Communicative Language Teaching is a ranking activity conducted as students prepare to give a presentation. In this activity, students are placed into groups and each group is required to select a topic for a future group presentation. A ranking activity for choosing a topic for the group presentation requires students to brainstorm, express their opinions, discuss and negotiate meaning, and reach consensus in groups. It involves higher order thinking skills such as analyzing, comparing, and synthesizing information.

For many students, it can be less challenging to brainstorm possible topics and explain them because this is primarily a unilateral form of communication; students are simply asked to share their own ideas and opinions. However, when it comes to discussion, negotiation of meaning and reaching consensus, this bilateral form of communication may be more challenging for some groups of students. This is particularly true for students at the intermediate proficiency level and below who may

have limited discourse competence in their L2. Learners at this level can benefit from having a fixed set of communicative structures as part of their overall repertoire.

These types of fixed structures are sometimes referred to as sentence frames or communication frames. For example, students in this context might want to be aware of the value of softening "I disagree" to "I'm not sure I agree." To integrate FFI into this component of the lesson, the teacher would simply monitor the group discussions and take notes on common forms and structures that students are struggling with. After several minutes of group discussion, the teacher might wish to pause the activity and give a five-minute lecture on three or four forms that students could incorporate into their discussion. Even after they learn useful chunks and expressions for discussion for the first time, students should be reminded of them before discussion every time until they are automatized. These forms might be placed on the board or projected onto the screen so students can refer to them during subsequent conversation.

FFI of this nature, integrated as it is into discussion group activities, has the obvious benefit of being responsive to student needs. The structures themselves are adaptable depending on the activity and the students' performance during that activity. Also, as the presentation of the forms is necessarily short, the students are still allowed a significant amount of time to internalize the new structures and begin to incorporate them into their own productive language use.

Conclusion

FFI comes in a range of styles and approaches, and teachers should be aware of how different types of FFI can be integrated into their teaching practice to best meet the needs of their learners. As with most aspects of English language teaching, FFI does not present a one-size-fits-all approach for teachers. Instead, decisions about how and when to incorporate FFI into the classroom experience are context-based and impacted by a wide range of factors including the students age and language proficiency level, the teacher's comfort level with instruction in specific forms, the lesson content, and the background knowledge and experience of the students.

As was highlighted by the two examples given here, FFI's advantages in the classroom can be numerous. In a well-balanced pedagogical approach, students can be encouraged to focus on both form and meaning in a given activity, and the form-focused instruction can be customized to student needs and may only take a limited amount of class time. Another advantage is that, in many EFL contexts in particular, there often exists a tension between focus on meaning and focus on form. Many countries now have a nationalized English language curricula that encourages communicative language learning and an emphasis on meaning; however, these same countries continue to assess students' language proficiency based primarily on knowledge of the form and structure of

the language. FFI can provide a middle ground here, as it allows teachers and students to develop their communicative skills in parallel with development of their knowledge of specific language structures and forms.

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Teaching Note

Developing Undergraduate ELL's *Quick Response* Skills

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Key Words: *Large lecture, Assessment, Oral communication*

After spending several years investigating the needs of non-native English speakers in undergraduate courses at a large public university, it became apparent to me that one of the main challenges facing these students is speaking up during large lecture classes. In such classes, two specific speaking skills students need are 1) asking questions for clarification, either to the professor or other classmates, and 2) conferencing with nearby classmates to answer clicker questions (Sheppard et al., 2015). Clickers are a type of personal response system used by instructors to make large lecture classes more engaging and participatory (Mayer et al., 2008). Instead of asking 100 or more students to raise hands to answer an adjunct question, clickers allow everyone in the class to answer the question, giving the teacher an immediate opportunity for formative feedback. This becomes a speaking task when students are given the chance to confer with neighbors about the possible answers, which is common practice.

Both of these speaking tasks – asking clarification questions and conferencing with nearby classmates – require students to quickly formulate utterances in English. However, the introductory listening and speaking course for undergraduate ELLs at my institution has no such objectives and does not offer students much practice with these *quick response* skills. The course instead focuses on planned speaking tasks like presentations and leading discussions. Seeing this gap, I recently piloted the following objective in the course: ELLs will be able to quickly formulate short, meaningful, coherent comments and questions in response to an audiovisual message.

