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**Journal of the Oregon Teachers of
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In this Issue

Articles in this issue of *The ORTESOL Journal* focus on a variety of issues of interest to professional language educators. Each article relates theory to practical suggestions for the classroom teacher.

- In the lead article Allan Klein draws on his experience in special education and in teaching English as a Second Language to explore the question of learning disabilities and ESL students. His article provides educators with basic information about learning disabilities and their relationship to problems with attention, memory, language, and pragmatic skills. It also offers practical advice for ESL teachers who think they may be dealing with an LD student.
- Suwako Watanabe applies discourse analysis techniques to examine differences in communication styles between American and Japanese students in small group discussions. Cultural differences are found in strategies for turn-taking, selection of a leader, and presentation of arguments during a turn. Her article closes with specific suggestions for teaching ESL students how to be more effective participants in group discussions in American classrooms.
- AnnKatrin Jonsson reviews arguments for and against the teaching of grammar in a communicative classroom. She applies a model offered by Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, integrating form, meaning, and use, to the teaching of the s-passive in Swedish. She then examines four English language grammar books to see whether they teach present and present progressive tenses in accordance with the form-meaning-use framework.
- Kathryn Brunette describes her own classroom-based research into the use of journals, focusing on the relationship between topic assignment and length of journal entry. Her article also reports on student attitudes toward journal writing and student reactions to the instructor's comments on their journals.

Also in this issue:

- **Review:** Angela Zagarella-Chodosh reviews the second edition of Andrew Cohen's Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom, and contrasts it with the first edition, which had a much narrower focus. She recommends the book enthusiastically for test constructors, research students, and classroom teachers.
- **Teaching Notes:** Dorothy Messerschmitt, currently president of CATESOL, the California affiliate of TESOL, is interested in the cultural phenomenon of lying and its relationship to Grice's maxim of quality (be truthful). She looks at several examples of lying behavior in children's literature and offers teaching suggestions to help ESL teachers approach this topic in a non-threatening way.

—The Editors

BASIC CONCEPTS OF LEARNING DISABILITIES AS THEY RELATE TO ESL STUDENTS

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Abstract

How does an ESL teacher know if a weak student has a learning disability? This article discusses definitions, research, and remediation relevant to this question. Topics include the origins and development of learning disabilities (LD) as a field of study and explanations of problems involving deficits in attention, memory, language, and pragmatic skills. Special mention is given to reading difficulties, including dyslexia. Research on learning disabilities among foreign language learners is also summarized. Phonological remediation is discussed, and related strategies to improve LD student performance are introduced. The article also offers practical advice, including some precautions, for teachers who think they may be dealing with an LD student. Included is an informal LD screening instrument modified so it can be used effectively by ESL instructors. The author summarizes some personal teaching experiences and concludes by discussing realistic expectations for both teachers and students.

Sompong, a Thai student in our intensive English program, is not succeeding. He is friendly, well liked by the staff, bright, and outgoing. He has been studying with us for about a year and, although he has slowly moved up through our class levels, he is the first to admit that things are not really going well. His syntax has not improved much and his pronunciation remains poor. Yet this very limited success is not for lack of effort or academic interest on his part. He is often studying when his classmates are on break, and he has finished college in his own country and plans to attend graduate school in the United States. Sompong has also just completed a scuba diving course, a feat that impressed me as one requiring not only a good deal of skill, but a fairly high comprehension level in English as well. Thus, when I try to put together a profile of Sompong as a learner, I find there are just

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too many contradictions to make any sense. The pieces of the puzzle do not seem to fit together, which has led me to ask a simple question: Does Sompong have a learning disability?

Other ESL teachers may find themselves asking the same question about students who do not fit the patterns of a slow learner but who are making very little progress in improving their English. This article will discuss definitions, research, remediation, and realistic expectations for both teachers and students. Its purpose is to assist teachers in developing strategies to successfully work with students who may be learning disabled.

Background

While the term "learning disability" (LD) has become in recent years an established part of the pedagogical lexicon, the field itself is in fact relatively new, having emerged only after World War I. Two theoretical perspectives were developed in the years that followed, each originating from a different point of view. Bender (1992) summarizes the development of the field.

One group, the early perceptual-motor theorists, was concerned with impaired perception and delayed motor development as possible causes of learning problems. After the war, Gestalt psychologist Kirk Goldstein observed brain-injured soldiers and noticed that some could no longer read and had a tendency to reverse letters (cited in Bender, 1992). In addition, many appeared distracted and exhibited hyperactivity. His work was generalized, sometimes erroneously, to children with the same symptoms. Despite any overgeneralization, Goldstein's work was seminal because it was the first to suggest that learning problems could have a cause other than retardation and that differential teaching strategies needed to be introduced.

The other perspective, that of the language theorists, was first used with children in the 1920s and 1930s. Dr. Samuel Orton, a neuropathologist, hypothesized that the normal dominance of one brain hemisphere in language—usually the left—was not present in children with language and reading difficulties (cited in Bender, 1992). He also noted that many children had problems with eye and hand dominance. Orton recommended using an educational methodology that included phonics and kinesthetic activities.

The 1960s brought a consolidation of these two differing camps. President John Kennedy's open acknowledgment of his sister Rosemary's

retardation, along with the growing civil rights movement, brought a public enlightenment concerning "handicapping conditions." Also, many LD researchers began to realize that the cause of both perceptual and language problems did not necessarily appear to involve low intelligence or environmental factors. Rather, it seemed to be a brain or central nervous system dysfunction affecting information processing. Dr. Samuel Kirk coined the term "learning disability" in 1962, launching the current collaboration of the two established perspectives (cited in Bender, 1992).

The search for causes of LD continues in the 1990s, as does advancement in assessment technology. While causal factors have little direct impact on the practitioner, it is worth noting some of the major ones being studied. They include genetic factors; the influence of smoking and alcohol during pregnancy; and a long list of post-natal factors, including head injuries, prolonged high fevers, and chemical/lead poisoning. Medical assessment of learning disabilities, traditionally based on neurological examinations, has been greatly advanced recently with the introduction of the PET (positron emission tomography) scan, which can picture different areas of the brain and estimate the metabolism in each. This is important since inactivity in a given part of the brain is seen as a possible condition leading to a learning disability.

While the causes of learning disabilities are not yet entirely clear, the types of problems that LD students encounter are well documented. The research cited below involves native speakers of English, generally children, the majority of whom are not studying another language. However, there are some general concepts that appear valid for learning disabled second language learners as well.

Attention Deficits

The first problem, one which affects all subsequent learning, is attention. Attention involves more than just staring at the teacher. It encompasses both the amount of time spent on task, also known as attention span, and the self-directing of focus. Both of these areas present problems for LD students.

While nonhandicapped students use an average of 60-80% of the time available to them for concentrating on a task, students with learning disabilities show only a 30-60% rate (Bryan & Wheeler, 1972; McKinney & Feagans, 1983). Time on task, then, is something that should be monitored

as a consistent indicator of disability. Likewise, the ability to focus attention on relevant stimuli forms a key part of learning (Bender, 1992) and thus is also a trait teachers should take note of. If students cannot filter out interfering stimuli, whether outside noises, internal hunger pangs, or emotional upsets, it will be extremely difficult for them to master a lesson's necessary information.

Such distractibility could be evidence of a problem with selective attention, that is, determining which stimuli are essential and which aspects of a given stimulus are useful. Selective attention is a crucial component of classroom participation and success (Ross, 1976). Students who achieve at high levels are those who can return their wandering thoughts to a lecture being presented and focus on the message, not the nasality of the speaker's voice. Additionally, they use selective attention in order to "get the gist" of a story by breaking down numerous pieces of information that are too big to be sifted through at the same time (Leahey & Harris, 1985). Research suggests that LD students have difficulty developing in this area (Ross, 1976).

There are specific auditory and visual strategies that can be used to help students having trouble with attention. One is the use of oral cues, such as, "Here are three specific examples that I want to show you," or "Point number two is..." Another is careful organization of the space on the blackboard to help students key their attention to the matter at hand. Dividing the space into a consistent and reliable framework of rectangles helps students selectively attend. They know where to look for important classroom information, such as the daily homework assignments (Klausman, 1993).

Memory-Related Problems

If attention is the cornerstone beginning the learning process, then memory is its foundation, which keeps all future learning intact. It is not unlike an office's filing system for important papers: a careful and organized system allows for easy retrieval of needed data, while a messy one leads to frustration. People who have "messy" memories are often absent minded and seem to be continually stumbling through life. It is easy for them to forget things because they do not know where they have stored information in the "cluttered files" of their minds (Levine, 1990). The brief overview of memory that follows provides a basic context for explaining some problems that LD students might encounter, but it is not intended to be a comprehensive view of all aspects of and models for memory.

The first step in being able to retain information is understanding the sensory input. Levine (1990) states that such sensory storage is dependent on the ability to attend to input and discriminate between which parts of it are worth keeping and which are not. Students with attentional problems often fail at this vital task. They may store many unimportant details, while neglecting to retain much necessary information.

The next step is encoding new information in the working memory, where information is held until a decision is made on further processing (Torgesen, 1985). Encoding begins with the previously mentioned segmenting of information into manageable blocks of stimuli. Later it can be stored in long-term memory, if it has future use, or discarded, if it is needed for only a brief period of time. An important point is that for information to be placed in long-term storage, it must first be registered deeply enough to make a lasting impression. Adequate depth of processing is crucial for success in learning (Lockhart & Craik, 1990).