In order to give students adequate practice and create a valid assessment of these skills, I collected videos of undergraduate lectures – in this case, an undergraduate introductory chemistry course for science majors. I combed through the videos to create an archive of two different types of one-to-two-minute excerpts: 1) when the professor was posing a clicker question to the class, and 2) when the professor was describing a diagram or concept that involved an important visual component.

Once I had prepared these collections of shortened video clips, I used them in class for formative assessment. To do this, I would simply play a shortened excerpt in class and have students respond appropriately, based on a prescribed set of characteristics for each response. For posed clicker questions, in order to mimic conferencing with a neighbor in a large lecture class, students were to respond to a neighbor with a quick (less than 30 second) comment that included the following characteristics: comprehensible grammar and pronunciation, a clear opinion, brief support for that opinion, and a phrase that passed the turn to the interlocutor. For the other type of quick response practice (asking clarification questions), we would listen to the excerpt together, then students would ask me questions, as if I were the professor in the excerpt. They needed to include these parts in their questions: getting the speaker's attention, creating context for the question, asking the question, listening to the answer, and briefly responding to show some level of understanding. These clarification questions needed to be formulated in under 30 seconds, using understandable grammar and pronunciation. Throughout the term, we practiced these *quick response* skills a number of times in class.

To summatively assess these *quick response* skills, I utilized our institution's learning management system, Canvas. I set up an online assignment in which students had to watch a short video excerpt (not one that we had practiced with, but identical in style and length) and then create a recording of an appropriate *quick response*. Students needed to complete the assessment within a short amount of time, as soon as class was dismissed. These individual recorded responses were evaluated with a simple rubric (*Fig. 1*).

Figure 1.

Making a Quick Comment

_____ Giving a clear opinion
_____ Supporting reasons / examples / explanation
_____ Passing the turn
_____ Using understandable grammar
_____ Using understandable pronunciation
_____ Being reasonably fluent

+ = excellent
√+ = good
√ = so-so
√- = not good
- = incomplete or poor

Asking a Quick Question

_____ Getting the speaker's attention
_____ Creating context for the question
_____ Asking a clear question
_____ Indicating some level of understanding of the response
_____ Using understandable grammar and correct question form
_____ Using understandable pronunciation
_____ Being reasonably fluent

Scoring video submissions can take much longer than scoring written submissions, but since these online student recordings were short (less than 30 seconds each), it was

very manageable. Using the rubric above, it took me little more than one minute per student to score these assessments.

At the beginning of the term, I noticed that students particularly struggled with the skills of "passing the turn," "creating context for the question," and "using the correct question form." We spent much of the allotted time focusing on these three specific *quick response* skills. By the end of the ten-week term, students were almost always correcting each other automatically, offering phrases like "What does _____ mean?" instead of something like "What means _____?" They were also much more likely to ask for each other's opinions after offering their own, and had developed the ability to create context for questions with teacher-provided stock phrases like "I understood the part when you were explaining about _____, but I'm still confused about _____. Could you help me with that?" On the last of three summative *quick response* assessments, all students earned at least a passing score (a minimum of √ on the rubric), with half of them earning an A (a mix of + and √+ on the rubric).

Adding *quick response* skills to the ELL's listening and speaking course filled a gap in the curriculum and allowed students to practice the unique speaking skills that they need in large undergraduate lecture classes.

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Teaching Note

Using Emotions and Personal Memory Associations to Acquire Vocabulary

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Keywords: *vocabulary, emotion, personal memory associations,*

Introduction

Of all the possible tools we have to help our English language learners (ELLs) acquire vocabulary, the use of emotions is one of the most powerful because "we are learning that emotions are the result of multiple brain and body systems that are distributed over the whole person" (Ratey, 2002, p. 223). If we go one step further and connect emotions to memories, we have a very effective set of teaching and learning tools. This procedural Teaching Note, then, looks specifically at how the use of Personal Memory Associations (PMAs) and their link to the emotions significantly help ELLs personalize, internalize, and genuinely learn lexical items.

Explanation and Employment of Personal Memory Associations

PMA is a particular, personal, and genuine memory that a student has of a person, event, or place. It does not have to be sensational in any way; rather, the memory can be very simple. It merely needs to have value in the student's psyche and involve a crucial emotional connection.

Once the essential information of a term, such as definition and part of speech, is addressed (see explanation of the process below), I have my ELLs connect a PMA with the lexical item (i.e., the word, phrase, or idiom) we are studying. My current and former students have become avid proponents of PMAs primarily because of the immediate connection these associations have to their lives. From an instructor's point of view, I consider the PMAs to be instrumental because they are real, student-generated, and directly linked to each ELL's unique and complex emotional network.

Let's take the lexical item "blissful" as an example. One student recently wrote the following about the term: "'Blissful' reminds me of my fifth birthday. I can still see the pink cake, taste the cake. There was great joy on that day." Another student wrote, "This term reminds me of my father looking with affection at my mother at the dinner table." As we can see from the content of these PMAs, the associations are very personal and based on strong emotional attachments. These associations fortify a long-term bond with the lexical items and create a special sense of tangibility in the students' minds. The words take on an intimate quality and consequently develop into a fixed, genuine, and meaningful part of the students' personhood.

A Note on the Head-to-Toe Method of Associations for Vocabulary Acquisition

It should be noted that I do not use the PMAs in isolation. I have found it best to use them in conjunction with other parts of my Head-to-Toe Method of Associations for Vocabulary Acquisition. I typically use the first six components of my method and then address the PMAs. The six parts include having the students:

(1) infer the definition of a term;

(2) identify its part of speech;

(3) decide the *verbpathy*; i.e., the positive or negative "feeling" of the term (e.g., "blissful" would be positive);

(4) associate a color with the term (e.g., "blissful" is often associated with green or pink);

(5) associate an emotion with the term (e.g., "blissful" evokes emotions like "excitement," or "peacefulness"), and

(6) come up with student-generated examples that demonstrate proper use and understanding of the term.

Once these six components are employed with confidence and comfort, we turn to the PMAs. For a full explanation of this method and its tools, see Randolph (2016).

Variations of Using and Producing PMAs

The cultivation of PMAs can be done in a number of ways. An instructor can

(1) elicit PMAs from volunteers in class as a group activity (this is done in the same way that example sentences are elicited);

(2) have students pair up and exchange the PMAs for each term and then write them down;

(3) assign one- or two-sentence PMAs as written homework; or

(4) assign a short-paragraph of a PMA as homework.

Recommended Levels

Using PMAs can be employed at all levels of instruction, from basic to advanced. However, the more vocabulary a student has, the better he/she will be able to articulate a PMA and relate it to a lexical item. I recommend that instructors vary the depth of PMA descriptions to correspond with their students' vocabulary knowledge. Although I have not used this at the K-12 level, I think it would work nicely given the proper scaffolding. I have used PMAs in most levels of my IEP and also in my advanced English university classes for ELLs with great success.

Concluding Remarks

Neuroscientists, Davidson and Begley (2013), have shown that "emotions… are central to the functions of the brain and to the life of the mind" (p. xi). Medina's (2009) research has demonstrated "[t]he more elaborately we encode information at the moment of learning, the stronger the memory" (p. 110). My ELL students consistently claim that the six basic components of vocabulary acquisition truly help elicit powerful memories; these memories are then turned into the crucial tools to help encode vocabulary through the PMAs. Moreover, PMAs allow ELLs to combine the meanings of terms with their own memories and feelings. These meanings, memories, and feelings are synthesized and consequently form a solid and intricate web of profound lexical item understanding and use.

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Research Note

Using VocabularySpellingCity with Adult ESOL Students in Community College

Tim Krause, Portland Community College

Keywords: *VocabularySpellingCity, vocabulary, spelling, adult ESOL, CALL, Community College*

Vocabulary acquisition is central to language learning, and many instructors believe that technology can facilitate this core activity. While numerous websites and apps offer language-learning activities and games, not all provide evidence that their content and techniques are effective. VocabularySpellingCity (VSC), however, commissioned a study in 2016 to document its effectiveness. Researchers at McREL, a nonprofit education research and development organization, found favorable results among mostly native English-speaking primary school students, including a 43% increase in vocabulary retention scores as measured by pre- and post-tests of 143 students in a southeastern U.S. elementary school (Arens & Mace, 2017).

VSC is a website and app that provide users with activities to learn vocabulary, spelling, phonics, and writing. Instructors create study lists by specifying words, definitions, and sample sentences before assigning activities. They can also monitor individual student progress (scores) as well as participation (time spent and number of activities completed).