The purpose of memory is to drive performance. For information to be usable, it must be catalogued in the memory files and be retrieved quickly and accurately by the working memory (Torgesen, 1985). The importance of the memory process is illustrated by the example of a teacher's assignment for a student to write a paragraph. The student must call up not only information on the subject to be written about, but also knowledge of syntax, morphology, and semantics, as well as lower-level skills such as letter formation, left-right sequencing, and capitalization and punctuation.

Learning disabled students have problems in both the storing and retrieving of information. Their problems include paying attention to the wrong details, not segmenting information into usable pieces, not storing information deeply enough, and losing information during the encoding and retrieval process (Levine, 1990). Because of these problems, they exhibit a decreased interest and motivation to try to remember items, a cyclical failure (Ross, 1976; Torgesen, 1985). What is an automatic response for students without learning problems is an intentional and unnatural process for LD students. Categorization and association techniques, such as the ones mentioned in Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies, have been shown to benefit learners with deficits in this area.

Language Deficits

Both attention and memory are general areas that affect all types of learning, so it is necessary to look specifically at language to get a clearer idea of how learning disabilities affect ESL students. LD research has traditionally focused on investigating the syntax, morphology, and semantics of the native speaker. However, recently, the emphasis has shifted to looking at the pragmatic content of real communication situations (Boucher, 1986). Research into syntax and semantics by Wiig, Semel, and Abele (1981) has provided insights into how LD students misunderstand sentences. Their work shows that language breaks down because of two kinds of ambiguity: deep structure/syntactic and word usage/lexical. An example of the former is the sentence, "The girl saw the boy with the binoculars," (did she use the binoculars or see them?) and of the latter, "This will make you smart," (will it hurt you or make you intelligent?). Language tasks were conducted on a group of 12-year-old students with learning disabilities and on various control groups. The results showed that the LD students had a general language function of a 7- to 8-year-old on lexically ambiguous statements and a 5- to 6-year-old level on sentence ambiguity.

The implication for ESL teachers is that suspected LD students may have serious difficulties with any form of language that might not be absolutely clear, including jokes, riddles, teaching instructions, and multiple word meanings.

Although, there has been a great deal of material written about native speakers with language disorders, with Wiig and Semel (1984) particularly acknowledged for their scholarship, an examination of syntactical and morphological problems in isolation, nevertheless, appears to have little relevance to the ESL classroom. The problems of an LD student could be extensive enough to fill an entire grammar book. Wiig and Semel give many examples, including deficits in verb endings, plurals, possessives, comparatives and superlatives, complex sentences, logical connectors, pronouns, and prepositions. Even so, it would be difficult to identify LD students based on such criteria, since most beginning students also exhibit difficulties with at least some of these structures.

Pragmatic Deficits

In contrast to the investigations described above, the research in pragmatics with LD students, though new, is showing some positive results (Bender, 1992). Research has shown that learning disabled students are consistently weak in pragmatic abilities (Boucher, 1986). Specifically, these deficits will manifest themselves in the areas of narrative language, referential communication, and social behavior.

The first of these, narrative language, involves understanding the substance of a story in either spoken or written form. Problems seem to stem from the inability (a) to recall critical information, (b) to understand the story schema showing the connection between various events in the narrative, and (c) to visualize the hierarchical nature of the story manifested through temporal and causal factors (Feagans, 1983). An additional concern is the use of pronouns whose referents are either unspecified or ambiguous (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987). These difficulties combine to pose a serious challenge to LD students.

An example of this situation is provided by Abdullah, a student from the United Arab Emirates, who was repeating and failing our pre-Level 1 program for the third time. He seemed to have a grasp of the concepts of subject-verb agreement and word order and had mastered beginning listening/speaking skills, but he was absolutely lost when it came to reading and writing. The ability to skim a story for the main idea and scan for details was, for him, an exercise in futility. He appeared to have no sense of story hierarchy. His solution to answering basic comprehension questions would be to copy a paragraph verbatim, even when the answer was present in the story's title. The frustration to both Abdullah and his teachers was palpable.

The next deficit area, referential communication, is defined as the ability to communicate specific information to another person and/or to evaluate the adequacy of communication from another (Feagans, 1983). Giving or receiving instructions is an example. Referential communication is complex because it requires the learner to distinguish between complete and incomplete messages and to understand what options for response are available. Students with learning disabilities have difficulty acting upon communication that is not absolutely clear. If they are expected to participate in information gap activities or in any situation where following directions is necessary, problems are liable to result.

The difficulty that some ESL students with learning disabilities have socializing within their own language group is a good example of the third area of pragmatic deficit, social behavior. Particular concerns include poor use of language in social situations, lack of awareness of social cues (including nonverbal ones), incorrect determination of one's own social status, and lack of adaptation to new social environments (Bryan & Bryan, 1983).

The case of Masahiro, a Japanese student, illustrates some of these problems. While he progressed, albeit painfully, from the foundations class to Level 1, his teachers were deeply concerned about his inability to understand or produce more than just beginning English in a spoken or written form. However, what also seemed troublesome was his inappropriate adjustment to social situations in comparison to other Japanese students. Although Masahiro was 18 years old, he acted much younger. His style of dress and basic immaturity added to the feeling that something was not quite right. He let the teachers know that he had a "secret" that was not for public discussion; he had a "girlfriend" in another city. What seemed disturbing was that Masahiro handled these events as if he were a preteen; he would become quite upset if a teacher asked him about his girlfriend while other students were nearby.

Social/sexual issues, while less quantifiable than academic ones, nonetheless can be a crucial indicator of LD. However, care needs to be taken to avoid inappropriate evaluation influenced by cultural differences. Instructors must also note that social behaviors alone are not sufficient evidence to diagnose a learning disability.

Reading and Dyslexia

Unlike some pragmatic deficits, reading problems can be more clearly measured. For most ESL students, especially those in university preparation programs, reading is an essential daily activity. According to Vellutino (1987), words on a page can be identified in two ways: by whole-word processing (examining the visual features, meanings and contexts of words), or by part-whole processing using alphabetic mapping (breaking down words by letter-sound associations). In Vellutino's view, learning to read is not an easy process, and beginning readers have to be able to employ both approaches. Students depending too much on a whole-word strategy, and neglecting alphabetic mapping altogether, are likely to overload visual memory and make errors such as "was"/"saw" and "lion"/"loin."

Conversely, those who use only alphabetic mapping may have fluency and comprehension deficiencies.

Dyslexia is defined in a very narrow sense as an extreme difficulty in learning to identify printed words, presumably as a result of a problem in neurological functioning. It was traditionally thought to be a dysfunction of visual perception/visual memory, but a more current theory, which Vellutino describes, holds that dyslexia is a subtle language deficiency. It stems from (a) phonological-coding deficits (trouble encoding and retrieving from memory), (b) deficient phonemic segmentation (difficulty in distinguishing component sounds of words), (c) insufficient vocabulary development, and (d) inability to discriminate the grammatical and syntactic variations in words and sentences.

Poor readers generally do not understand that words, both spoken and printed, are made up of individual phonemes. As a result, the strategies of alphabetic mapping and letter-sound synthesis (phonetic decoding) do not help them learn to read. The root of such poor phoneme segmentation is in the memory storage of weak representations of letter sounds *and* word names, a broader phonological coding problem (Liberman, Shankweiler, & Liberman, 1989). Poor phoneme segmentation, in turn, can inhibit learning the association between letters and combinations of letters and various sounds, as well as learning printed words as complete entities. Poor readers store words without completely encoding them phonologically, thus not retaining enough clues to retrieve the words when necessary (Vellutino, 1987).

Further, a commonality may exist between the processing of reading and listening (Sinatra, 1990), with some learning disabled students exhibiting deficits in listening comprehension (Berger, 1978). Studies by Crain (1989) support the view that lack of spoken language comprehension among poor readers results from limited phonological processing and from working-memory deficits. Vellutino points out that dyslexic readers show deficits in word recall, and Rudel (1988) reports that they also exhibit weaknesses in naming common objects and numerals. She notes that the learning disabled students studied demonstrated severe circumlocutions, long hesitations, and word substitution errors.

Foreign Language Research

Before examining phonological remediation, it is worthwhile to discuss an additional area of LD research: why high school and college students fail in their foreign language programs. Pimsleur's (1966) research in the 1960s and the development of his Language Aptitude Battery showed that students who were far less successful in foreign language classes than in other subjects had specific problems with what he called "auditory ability," or sound-symbol and sound discrimination tasks. This was determined to be the factor that caused deficiencies in foreign language learning not explained by intelligence or motivation. He also suggested that auditory ability might be an indicator of success in learning to read and write in a person's first language (Pimsleur, Sundland, & McIntyre, 1964).

Recent work by Sparks, Ganschow, and Pohlman (1989) on the connection between native and foreign language learning has been outlined in terms of a "Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis," derived from research by Vellutino and Scanlon (1986) on children with learning disabilities. It speculates that students who are poor foreign language learners are unable to master one or more of the linguistic codes--phonological, syntactic, and semantic. The authors studied high school students who were either at a "high risk" or "low risk" for failure in a foreign language and then compared them with a third group of LD students. Level of risk was determined by foreign-language course grades, teacher recommendations, and results of a screening instrument used to determine likelihood of difficulty in a traditional foreign language classroom. The authors' results found significant differences between the "high risk" group and students with LD on measures of syntax and semantics in both native and foreign language aptitude, with only the latter students doing poorly. However, the authors hypothesized that foreign language learning problems of learning disabled and "high risk" students resulted primarily from deficiencies in phonology and associated rote memory deficits (Sparks, Ganschow, Kenneweg, & Miller, 1991).

In summary, the foreign language research on poor auditory ability and the extensive dyslexia research on deficits in phonological ability suggest a possible connection between problems in learning to read in a first language and difficulty in acquiring a second language. When the added presence of a weakness in listening comprehension is considered, it appears that LD students are likely to fare poorly in both oral and written activities in a foreign language classroom (Sparks, et al., 1991).

Phonological Remediation

To remediate what Sparks et al. (1991) see as weaknesses in teaching a foreign language, the authors propose using a multisensory, direct, and explicit teaching of the phonology of the second language (in this case English). They surmise that this might be the key that enhances an LD foreign language student's ability to "crack the code" of a new language. The Orton-Gillingham method (Gillingham & Stillman, 1960) is based on the idea that a student's auditory, visual, and tactile-kinesthetic pathways are activated at the same time. Thus the students are simultaneously listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all the while strengthening their bottom-up skills. For students, especially beginners, who lack phonemic awareness, providing a "road map" will help make sense of the English phonology system. I have found that both poor learners and those suspected of being learning disabled find comfort and guidance in being taught the phonemes using a systematic approach. Given the phonetic irregularity of written English, sight words, ones that cannot be logically decoded, must also be introduced into the teaching.

In addition to teaching decoding, the instructor should expand the Orton-Gillingham material to include the instruction of syllable patterns and morphemic analysis. The TUTOR programs, multisensory, sequential reading and spelling lessons, form one such curriculum (Henry, 1988; Henry & Redding, 1990). Paying attention to the phonological code is an important aspect of ESL teaching. Current reading approaches focus on providing higher-level, top-down skills in a communicative and contextual base. However, direct instruction of lower-level skills via the sound system may be necessary to reach the goal of an interactive reading program.

Comprehension Strategies

While learning the mechanics of reading, LD students need to become more actively involved in the comprehension of the material (Idol, 1987). Several strategies derived from the studies of metacognition, which teaches the student how to learn, are discussed below.

- **Visual Imagery:** Use of visual imagery helps increase the active involvement of students in learning the material (Ellis, Marshall, & Sabornie, 1989). Closing their eyes, thinking of the scene being read, identifying the

necessary aspects of the story, and then creating a visual image are steps in using this technique.

- **Story Map:** A visual representation of a narrative can greatly benefit LD and/or poor learners who are having difficulty understanding the story's schema. It provides a graphic representation of the story's main events—setting, problem, goal, action, and outcome. This map is a cognitive organizer which helps highlight temporal and causal patterns (a sample of this can be found in Idol [1987]).

- **Illustrations:** There is some evidence that LD students do not actively seek out the relationship between the text and the pictures and that teachers can help them make that cognitive connection. Illustrations may be one more strategy in helping with reading comprehension (Mastropieri & Peters, 1987).

- **TELLS:** "Advanced organizers" are auditory techniques that encourage students to think about a story before reading it, which may increase reading comprehension and oral reading performance. Use of acronyms such as TELLs (Idol-Maestas, 1985) can focus attention and activate existing schemata to prepare for new material. In this technique, the "T" stands for the story's title; "E" means examining pages for clues; "L" refers to looking for important words; the second "L" asks students to look for difficult words and differentiate them from important words; and "S" means setting.

- **Inference Questions:** Learning to answer inference questions that are related to, but independent from, the story may be useful (McCormick & Hill, 1984). Using examples that are not dependent on the story context, but that may provide clues to the story, could activate learning. One such example would be asking students to think about some difficult adjustment they had to make in their lives before they read a story about a foreign student struggling to adjust to life in the United States. Other activities could also include prompting students to predict outcomes and make generalizations based on their experiences.

- **Story Retelling:** Using low-level passages as practice will help LD students develop their narrative skills and improve reading comprehension (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985). Giving the students "WH" questions to use as advanced organizers before they read the passage will give them an

auditory framework to help focus on important details in the narrative. This will also strengthen their selective attention.

- **Oral Reading:** This is an activity that gives learning disabled students as much trouble as silent reading (Rose & Beattie, 1986). Common errors are word omission, incorrect pronunciation, long hesitation before words, and lack of comprehension of material read. Research has shown that the advanced organizer technique of previewing the material by hearing it read will decrease the oral reading errors. Taping the story so students can hear it before reading it provides an opportunity for the teacher to watch and see if the students appear to be understanding the plot.

Recommendations

Several broad recommendations about learning disabilities could be helpful for *ESL* teachers. Some of these are influenced by the work of Robin Schwartz (1994), an *ESL/LD* instructor at The English Language Institute of The American University. Because *LD* students have weaknesses in memory functions, teachers should look for students who often forget one day the skills learned the day before. This inconsistency will manifest itself in highly irregular performance. Often the student will not profit from the teacher's written or oral corrections and may interpret assignments in unusual ways. Some *LD* students may start out doing well, but as the term proceeds, will begin missing homework and will be increasingly tardy and absent from class. Others may be highly motivated, hardworking students who seem to be beating their heads against the wall. There are some students with learning disabilities who are overly willing to please, while others may try to conceal their deficits by becoming the class clown or by exhibiting surly, uncooperative behavior. There is no single identifying trait that will act as a red flag to pinpoint students with *LD*.

Although students with learning disabilities do share some academic problems with slow learners—though on a continuum *LD* is much more severe—these same disabled learners can excel in other areas of life. Masahiro, the Japanese student mentioned earlier, is an accomplished clarinetist who was invited to perform with the university orchestra. Abdullah, from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was on the national soccer team. I must put in a caveat, however, that the students mentioned in this paper were only suspected of being learning disabled. Formal assessment is discussed below.

LD is not a medical condition that can be "fixed." Successful students learn to compensate for problems by circumventing weaknesses (grammar and spell-check software can be useful tools when their proper use is taught and monitored by the instructor). In addition, no single characteristic can be used to decide if there is a learning difficulty. Teachers in an intensive English program should look for clusters of problems and wait for six months before making any decisions about remediation or alternative placement for a student.

Assessment

It is not possible to obtain a truly representative score for ESL students on a standardized assessment of intelligence written for English speakers. However, the preceding information, along with a portfolio of work and comments from teachers, can give a school a good idea of who may be learning disabled. A writing sample in the student's first language may offer some insights regarding his/her overall syntactical ability, if someone can translate the sample. In addition, Ganschow and Sparks (1991) have developed "A Screening Instrument for the Identification of Foreign Language Learning Problems." Here I have modified it slightly to accommodate ESL students, so it can be used to help identify those that are at high risk of not succeeding. Some questions might be perceived by some students as intrusive; therefore, cultural sensitivities need to be respected in the instrument's use. Another difficulty is that it cannot be used with low-level students unless it is translated.

Foreign Language Learning:

- 1. How easy has it been for you to learn a foreign language?**
- 2. Estimate your overall grade in those languages you have taken in high school or college**

Developmental History:

- 3. Did you have articulation (speech) or language difficulties as a young child?**
- 4. Were you early or late in learning to walk?**
- 5. Were you early or late in learning to talk?**

6. Do any of your biological brothers and/or sisters have a history of academic learning difficulties?

7. As a child, how easy was it for you to learn to tell time?

8. How easy was it for you to learn self-help skills (i.e., tie shoes, button, zip, snap clothing)?

9. How easy was it for you to distinguish right from left?

First Language Learning History:

10. How easy was it for you to learn to read? Do you read for pleasure?

11. How easy has spelling been for you? (for students with an alphabetic language)

12. How easy was it for you to understand what you read?

13. How easy was it for you to learn basic arithmetic computation, such as multiplication tables?

14. How easy was school for you at the elementary and junior high levels?

15. Estimate your elementary school grades in reading and spelling

16. How easy were chemistry, biology, and/or physics in high school?

17. How easy was it to study your native language in high school?

18. How easy was algebra in high school? Geometry?

Tests and Classroom Learning Characteristics:

19. How easy are most tests for you?

20. How easy is it for you to study for a test?

21. How easy is it for you to complete a test in class when there is a time limit?

22. How easy is it for you to learn in a class when the teacher talks quickly?

23. How easy is it for you to learn to remember specific facts (i.e., names, places, dates)?

24. How easy is it for you when the teacher writes few or no notes on the board?

25. How easy is it for you to take notes in class?

General Information:

26. How long have you been studying English in the U.S.?

27. Do you think you have a problem learning English? If yes, what do you think the problem is?

28. How long do you plan on studying English in the U.S.?

29. What are your academic plans in the U.S.? In your own country?

30. Do you have any special skills or talents (i.e., art, music, drama, sports...)?

Key: On yes/no questions, students are rated as "High Risk" if they answered yes to questions relating to articulation problems (3) and biological brothers/sisters with academic learning difficulties (6) and late on learning to walk and talk (4, 5). On the questions relating to grades (2, 15), students are rated "High Risk" if they indicate a D or an F. The remaining questions employ a five-point scale (very easy to very difficult); students are rated "High Risk" if they indicate either a 4 (somewhat difficult) or a 5 (very difficult).

I administered this inventory to Sompong and was surprised at some of the indicators that appeared. Some simple but overlooked information came to my attention. For instance, even though he has been at our school almost

a year, he started studying English in the U.S. three years ago. Moreover, he has a strong aversion to reading in his own language and had serious difficulties finishing college. What seemed particularly noteworthy was that his articulation problems are also present in his first language. The inventory helped his teachers confirm their shared feeling that he does have a learning disability.

Final Thoughts

After all the data have been collected, one must ask what can be done with this information. Unfortunately, the student or his/her family might not want to hear negative observations. In addition, even if they are receptive, there are very few resources for post-high-school ESL students. Remediation is a long process and few ESL teachers are trained in special education; conversely, few special education teachers know much about the field of ESL. Realistic expectations from both the student and the teacher must be the first order. It is necessary to accept what can and cannot be done in this situation. However, allowing an LD student more time for tests and classwork, opportunities for oral exams, extra help organizing paperwork and schedules, and reduced course loads might help the situation.