Although designed for K-12 students, VSC is popular among my community college colleagues, and I was interested in learning if findings by McREL hold true for adult ESOL students. Therefore, in fall 2017, I conducted a study similar to Arens & Mace (2017) that involved 22 intermediate writing students and 18 academic reading students at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon. I wanted to know if students who chose to use VSC would demonstrate greater improvement in vocabulary retention compared to those who chose other study methods.

Before the term began, I prepared word lists for each course. The intermediate writing course was assigned 10 weekly lists, each containing eight words drawn from the course's grammar textbook, *Grammar for Great Writing A* (Blass, Folse & Mitchell,

2017). The reading course was assigned 10 weekly lists, each containing 10 words drawn from course readings on CommonLit, a website that provides reading passages and instructional material. In choosing words, I gave preference to those with high relevance to course topics and high frequency on the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2017).

Participants in the study first completed a pre-test at the start of the term by matching a random sample of the words with their definitions or by using them to complete sentences. Then I described a number of common ways to study vocabulary (e.g., flashcards, journals) before demonstrating VSC and distributing individual premium accounts provided by the college. Each week, participants received a new word list with a set of five recommended VSC activities (Which Word? Sentences; MatchIt Definitions; Parts of Speech; Flashcards; and Practice Vocabulary Test). While all participants were assigned the same words to learn, use of VSC was voluntary. Participants could complete the assigned VSC activities; select different VSC activities; or utilize other study methods of their choosing. During the final week of the term, participants completed a post-test identical to the pre-test as part of their final exam.

I downloaded VSC usage data and calculated differences in test scores to identify changes from beginning of term to end of term. I first sorted the data by time spent using VSC, dividing each class into two groups following a naturally occurring separation in the data. Among writing students, the range for "non-users" was 0-59 minutes over 11 weeks compared to 165-570 minutes over 11 weeks for "users." Among reading students, the range for "non-users" was 0-37 minutes over 11 weeks compared to 118-752 minutes over 11 weeks for "users." While average scores for both groups increased, Table 1 shows that the change for students who used VSC was greater than the change for students who did not use VSC: 50.0% versus 30.3% for writing students; 137.0% versus 47.5% for reading students.

To further explore the characteristics of successful students, I re-sorted the "users" of each course into two groups equal in size according to the change in scores from pre-test to post-test. Table 2 shows that, on average, participants with lower pre-test scores saw the largest change. Conversely, on average, participants who started the term with higher pre-test scores made less improvement over the course of the term despite spending a higher number of minutes per week using VSC.

I theorize that this result is at least partially due to advanced students spending an inordinate amount of time practicing words they had already mastered instead of focusing on unfamiliar words. This is because each VSC activity repeats the complete set of words on a list rather than providing a dynamic assessment that recognizes student errors and shifts focus to those words automatically. While VSC does have an option to create personalized review lists based on past performance, preparing those lists is a manual process for the instructor, and therefore not utilized in this study concerning adult ESOL

Table 1: Change in scores by time spent using VocabularySpellingCity (VSC)

	Range of average minutes per week using VSC (mean)	Mean pre-test scores	Mean post-test scores	Percent increase
Level 5 Intermediate Writing - "Non-Users" (n=10)	0.0 to 5.4 (2.4)	8.9	11.6	30.3%
Level 5 Intermediate Writing - "Users" (n=12)	15.0 to 51.8 (24.3)	7.5	11.3	50.0%
Level 8 Academic Reading - "Non-Users" (n=8)	0.0 to 3.4 (0.8)	9.9	14.6	47.5%
Level 8 Academic Reading - "Users" (n=10)	10.7 to 68.4 (32.6)	5.4	12.8	137.0%

Table 2 Time spent using VocabularySpellingCity (VSC) by change in test scores

	Mean pre-test scores	Mean post-test scores	Percent increase	Range of average minutes per week using VSC (mean)
Level 5 Intermediate Writing - Lower Change (n=6)	8.5	10.0	17.6%	16.0 to 51.8 (26.9)
Level 5 Intermediate Writing - Higher Change (n=6)	6.5	12.5	92.3%	15.0 to 30.7 (21.7)
Level 8 Academic Reading - Lower Change (n=5)	7.0	10.2	45.7%	17.5 to 68.4 (36.3)
Level 8 Academic Reading - Higher Change (n=5)	3.8	15.4	305.3%	10.7 to 52.7 (29.0)

students using VSC independently outside the classroom. Study results, however, suggest that incorporating this step might be necessary to improve the performance of advanced students.