In the two years that I have worked in an intensive ESL program, I have noticed seven students that I think are learning disabled. Assuming that I have overlooked another 7, that would be only a total of 14 in the well over 400 students who have passed through our doors. I think that a majority of the students doing poorly would fit the category of slow learner--someone without the extreme strengths and weaknesses of an LD learner, but who, nevertheless, is not doing well in the program. The techniques suggested will also help those students.

My goal in this paper has been to show the problems of learning disabilities in a realistic but not pessimistic portrayal. LD students will vary in their ability to learn another language, but they can attain some degree of success as long as they have a tempered and clear idea of the struggles they may face.

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GROUP DISCUSSION AMONG JAPANESE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH: HOW CAN WE MAKE IT MORE USEFUL AND LESS FRUSTRATING?

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Abstract

Reports and observations indicate that non-native speakers of English, especially Japanese and other Asian students, have difficulty participating in group discussion. Since group discussion is an important instructional device in academic settings in the United States, difficulty in participating in group discussion is not only a matter of intercultural miscommunication but also of whether effective learning by non-native speakers is taking place in the regular course.

In order to find what kinds of abilities are necessary in a group discussion, a total of seven group discussions (four in English and three in Japanese) *were* experimentally set up and analyzed. Based on the analysis of the discourse in the group discussions, this paper shows how Japanese students discuss differently from American students and sheds light on some reasons why Japanese students are likely to have problems participating in a group discussion. The paper suggests three steps to teach Japanese (and other) students how to participate meaningfully in group discussion.

Introduction

Group discussion is a common speech event within the academic setting in the United States. As a foreign student myself, I have participated in many group discussions in regular classes and seminars in a graduate program at an American university. Having come from Japan, I found these group discussions frustrating because I could not easily understand what other students were saying and I could not express my ideas smoothly in a timely fashion. I often felt unfulfilled or dissatisfied when a group discussion was

over. Eventually, I found that this problem is shared among Japanese students in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and "regular programs." Besides the lack of linguistic skills needed to interact in group discussions, another source of frustration for students seems to be different expectations as to how to interact in group discussions.

While there are many techniques for making ESL classrooms more communicative, studies report that Japanese and other Asian students tend to be less interactive, communicative, or articulate in class (Sato, 1981; Watanabe, 1990; Yamamoto, 1991). In many cases, the Japanese students do not have adequate communicative skills when they launch into participation in group discussion in non-ESL courses. It is necessary to understand the needs of those students who are not benefitting effectively from group discussion and to provide them with more effective and practical training.

In this paper, first, by comparing discussion styles observed in American students' group discussions and Japanese students' group discussions, I will show potential cross-cultural communication problems. Second, I will suggest some ways in which ESL/ENNL teachers can help develop communicative competence that is necessary for group discussion.

Communicative Competence

It has been more than two decades since Hymes (1972) argued for the importance of communicative competence, which can be defined as the ability to use a language appropriately in a particular social setting. Comparing it with linguistic competence, he argues that

[a normal child] acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. (p. 277)

His argument is consistent with what communication is all about in the sense that communication involves two or more parties, and one must consider others' **communicative movement in order to execute effective communication**. This is one of the reasons why conversation, as an example of communication, is sometimes characterized as dancing with another.

Gumperz (1984), an anthropologist, revisits this concept of communicative competence and argues that neither theoretical linguistic grammar nor sociolinguistic sets of rules are sufficient alone to explain the processes of communication. Communication involves not only linguistic codes to convey the intended message but also a set of expectations about how a certain string of utterances is to be interpreted. As an example, the response at the surface level may not quite match the question, yet the intended message may be properly interpreted by the addressee. This interpretation aspect of communication is important in that one can make the next communicative move based on interpretation at a particular moment (Goffman, 1986). Especially when the surface level of a message is ambiguous about the intended message, conversationalists must negotiate meaning (Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1986). A case in point is one adjacency pair embedded in another.

There is a range of verbal and nonverbal devices that help the participants to determine or at least come up with the most plausible interpretation of what is being communicated. Gumperz (1982) calls these devices "contextualization cues," which include "the code, dialect and style switching processes, some of the prosodic phenomena...choice among lexical and syntactic options, formulaic expressions, conversational openings, closings and sequencing strategies... [and] any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling" (p. 131) of what the speaker intends to express and have interpreted by the listener.

It should be emphasized that within his definition, contextualization cues are to be used not only individually but also in coordination with others. This implies that for a foreign language learner, mere mastery of discrete linguistic items is insufficient in that the learner must also master the ways in which contextualization cues should be coordinated to achieve communicative tasks.

Learning how to use a set of contextualization cues appropriately is very difficult because many of these cues are beyond the level of grammar, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions. Appropriate use of contextualization cues involves, besides linguistic forms, suprasegmental forms, cognitive processes, and socio-cultural background information. Hymes (1972) claims that one needs to learn communicative competence through experience and that a set of sociolinguistic rules, such as a set of rules for greeting, is not fully useful here. Just as the person who wants to be able to play tennis needs to practice in a court instead of studying a book about tennis in a

classroom, so the language learner who wants to be able to sustain effective involvement in an ongoing conversation needs to practice the language in communication consisting of chains of listening and speaking tasks instead of reading a description of conversational rules. More specifically, in order for a learner to be able to sustain active engagement in a conversation as properly as a native speaker, s/he needs to be able to produce an utterance in the language correctly, to infer properly what is being intended by the other, and based on the inference, to make an appropriate communicative move.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has communicative competence as its theoretical foundation. CLT aims at attaining communicative competence, and the emphasis is on communication (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). It uses various kinds of communicative activities in which students can actually use the target language to achieve a certain goal (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Rivers, 1987).

Recently, CLT has been criticized for putting too much emphasis on communication and for neglecting accuracy. Hammerly (1985) argues that encouraging premature communication beyond the learner's linguistic capability will result in a great degree of fluency but a small degree of accuracy. Richards and Rodgers (1986) point out that the range of communication and activities is not clearly defined within CLT and it gives too much room to the teacher as to what kind of and how much communication will be facilitated.

Another drawback inherent in CLT is that it may fall short when it is used with learners from a culture in which active participation in class is not a norm. It implicitly assumes that the learners are motivated to talk in class. However, depending on the culture, learners may have been trained to be reserved in class. Sato (1981) found that compared with non-Asian students, Asian students voluntarily took turns less frequently and were more dependent on the teacher to call on them. Mizuno (1983) reports that in an English class consisting predominantly of Japanese students it was more successful to use "macro-analysis" techniques that encourage an equal distribution of leadership among the members of the group and a democratic atmosphere in which the group can seek to synthesize the ideas of its members into a conclusion. Yamamoto (1991) found that the quietness of Japanese students in ESL is dependent on the situation factor. While the Japanese students in her study

were less interactive in teacher-fronted classes, they were more interactive in face-to-face interviews with a native speaker.

Robinson (1987) points out the need to give consideration to culturally diverse speech styles and resulting constraints when students speak English and offers communicative strategies to overcome these constraints. Iwasaki (1992) considers different rules of politeness and lack of knowledge of routine expressions as sources of difficulty that Japanese students have and suggests that carefully designed routine conversations which are to be memorized and practiced in class will help them develop skills for communication.

In this study, an experimental group discussion was conducted in order to answer the following questions: "Are Japanese discussion styles different from Americans'?" If so, "How are they different?" The next section presents the study and the results in more detail.

Differences Between American and Japanese Group Discussions

Four American and three Japanese group discussions were set up to collect data. Each group had an equal gender ratio with the exception of one American group which consisted of one male and three female students. All the American participants were Caucasian except one Korean-American female student and one student whose mother was Japanese. Age differences varied from one group to another, as did the majors and years in school. Background information on the participants and each group's label are shown in Appendix A.

All the United States participants spoke in English, while all Japanese spoke in Japanese. The excerpts from the Japanese data are translated into English by this author. The transcription conventions are presented in Appendix B.

The groups were asked to discuss the following topics:

1-A: Why are you learning Japanese? (assigned to U.S. groups #1, 2, and 3)

1-B: Why did you decide to study abroad/in the U.S.? (assigned to U.S. group #4 and Japanese groups #1, 2, and 3)



2: Many people say that, for Americans, the Japanese language is hard to learn compared to European languages. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3: Discuss misunderstandings that are likely to occur between a Japanese and an American because of language and cultural differences. Give specific examples of misunderstandings.

Three U.S. groups discussed topics 1-A, 2, and 3, and three Japanese groups discussed 1-B, 2, and 3. As the difference between 1-A and 1-B may be a factor for the different ways of discussion, one U.S. group was set up to discuss 1-B, which is the same topic that the Japanese groups discussed.

In four of the seven group discussions, the researcher was present during the whole discussion but was not involved in the discussion. In the other three, the researcher was present only at the beginning and the end of the discussion. Each group discussion was tape recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data were then analyzed in terms of three phases: beginning, ending, and presenting argument for a certain position.

When American group discussions were compared with Japanese group discussions, it was found that (a) in the Japanese groups, hierarchical relations were important for turn order and selection of a leader while in the American groups there was very little evidence that hierarchical relations are bases for the turn order and discussion format; (b) the ending was signaled and rendered through explicit reference to ending performed by the assumed leader in the Japanese groups while the ending was signaled and rendered without explicit reference to ending in the U.S. groups; (c) turn-taking structure was rigid and resembled panel discussion format in the Japanese groups consisting of unfamiliar members, while the basic turn-taking structure in the U.S. groups was in a free discussion format; and (d) Japanese participants tended to present an argument with both nonsupportive and supportive points at one time, while American participants tended to present only one supportive point for their position at one time.