This study has a number of limitations and, therefore, questions for further research. The first is how VSC compares with other tools and strategies, and what advantages one may have over the other. In other words, can higher scores be attributed to VSC specifically, or were they simply the result of more intentional study? Could another tool, such as Quizlet, provide the same results? A second question concerns time and motivation. What is the minimum number of minutes per week for learners to make reasonable gains in vocabulary, and at what point do they begin to see diminishing returns? A third question is what factors differentiate implementation in a community college setting wherein adult students are more likely to work independently rather than in class under the direction of a teacher. For example, will scores increase further if advanced students create their own review lists for more efficient study? If community college instructors identify best practices and carefully curate the experience, then the data suggest their adult ESOL students are likely to benefit from using VSC.

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Book Review

A Review of *New Ways in Teaching with Humor*

Reviewed by Davida Jordan, Portland State University and Portland Community College

Rucynski, J. (2017) *New ways in teaching with humor,* Alexandria, VA: TESOL Press.

Editors' Note: ORTESOL would like to thank TESOL Press for providing this book free of charge.

My first thought about this book about humor was, if you need to read a book about humor, you might be in trouble. Humor is natural and innate, isn't it? Yes and no. Some teachers are naturally funny, while others struggle with feeling comfortable enough in their own skin to venture into the world of humor in the classroom. Wherever you are on the humor spectrum, as an ESL teacher, you can find something useful in *New Ways in Teaching with Humor*, edited by John Rucynski, Jr. and published by TESOL Press.

New Ways in Teaching with Humor is a compilation of over 100 ESL lesson plans arranged in seven different humor categories such as "Wordplay and Puns," "Comics and Cartoons," and "Sitcoms and Movies." The editor received a three year grant from the Japanese government to research humor in teaching and learning language, and there is quite a bit of other research being done in this field as well. For example, by reading this book, you will explore Schmitz's three types of humor: universal or reality-based humor, culture-based humor, and linguistic or word-based humor. You may already be familiar with Hofstede, but by reading *New Ways in Teaching with Humor*, you will learn about his work as it relates to differences in humor between cultures. Finally, you will be introduced to Washington State professor Nancy Bell, who has done a great deal of work regarding humor in the ESL classroom and whose writing is referenced in many sections of this book.

Once you have been convinced that there is solid academic research that supports using humor in the ESL classroom, you will be ready to put some of this theory into practice. *New Ways in Teaching with Humor* contains quite a few suggestions for how to analyze American and British humor with your students. For example, teachers can study all about humor by reading Quock's JALT presentation, "Laughing matters: On the

theory and teaching of Western humor", and how it can be utilized in the EFL/ESL classroom, and then screen several episodes of the hit American sitcom Seinfeld for their students to see if they can identify what makes Jerry and his friends' interactions so funny.

New Ways in Teaching with Humor also provides a wealth of creative ideas to bring life into your classroom by having fun and being funny while not necessarily engaging in any kind of dissection of what makes it funny. For example, how about teaching pronunciation through humorous posters that gently point out mistakes: "parking at the beach" vs. "barking at the peach"? This silly image might be just what a student needs to remember to attend to his/her pronunciation.

Using humor can help us with practical tasks that need to be accomplished, such as reading the syllabus. One contributor suggests a syllabus quiz, which many of us already do, peppered with jokes such as "How often should you bring chocolate to the teacher?" to make sure students are reading carefully. Another lesson plan expands on a typical method of practicing pronunciation: tongue twisters. Instead of simply teaching students tongue twisters, why not have them write their own, focusing on the target sounds? The results might be funnier than the original! An inventive writing lesson, "Humor and Digital Literacy: Teaching Cohesion through Tonight Show Hashtags," compares hashtags to topic sentences and tweets to supporting sentences. What an interesting way to bring the five paragraph essay into modernity!

Overall, *New Ways in Teaching with Humor* serves its purpose, but I had a few complaints. Some sections were a bit repetitive and could have been improved by removing lessons with overlapping themes. Bypass the section on first-world problems and memes unless you are prepared to enter into a discussion on how class, geographic location, race, and gender play a part in what kinds of problems we have. Otherwise, you may end up with a bewildered class filled with students who do not understand why not having the latest version of the iPhone qualifies as a problem. Likewise, many of the ambitious teachers who contributed lessons to this book attempt to teach rather difficult concepts in humor such as sarcasm and irony, concepts which have always fallen flat when I have tried to teach them. They do not offer any magic formulas for how to make these subtle forms of humor more clear, probably because there aren't any! I also would have liked short bios on each contributor. Seeing as our background informs our sense of humor, it would be interesting to see how each contributor's context informed his/her lesson.

I often tell my students that they will know they have arrived at their next level of fluency and proficiency when they start dreaming in English. Rucynski and his contributors posit that perhaps understanding a joke in English is just as significant of a milestone. The cultural and linguistic competency required to laugh heartily at a joke in

another language is a true accomplishment. Perhaps you will find a humorous idea in this compilation that will help set your students on the path to English success.

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Book Review

A Review of *Beyond Repeat After Me: Teaching Pronunciation to English Learners*

Reviewed by Mika Sakai, Portland State University

Yoshida, M. T. (2016). *Beyond repeat after me: Teaching pronunciation to English learners.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL Press.

Editors' Note: ORTESOL would like to thank TESOL Press for providing this book free of charge.

   "Repeat after me" used to be heard frequently in ESL or EFL classes. Students repeated after their teachers, trying to sound like them without knowing what they were doing. Back in the old days, from my personal experiences, it was very common that teachers did not spend a lot of time teaching pronunciation and could not explain how the English sounds were produced or why they sounded a certain way. Since the 1990s, the different approaches and methods of teaching pronunciation have been actively discussed, and currently one of the most prominent approaches is the Morley approach, which focuses more on three dimensions of learning: intellectual involvement, affective involvement, and physical or performative involvement (Morley, 1991). This book, *Beyond Repeat After Me: Teaching Pronunciation to English Learners*, is based on Morley's approach. Marla Tritch Yoshida, whose experience includes over 28 years of English language teaching and teacher training, wrote the book for EFL or ESL teachers, including non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST), in order to help them learn about the basic American English phonology, typical problems that students may have, and effective teaching tools and activities. Additionally, an accompanying website that contains sound recordings and video tutorials as textbook supplements is available at www.tesol.org/beyondrepearafterme for no additional cost.

   Beyond repeat after me: Teaching Pronunciation to English Learners has a total of 187 pages, which can be considered to be a concise textbook compared to other thick, heavy textbooks. It is organized in 15 chapters, starting with an introduction and ending with final thoughts and references. Overall, it is divided in three sections. The first section, from chapter 1 through chapter 7, focuses on sound production, including

phonology, articulatory system, consonants, and vowels. The second section, from chapter 8 through chapter 12, focuses on suprasegmental features. The final section covers activities, resources, teaching tips, the author's philosophy, and the English spelling system.

In the first section, the author gives teachers the basic concepts of phonology, and how to articulate English consonants and vowels using charts and pictures, which is effective for learners to develop their self-monitoring skills in pronunciation. Learning how to produce sounds that are different from their L1 is a cognitive process, and is the beginning of "Beyond Repeat After Me" teaching approach. Since pronunciation is instant and complex, sound production integrates cognitive, physical and communicative aspects, and the book's charts and pictures are useful materials for learners as quick references to figure out which part of articulatory system needs to be used and to create an accurate sound.

In the second section, suprasegmentals such as syllables, word stress, rhythm, thought groups, prominence, intonation, and connected speech are introduced as important features. Many activities, tips, examples and websites that teachers can use in the actual classes are also introduced here. The activities are arranged by three modes: imitated mode, guided mode, and extemporaneous mode (Morley, 1991), and this helps to teach pronunciation gradually according to learners' learning speeds and stages.

In the last section, the author encourages teachers to be creative and mindful in teaching pronunciation; there is no "the absolute way of teaching pronunciation." Teachers have to consider many factors such as learners' ages, skill levels, L1s, goals, available resources, constraints, and preferences. Importantly, she recommends finding a time to teach pronunciation, integrating a quick pronunciation lesson between activities, at the beginning or ending of a lesson, or as a part of other skills' exercises. As final thoughts, she suggests that pronunciation should be taught using a balanced approach of individual sounds and suprasegmental elements, with the final goal of pronunciation being intelligibility.

One concern is that at least one of the websites that she introduces is no longer available.

In conclusion, this is a handy, informative textbook that teachers will want to carry with them. It covers the key factors in teaching pronunciation in order to help learners to reach advanced intelligibility. Furthermore, it can be used as a reference textbook even for learners.

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