The Beginning and Turn Order

The American participants began the discussion immediately, while the Japanese participants took time to talk about the turn-taking order and the discussion format. The following example is the beginning segment of J-2 discussion, which begins with the researcher telling the members to start.

Example (1): J-2 BEGINNING

- 1 **Researcher:** /⁹⁹⁹⁹199/ but, when you are ready...smoothly...please
- 2 **Minako:** Smoothly begin.
- 3 **All:** [pause: 4.5 seconds]
- 4 **Minako:** Okay, go ahead from the older person(s).
- 5 **Kiyoshi:** [Okay, let's begin.
- 6 **All:** [laugh]
- 7 **Minako:** It is funny. [laughs] Well...
- 8 **Kiyoshi:** Anybody who is proper (will talk) first...
- 9 **Minako:** [Well, then, number one...

Well, as for myself, I had had a desire to go to a foreign country since I was a little kid, you know.
[Minako continues]

In line 4, Minako encourages "the older ones" to speak first. Kiyoshi, who happens to be the oldest member, turns Minako down by stating that the proper person should talk first in line 8.

In contrast, the American group, A-I for example, begins the discussion quickly without a process of conceding.

Example (2): A-1 BEGINNING

- 1 **Researcher:** **Begin : : whenever you're ready : :**
- 2 **Kris:** **Okay.**
- 3 **Joan:** [**Okay.**
- 4 **Stan:** ^c **Who's first...I'll go.**
- 5 **Joan:** **Go ahead, Taylor-san.**
- 6 **Stan:** **I'm Stan Taylor, and I'm/learning about the Japanese.**
 [Stan continues.]

What is more intriguing is the turn-taking order in the Japanese group discussions while they were discussing topic #1. Each beginning segment in the Japanese group discussions was followed by the discussion/presentation reasons for coming to study in the U.S. As Table I shows, there is a pattern in the turn-taking order. The oldest male member was the last one to speak in all three groups, preceded by the younger male member, and either of the two female members took the first turn. Hierarchical relationships among the group members were perceived as a factor in deciding the order of turn-taking.

This is closely related to the Japanese tendency to save the face of the superior. Since in the early stage of the discussion, the direction that the discussion will take is unknown yet, there is more chance to risk losing face by making an ignorant statement or a statement that is opposite the majority position. Juniors/subordinates can afford to lose face making mistakes; in turn, the superior is expected to synthesize contradictions, objections, and anything that causes dissonance (Nakane, 1972).

TABLE I
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TURN ORDER
AND GENDER/AGE

Turn	J-1	J-2	J-3
#1	F 23 Hiroko	F 22 Minako	F 28 Keiko
#2	F 20 Satoko	F 23 Kazuko	F 23 Fumiko
#3	M 20 Jiro	M 26 Masao	M nla* Ikuo
#4	M 22 Teruo	M 32 Kiyoshi	M 29 Yasuo

*Although Ikuo's age was unknown, he was apparently younger than Yasuo.

Ending

The significant difference in the ending phase of the entire discussion is that the American group discussions ended after a long pause, while the Japanese group discussions ended with the assumed leader suggesting and then announcing the end. The following is an example of the ending in the American group discussions. This example begins with Katy, but before this example, there has been discussion regarding the third topic about misunderstanding between Americans and Japanese.

Example (3): A-2 ENDING

Katy: Well, even..., uhm, going along with the tea idea, they have all the different verbs for the different parts of preparing the tea, of serving the tea of, uhm, red tea, green tea, you know. We just call it by the color in the tea and serve tea, make tea, and they have so many different words and actions that are associated with it.

Mary:

[
M-hm.

[pause: 5.7 seconds]

[A group member shuts off the tape recorder.]

After Katy is finished taking, Mary says, "M-hm," without much to say. This is followed by a relatively long pause. It seems that the preceding active discussion and this long pause signal an end, and one of the group members, who is unknown, shuts off the tape recorder.

The endings in the Japanese group discussions were marked by (a) the assumed leader's confirmation and/or (b) his announcement of the end. The following excerpt shows the very ending of Group J-2. After an hour of discussion, the researcher interrupted the discussion and implied that they should wrap up soon because she had to leave for another appointment. Then Kiyoshi started to wrap up as follows:

Example (4): J-2 ENDING

- 1 **Kiyoshi:** **Although the talk has become lively, it seems everybody's busy, so**
- 2 **Kazuko:** **M-hm.**
- 3 **Kiyoshi:** **So : :**
- 4 **Minako:** **Chan-chan-chan.**
- 5 **Kiyoshi:** **Well, shall we quit?**
- 6 **Minako:** **Yes.**
- 7 **Researcher:** **Okay? Then, thanks.**
- 8 **Kiyoshi:** **Then, the discussion is over.**
- 9 **KaQ** **Thank you. Shake hands. [Actually verbalizes this with a handshaking gesture.]**
- 10 **Minako:** **Thank you.**

In line 5, Kiyoshi asks the other members if they want to end the discussion, which is "suggesting"; and Minako says, "Yes," in 6. In line 7, the researcher mistakingly assumes that the discussion is completely over and says, "Thank you." However, Kiyoshi's "announcement of the end" follows

in line 8. Then, both Minako and Kazuko thank and verbally express hand-shaking behavior, acting as if an international political discussion has been officially concluded.

In each of the three Japanese groups, the older male member assumed the leader role and acted accordingly. Furthermore, the other members in each group displayed group conformity. Here, these leaders' announcement and confirmation serve as signals for the group members. The formation of the hierarchical relationships among the group members, i.e., the leader and the followers, functions to guide them as to how to interact and what role to play in the group activity.

Argumentation Strategies

The second topic, "Many people say that, for Americans, the Japanese language is hard to learn compared to European languages. Do you agree or disagree? Why?" had the potential of leading to a polarized discussion. The common task was to express whether or not one thinks that Japanese is a difficult language. Two differences were found between American and Japanese in their ways to achieve this task. First, the turn-taking format was different between the American and Japanese group discussions. **The American group took the form of free discussions in which members can spontaneously take a turn. On the other hand, the Japanese groups used a round-robin turn-taking system.**

Second, the organization of argument presented by a single discussant was different. **The Japanese members tended to use a multiple-point argumentation strategy in which both supportive and nonsupportive points are presented at one turn. The American members tended to use single-point argumentation strategy in which one supportive point is presented with the position statement at one turn.**

The following example shows the single-point argumentation strategy in which Stan states that Japanese is difficult with one supportive point.

Example (5): STAN'S ARGUMENT

Okay...I think it's harder than European languages, at least writing-wise, especially with the kanji.

As a supportive point, he points out the writing element of the Japanese language. His point here is that the totally different set of writing systems between Japanese and European languages makes Japanese difficult to learn.

In Group J-2, Kazuko presents her position with more than one point at a time. The example is as follows:

Example (6): KAZUKO'S ARGUMENT

Let's see... As it is expected, I think it's hard.

Especially, how can I say...

In the case of my university..., oh, there, at HNU, they have like Japanese course, and they study quite intensively...

Like basic structure, they can master, but after all, they can't keep up with the amount of kanji, and no matter how far they advance, they don't reach a certain point, say, to read a newspaper.

So, like ourselves, we can't read like an English newspaper that fast, but, at least, we can understand by roughly skimming it.

But, if the people here, for example, those at the advanced level, well, if we gave them a newspaper and can they read ? if we told them to read it, probably they can't read it, I think, you know.

That's why I think that part is hard, and also, as for like nuance...I wonder how far, deep, they understand...

Kazuko's position is that, as clearly stated in the very beginning, Japanese is hard. After the position statement, she goes on to examine four aspects of language learning: (a) grammar, (b) writing, kanji, (c) reading, and (d) comprehension of nuance. If one follows logic, s/he realizes that the first point on grammar does not necessarily support her position. The tendency to present more than one point at a time and to include supportive and nonsupportive points is observed in the other Japanese discussants as well.

The tendency to include supportive and nonsupportive points at the same time may be a reason for the notorious "inscrutability" of Oriental people.

Since both supportive and nonsupportive points are presented, American participants may not know which position the Japanese participant is taking. Moreover, we ought to consider another potential problem as well. The example cited above was originally in Japanese, and it was presented in the panel-discussion type of turn-taking format in which each participant can take as much time as s/he wants without being interrupted. Had it been in the free-discussion format performed in English, the Japanese student might have been interrupted when s/he finished presenting his/her position and the first point. The problem in such a situation is the frustration that the Japanese student experiences because s/he cannot present an opinion comprehensively.

The following excerpt from Group A-1 illustrates the American students' tendency to engage in free discussion.

Example (7): A-1 DISCUSSION OF TOPIC #2

1 **Jill:** I think that what's hard about it is learning a new alphabet.-

2 I think it's hard.

3 **John:** [But that's any language, though.

4 **Jill:** No, well, no, no, no, not a new alphabet.

5 **Katy:** [It depends. The cyrillic - >

6 alphabet, you know, /there's something like in/ Russian.

7 **John:** [Uh, all the- [Uh-

8 **Jill:** [Yeah.

9 **John:** Yeah, but, see, once you get that down, it's, - >

10 it's not as hard as-

11 **Jill:** Once you get that down. Yeah, but in Japanese and

12 Chinese, you also, you have to get the *kanji* down, not just

13 the *hiragana* and *katakana* *Pl.*

Another strategy of arguing is to repeat the supportive point. As in the above example, Jill's supportive point is the fact that Japanese has the added difficulty of mastering an entirely different writing system. Later in the discussion, she raises this point again as shown in the following example.

Example (8): A-1 DISCUSSION OF TOPIC #2

Mary: The thing that I remember is that the grammar and the phonetics are so much better in, I mean, it's so much easier in Japanese than, say, English.

English, nothing is spelled how it sounds, and there's so many exceptions to the rule.

Jill: Well, in German, it's spelled, in German, it is.

So it's not...I'd, I'd say, well, I learned German, German in Germany, too. So I think, I think it's hard to learn [laugh & sigh] a foreign language itself, and Japanese has the added difficulty of the reading being harder, and the fact that you have to learn five thousand before you can even read the newspaper, and in, in German you wouldn't have to study that much.

American members retained the same supportive point and repeated it even when what immediately precedes it does not necessarily relate to the point. By sticking to the consistent point, the members avoided accepting the opposing position.

Cross-Cultural Implications

The findings of the differences in the ways in which Americans and Japanese hold discussions further indicate differences in cultural values and

orientation. The Japanese group discussions suggest (a) the importance of hierarchy, (b) group orientation, (c) avoidance of confrontation maintained in the speech event of group discussion. Based on these different cultural orientations, it is possible to predict potential cross-cultural miscommunication.

First, Americans may proceed with the discussion without paying any attention to the differences in the relationships among members. Among Japanese students, the relationship can be consensually determined based on the physical appearance of others or by finding out about each other before the discussion. If the group is mixed with Japanese and Americans, then Japanese feel concerned about whether their perception of the relationships is the common perception within the group. Moreover, skipping a confirmation of the relationships may be perceived by the oldest Japanese male member as offensive because his status has not been acknowledged.

Secondly, there may be misunderstandings during discussion. Since the oldest Japanese member may remain quiet throughout the discussion, American members may misinterpret his silence as having nothing to say. A Japanese member might get to the first point when presenting an argument, while an American member may perceive that the Japanese member's turn is over and start to talk. Furthermore, the American member's talking can be perceived as interruption by the Japanese member who did not get to finish what s/he has to say.

In contrast, Japanese may try to synthesize all the views that have been presented. They may try to force an American to agree with them with a question such as "Don't you agree?" When American members are engaged in a free discussion where one may jump in at any time, Japanese members cannot keep up with the pace and lose track of what the original point of discussion was. Japanese members may perceive that American members are arguing over unimportant points that are unrelated to the original discussion topic that the professor has assigned.

Thirdly, at the end of the discussion, the Japanese members may feel that the discussion is incomplete because there is no consensus or agreed conclusion. The American members may move on to the next topic or end discussion even though Japanese members still have things to say. The Japanese members may be bewildered by the lack of a sense that "we did it together."

Some Suggested Ways to Teach How to Interact in Group Discussion

The findings of these cross-cultural differences in discussion styles indicate that group discussion can be considered as a target of instruction as well as a means of instruction. In other words, some students may need to be instructed in how to interact meaningfully in group discussion. The comparison of the Japanese and American group discussions clearly shows that Japanese students have a different set of expectations as to how to go about discussing in groups. A good understanding of how Americans or American students carry out group discussions will help ESL students prepare for their study in other courses.

In what follows, I will suggest three steps in which interaction in group discussion can be taught. They include (a) providing cultural information about group discussion in the United States, (b) teaching how to construct one's argument (one-point argumentation strategy), and (c) teaching how to engage in dialogical argument.

Cultural Information About Group Discussion

It is important to teach how group discussion is valued and what ideologies it reflects. In general, group discussion in the United States is a speech situation in which each participant presents a view/opinion about an issue in question. Its purpose is to exchange different ideas and views, including minority viewpoints. Certainly, the purpose of group discussion reflects the ideology of democracy. However, the instructor should be cautioned that although Japan is a democratic nation, group discussion is not practiced in the same manner as in the United States. For one reason, Japanese society has modified democracy in its own way without changing the strong emphasis on consensus within a group that is founded on hierarchical relations. The majority's opinion often overrides the minority's as expressed in a famous saying, "*Deru kui wa utareru* (The post that sticks out will be hit)."

The following list contains some principles reflecting American democracy.

1. The purpose is to have different views and opinions expressed; the assumption is that unless different opinions are expressed, one cannot know whether it is good or bad.

Japanese assume that there will be a leader who will "put different things together," and they expect that the group discussion will end with a certain *degree* of consensus. When a Japanese is explicitly disagreed with or criticized by someone who is not supposed to do so according to the social relationships, s/he is likely to get emotionally charged. In order to keep discussion from turning into a frustrating experience, it is important to explain that the goal of discussion in an American class is often not to come to a consensus but to get different opinions and views expressed. Judgement or final decision is made individually. An individual has no obligation to follow other people. This point is difficult for Japanese, who expect that a judgement or final decision will be made by the group as a whole.

2. Equal chance for participation; the assumption is that one will exercise his/her right to speak.

As the attitude of Japanese (and other Asian people as well) regarding participation in discussion is very passive compared to non-Asian students (Sato, 1981), they may think as follows: "Somebody will probably ask me something. I'll wait till then." It cannot be over-emphasized that one must be seriously proactive in order to participate in class discussions in the United States. Japanese students may interpret the word "equal" to mean that each one is automatically given a chance. However, in American society, one is expected to exercise his/her right to express a view. This explanation is helpful in order to get them to speak up.

3. Every participant and opinion is unique and original.

A Japanese may say, "Somebody has said this already, so I don't have to repeat it," or "It's a waste of time if I repeat it." This is clue to his/her perception of discussion as a group-oriented activity. It is assumed that if one member has fulfilled a function, another member does not have to duplicate the function. It should be taught that group discussion is not a situation where labor is clearly divided and each one has his/her own role to play. Rather, each student is responsible for forming and contributing an opinion of his/her own to the group discussion. After the discussion, different opinions and views that have been expressed are to be examined, integrated, or, sometimes, dismissed by each individual. Evaluation or judgement of others' opinions is not usually expressed during discussion. Thus, a concern such as "What I'm thinking is trivial and unimportant, so I don't have to/want to say it" should be unnecessary.

Pointing out differences between group discussion and other kinds of speech events or activities such as casual conversation, storytelling, and reporting is also helpful.

Teaching Argumentation Strategies

Schiffrin (1987) points out that there are two aspects in argument: One is its monological aspect, and the other is dialogical. Similarly, argumentation strategies can be taught first by teaching how to organize one's argument, and, second, by teaching how to engage in dialogical argument.

One-Point Argumentation Strategy

First, the teaching of organizing monological argument can be approached by explaining the simplest construction of an argument, that is, the one-point argument shown previously. The one-point argument is to present one's position and one supportive point. For example, Stan in the A-1 group discussion said:

Stan:

I think it's harder than European languages, [POSITION STATEMENT]
at least writing-wise, especially with the *kanji*. [ONE SUPPORTIVE POINT]

It is important to encourage students to be brief because, as the comparison of argumentation strategies between Americans and Japanese shows, Japanese are less used to brief than to extensive point-making. For them, the multiple-point argument is persuasive and convincing because it is holistic and inclusive. Thus, the natural tendency of Japanese students is to include both supportive and nonsupportive points at one time. This hinders spontaneity when they are discussing. Furthermore, by consciously making efforts to present a brief supportive point, students are trained to seek the most effective point to support their own opinion.

This training may be done by the instructor's asking a simple question such as a preference question. For example, the instructor may ask, "Which do you like better, big cities or the countryside?" Students may answer by first stating their preference (e.g., "I like big cities") with one supportive point (e.g., "because I can go shopping").

Example:

T: Which do you like better, big cities or countryside?

S: I like big cities because I can go shopping.

Before having a student actually perform in an exchange, the task can be prepared in smaller chunks/steps. For example, students may want to do brainstorming as to supportive points for either position; then they can decide to take a position. Furthermore, they may want to combine the position statement and one supportive point. After they get used to this type of organization of argument, the instructor can move from simple topics to complex ones.

The second step is to teach how to strengthen a supportive point. As in the excerpt from the A-1 discussion of Topic #2, the American students paraphrased or expanded the same supportive point. The teacher should emphasize the fact that by using the same supportive point, one can take more than one turn, which gives the students the sense of accomplishment. Other strengthening techniques include adding examples, asking a rhetorical question, telling an episode, explaining, and telling drawbacks resulting from taking the opposite stance. Furthermore, the teacher can challenge the students to strengthen their supportive points by pointing out the weaknesses in their arguments.

As the degree of complexity increases, the instructor may assign readings to students such that the use of discussion can be tied to the reading assignment. Eventually, the focus may shift from acquiring the discussion skills to reinforcing what is learned from the reading assignment through discussion.

Dialogical Argument

Teaching a dialogical argument involves showing models and doing simulation. Dialogical argument involves at least two people so each participant must consider the fact that s/he is to play two roles, speaker and listener, simultaneously. Listening to the speech of another non-native speaker of English seems to be less effective because these non-native speakers may be interacting according to their own cultural norms rather than those shared by American students. So models performed by native speakers are vital. Models can be recorded segments of TV discussion programs or

recordings of naturally occurring meetings. A segment of a discussion may be selected and used to explain what is taking place. The shortest segment consists of two turns, and it can be used to identify the relationship between the two turns and to identify the linguistic clues to support the relationship. As in the following, T2 and T3, for example, can be taken out and examined in terms of the relationship between the two and the relationship between each turn and the topic.

Turn 1- > Turn 2- > Turn 3- > Turn 4- > Turn 5- > Turn 6- > ...

Figure 1. Relationships between turns.

The content of Turn x (Tx) and Turn y (Ty) can be:

1. argument for A and argument for B;
2. a supportive point for A and another supportive point for A;
3. question and answer;
4. criticism against A and defense for A.

The relationship between Tx and Ty in (1) is an opposing one, while that in (2) is a cooperative one; (3) is an adjacency pair indicating a strong cohesion, and the question may be one about factual information, a rhetorical one, or an attack on the opposing position; (4) is likely to happen after the discussants have presented their positions. **There are many other combinations than these, including ones that seemingly lack any relationship to each other or even to the topic.** The students need to be taught what makes bad argumentation strategies so that they can not only avoid using them but also dismiss them when they are used by others.

In addition, it is also helpful to identify topic, subtopic, supportive or nonsupportive points, stance and so forth. The careful, analytical examination of a segment should reveal that, in many cases, the surface level of speech conceals not only the speaker's true intention but also the bridge between the speaker's contribution and the topic at the global level.

After carefully studying models, students can practice the smallest unit of discussion consisting of two turns first through simulation and then through spontaneous exchange. When the students are comfortable in accomplishing this minimum unit spontaneously, a small group may be formed to discuss a topic spontaneously. Arrangements may be made as to which stance each member will take. After going around several turns, the teacher and the class may give comments and suggestions to improve the argumentation strategies. It is also important to make sure that the students revise their statements and arguments and try them again. Furthermore, it is easier for the students to begin with a small group and gradually enlarge the size of the group.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown differences between American and Japanese students in their discussion styles and have discussed some cross-cultural implications. Based on these findings and implications, I have suggested several ways in which ESL students who have difficulty expressing themselves can practice oral/aural skills that are helpful specifically when participating in class discussions.

The findings in this paper are limited to the comparison between Americans and Japanese, and their applications may be limited to only a portion of the entire ESL student population. However, they are meaningful in that they can help us identify causes of communication problems that occur when the students go on to study at colleges or high schools. In addition, the analysis of discourse in group discussions actually helps us understand communication processes which are culturally specific and helps us to identify learners' needs.

In our daily life, we take it for granted that we can interact with one another based on shared knowledge and principles of communication. For ESL instructors, it is important to be aware of the fact that some of the ways students perceive and communicate are culturally specific. **When an instructor says, "Let's have some discussion,"** what s/he means by that may be different from what students expect that to be. Students continue to interact according to their own expectations, which are likely to differ from the instructor's expectations. This is one way in which communication problems remain unsolved. Thus, it is important to give more practical and specific training to the students by providing them with cultural information

that is necessary and useful in the real-life situations that they will find themselves in later.

The contribution that discourse analysis brings to foreign language pedagogy is tremendous, especially when the major goal of teaching foreign languages is to develop abilities to communicate in the language that the learner is studying.

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Appendix A

Background Information of the Participants

Group A-1

Name	Sgic	Age	Grade	<u>Ethnic Background</u>
Kris	F	n/a	Senior	Anglo-Saxon
Joan	F	22	Senior	Korean-American
Stan	M	18	Freshman	Anglo-Saxon
Ken	M	n/a	Junior	Anglo-Saxon

Group A-2

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Ethnic Background</u>
Katy	F	19	Freshman	Anglo-Saxon
Jill	F	n/a	Freshman	Anglo-Saxon
Mary	F	18	Freshman	Anglo-Saxon
John	M	18	Freshman	Anglo-Saxon

Group A-3

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Ethnic Background</u>
Beth	F	19	Sophomore	Anglo-Saxon
Jenny	F	19	Sophomore	Anglo-Saxon
Sean	M	21	Senior	Anglo-Saxon
Mark	M	20	Sophomore	Anglo-Saxon

Group A-4

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	<u>Ethnic Background</u>
Cindy	F	20	Sophomore	Anglo-Saxon
Linda	F	19	Freshman	Anglo-Saxon
Paul	M	19	Sophomore	Anglo-Saxon
Steve	M	20	Sophomore	Anglo-Saxon

Group J-1

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Subject of Study in the U.S.</u>	<u>Length of Stay</u>
Hiroko	F	23	EFL*	1 month +
Satoko	F	20	EFL	1 month +
Teruo	M	22	EFL	1 month +
Jiro	M	20	EFL	1 month +

*EFL is English as a Foreign Language.

Group J-2

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Subject of Study in the U.S.</u>	<u>Length of Stay</u>
Kazuko	F	23	linguistics	1 year +
Minako	F	22	government	7 years +
Masao	M	26	linguistics	1 year +
Kiyoshi	M	32	linguistics	1 year +

Group J-3

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Subject of Study</u>	<u>Length of Stay in the U.S.</u>
Keiko	F	28	linguistics	6 months +
Fumiko	F	23	linguistics	6 months +
Yasuo	M	29	linguistics	1 year +
Ikuo	M	n/a	Foreign Service	6 months +

Transcription Conventions

.. noticeable pause or break in rhythm (less than 0.5 second)

... 0.5 second pause

.... 1.0 second pause

highlight marks emphatic stress

. marks sentence-final falling intonation

marks yes/no question rising intonation including the intonation used in a confirmation request

- marks a glottal stop or abrupt cutting off of sound

: marks elongated vowel sound

/Ill indicates transcription impossible

/Words/ between slashes indicate uncertain transcription

[Square brackets] are used for comments on quality of speech or context

Single brackets between lines indicate

overlapping speech

Brackets on two lines indicate

second utterance latched onto first, without perceptible pause

An arrow at the end of a line indicates that the line continues- >

and that there is another line following it.

(English words in parentheses) indicate that they are not specifically corresponding to anything in the Japanese sequence but are necessary in English.

MinaIco: Underlined Japanese names are female names.

THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR IN A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

The presumed opposition between communication and grammar has led to concern about whether teaching grammar in a communicatively oriented classroom is at all beneficial to the learner. This concern is discussed here and research done in the area is synthesized with a focus on Larsen-Freeman's (1991) grammar framework, which suggests that there is a constant interaction between form, meaning, and use in language. This should be taken into account when teaching grammar so that it ceases to be a sentence-level system learned through an accumulation of structural entities. Instead, grammar should always be taught with reference to meaning and use.

A suggestion of how this can be carried out is found in the second part of the article, which describes one method of teaching a grammatical structure (the s-passive in Swedish). It also compares different instructional materials and looks at the extent to which they can be said to be consonant with this new notion of grammar. The lack of instructional material treating grammar according to this grammar framework proves problematic for any teacher wishing to use the method.

The focus of this article is the role grammar has or should have in a communicatively oriented classroom. The role of grammar in the language classroom has been much debated in recent years, so it is useful to look at how the Communicative Approach has influenced this debate. In order to do this, I shall explore the notion of grammar and how this notion affects the teaching of grammar. My interest in this topic has grown out of experiences teaching Swedish and English as a foreign language.

Much of the confusion around the use of grammar derives from the common notion of grammar as an activity totally separated from communication. This would suggest that when 1 as a teacher choose to focus on grammar and accuracy of form in my classroom, it is at the expense of communicative competence and vice versa.

Current textbook design often lends credence to this view. Most textbooks that I have come across are organized around grammar points; when communication is stressed, it is done separately from the grammar points in an attempt to present the students with everyday language. In textbooks where the focus is on communicative skills, grammar is de-emphasized, since grammar is thought to be of limited use when teaching communicative skills. Since many have come to doubt that this separation between communicative, everyday language and grammar helps learners, the recent focus is on discovering a way of making grammar teaching into useful and meaningful communication.

The argument over grammar's role in language teaching is not about the need for grammatical competence, but about the effectiveness of teaching grammar. Two points of view can be found as regards this question. The proponents of one focus on language use and the message being communicated, believing that form will take care of itself if the learners are exposed to enough comprehensible input and they are receptive; i.e., the affective filter is low. Proponents of the other view believe focus on form is necessary in order for the learner to be able to organize the input; they also claim that not focusing on form leads to fossilization.'

Krashen's (1982) argument against grammar instruction points at research showing that learners are incapable of making use of consciously learned grammar rules (learning) when communicating because communication depends upon a rules system which is not consciously acquired (acquisition). Other research suggests that the learners have a built-in grammar syllabus which alone determines the route of acquisition. Rutherford (1987) gives a counter-argument based on the fact that there is not solid support for the learning-acquisition distinction and that the theory of the built-in syllabus is supported by research which is too restricted. However, even as he points

¹ "Fossilization" means that the learners are "prematurely plateaued"; i.e., they have reached a certain point in their acquisition and do not develop further.

out that the weakness of evidence against grammar instruction or grammatical consciousness-raising² does not provide sufficient evidence for such instruction, Rutherford goes on to mention three studies that show a need for grammatical consciousness-raising, revealing

the need for practice focused on both function and form... the insufficiency of meaningful input alone for formal accuracy... [and] the beneficial effects of formal instruction for hypothesis formation. (p. 212)

Thus, even if the evidence from research concerning the usefulness of grammar instruction in language acquisition is inconclusive, there is no contrary evidence that not teaching grammar is beneficial to language learners. In fact, even Terrell (1991), a proponent of the Natural Approach, argues that explicit grammar explanations can indirectly help the normal acquisition process.

Accordingly, there seems to be a common opinion among applied linguists that grammar should be taught, but that the notion of grammar is, or should be, revised. The traditional notion that grammar is primarily morphology and syntax is being replaced by a new notion of grammar: "When learned as a decontextualized sentence-level system, grammar is not very useful to the learners as they listen, read, speak, and write in their second or foreign language" (Celce-Murcia, 1991, p. 466). "With grammar we are concerned with how we make up the message we are communicating, not simply in terms of forms and structures, but in terms of meaning" (Dickins & Woods, 1988, p. 630). The conception of grammar is no longer "an accumulation of discrete autonomous entities (i.e., constructions and rules)" (Rutherford, 1982, p. 34), but also meaning and context. Thus, grammar should always be taught with reference to the meaning being communicated and to the context where this meaning is communicated.

This notion of grammar seems to have evolved from Canale and Swain's (1980) definition of communicative competence. References to Canale and Swain's work can be found in Celce-Murcia (1991), Herschensohn (1990),

² "Consciousness-raising" (C-R) is a term that Rutherford (1982) prefers to "teaching grammar." Teaching grammar seems to imply that it is a conscious knowledge of grammar rules that is to be learned rather than, as the term C-R implies, an ability to apply these rules.

and Dickins and Woods (1988). According to Canale and Swain, communicative competence consists of four components.

1. Sociolinguistic competence
2. Discourse competence
3. Linguistic competence
4. Strategic competence

Only the third deals with grammar in the old sense, while the first two are now also considered to be part of the grammar of a language. Larsen-Freeman (1991) suggests a grammar framework in the form of a pie-chart with three pieces (see Figure 1).

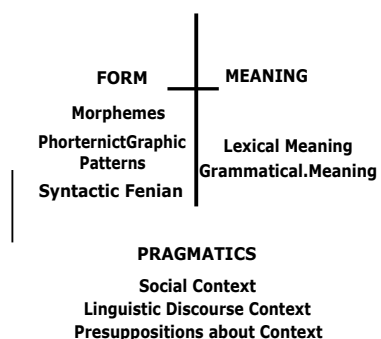


Figure 1. Form, meaning, pragmatics.

The pie-chart suggests that these pieces do not function alone but that they constantly interact with each other. In this way, Canale and Swain's (1980) "communicative competence" represents a new definition of grammar as expressed by Celce-Murcia (1991), "Grammar should never be taught as an end in itself but always with reference to meaning, social factors, or discourse—or a combination of these factors" (p. 467). Similar definitions can be found in other sources; for example, Dickins and Woods (1988) define grammar as "a constant interaction of functions" (p. 642) which influence the way we form a combination of words in order to communicate.

Despite widespread acceptance of this new definition of grammar, there exist differences in opinion over how this theory can be realized. Does the

teaching of grammar just imply the teaching of "process" (Dickins & Woods, 1988; Garrett, 1986; Rutherford, 1982, 1987) or does it also imply sometimes focusing only on forms and structures, i.e., "the product" (Larsen-Freeman, 1991)? Rutherford, Dickins and Woods, as well as Garrett, see teaching grammar as the teaching of a process. Since language is not a "hierarchical assemblage of entities," and the learning of a language is not "a progressive accumulation of such entities" (Rutherford, 1987, p. 211), "grammar should rarely be examined in terms of discrete items but, rather should be introduced to learners as a complex of integrated networks that functions as a means to successful communication" (Dickins & Woods, 1988, p. 642).

Larsen-Freeman (1991) and Celce-Murcia (1991), on the other hand, are opposed to the view of the teaching of grammar as just teaching process. Larsen-Freeman (1991) points out that it is sometimes necessary to see the teaching of grammar as the teaching of linguistic structures and the learning of a language as an accumulation of structural entities. Larsen-Freeman acknowledges that Rutherford (1987) is right in his position, but she points out the need for a balance between process and product, as investigations in the area of writing have shown.

Logically, then, this new definition of grammar has implications for the way grammar should be taught. Although the process-oriented method of teaching grammar seems challenging, I find the notion of grammar that Larsen-Freeman (1991) and Celce-Murcia (1991) suggest more useful and easier for me as a classroom teacher to handle; therefore, I will deal mainly with that point of view hereafter.

When I consider the role of grammar in the classroom, I need to consider the learner and instructional variables suggested by Celce-Murcia (1985) (see Figure 2). This means that according to the age, proficiency level, and educational background of the students and the skill, register, and need or use being focused on, the instructor can determine to what extent grammar should be emphasized in a specific class. If the class consists of well-educated adults with a high proficiency level and the skill being practiced is mainly formal writing, then form should be the focus. On the other hand, if the class consists of intermediate, younger learners working mainly on listening, reading, and speaking skills, then the focus on form becomes less important.

	Less Important----	Focus on Form-----	More Important
Learner Variables			
1. Age	children	adolescents	adults
2. Proficiency Level	beginning	intermediate	advanced
3. Educational Level	pre-literate, no formal education	semi-literate, some formal education	literate, well educated
Instructional Variables			
4. Skill	listening/reading	speaking	writing
5. Register	informal	consultative	formal
6. Need/Use	survival communication	vocational	professional

Figure 2. Learner and instructional variables.

The next question, then, is how grammar can be taught following this new definition. As mentioned earlier, Celce-Murcia (1991) suggests that grammar should always be taught in connection with meaning, social factors, or discourse. She also suggests effective ways to focus on form, as shown in the grid below (see Figure 3). If the teacher follows the suggestions on the right, students will learn form at the same time as they experience language in context (Celce-Murcia, 1985).

Less Effective---	— Ways to Focus on Form----	-More Effective
manipulative drills		communicative activities
context-free practice		context-embedded practice
sentence-based exercises		text-based exercises
cognitively undemanding activities		cognitively demanding activities
contrived materials		authentic materials
dull or neutral content		interesting and motivating content

Figure 3. Ways to focus on form.

A Consideration of the Grammar Framework

To exemplify how this new notion of grammar might influence teaching, the following suggests one way to focus on form. When going over the Swedish s-passive with second-year students, I used a procedure which was heavily influenced by recent ideas on the teaching of grammar.

The use of the passive in Swedish is quite similar to its use in English, but it is formed differently. I could have given the students only the form, expecting the use to take care of itself. However, since learners rely more on overt learning as they become more advanced (Larsen-Freeman, 1991), it was also important to focus on use. The students needed to become sensitive to when the passive is preferred to the active in Swedish. Another goal was that the learning be meaningful and fun with many opportunities for the students to be active and to practice different materials: poems, newspapers, and pictures.

Presentation Phase. I started by asking the students to brainstorm "ONE MINUTE," i.e., to write down everything that a person can do in one minute. The students worked in pairs for a couple of minutes and then wrote down suggestions on the blackboard. EX: "You can heat a cup of water in a microwave oven," "You can sing a song," etc. After that, I picked out a few of the sentences and converted them into the passive. When I asked the students what had happened, they were able to describe the process and see how passive is formed in Swedish. After that, they were able to form passive sentences themselves from the sentences on the blackboard. This was followed by a discussion about when it is appropriate to use the passive.

Since I believe that learning comes from the students forming their own hypotheses and generalizations about a language, I presented the structure inductively. With a different structure or class, I might have chosen to present it deductively. This might be the case if the grammatical rule being presented was too complicated to infer from given examples or if the inductive presentation was not suited to the students' learning style.

The next step was to present a poem called "The Minute Takes 60 Short Steps," containing both passive and active sentences. The students were asked to find the passive sentences and try to decide why the active had not been used in these cases.

The Practice Phase. The students worked in pairs finding the passive in headlines in newspapers. They were then to try and discover from the rest of the article if it was possible to make the passive sentences into active sentences. The students found several passive headlines and, in most cases, were able to write longer active sentences for them by scanning the beginning of the articles. After that, they "reported their headlines" to the others and wrote them on the board. For homework, the students were given an exercise consisting of a text written in the active voice. They were to figure out when it would be better or more appropriate to use the passive. During the next lesson, they compared texts to see if they had made the same choices. This was followed by correction and discussion.

Communication Phase. The next activity was pair-work in which the students were to choose two pictures out of five given to them and write a short article connecting these two pictures, using the passive in the headline and two to three passive sentences in the short article. When finished, the articles and the pictures were presented to the rest of the class. The last activity given was homework where the students were asked to write a short poem called "One Minute." Although they were not urged to use the passive, most did.

I discovered this method takes into account the different pieces of Larsen-Freeman's (1991) grammar framework (Figure 1) as well as Celce-Murcia's (1985) grid (Figure 3). The challenge when it comes to the passive is to learn when and why it should be used. However, since the formation of the passive differs in Swedish and English there also has to be a certain focus on form.

Grammar Books

As mentioned earlier it is difficult to find grammar textbooks that fit into a communicatively oriented classroom. This section will compare excerpts from four books that deal with grammar assessing to what extent they can be said to be consonant with the "grammar framework" suggested by Larsen-Freeman (1991) (Figure 1) and the focus on form suggested by Celce-Murcia (1985) (Figure 3). The books are:

1. Quirk R., & Greenbaum, S. (1973). A Concise Grammar of Contemporary English.
2. Azar, B. S. (1981). Understanding and Using English Grammar.

3. Pollock, C. W. (1982). Communicate What You Mean.

4. Rieggenschach, M., & Samuda, V. (1993). Grammar Dimensions: Form, Meaning, and Use.

I looked at how these texts explain the simple present and the present progressive since this contrast does not exist in Swedish and therefore is a problem for Swedish speakers. The extent to which the texts are consonant with "the grammar framework" varies.

The text which follows the implications of this new notion of grammar to the greatest extent is the one by Rieggenschach and Samuda (1993). In keeping with Larsen-Freeman's (1991) suggestion, it determines where the challenge of the structure lies, presenting the structures and designing activities accordingly. The activities and exercises can also be said to follow the focus on form as presented in Celce-Murcia's (1985) grid (Figure 3).

Unit 1 (simple present) and Unit 2 (present progressive) start out with a task related to a work of art. These tasks present the learner with a structure, giving them a chance to hypothesize when the structure should be used. In Unit 1, the task is to complete a questionnaire asking the students how they learn grammar. The statements are in simple present and the students are to circle a number representing one of several different adverbials of frequency. This way the students are presented with both accurate usage and the fact that the simple present is often used in combination with an adverbial of frequency. After this first presentation, the learner is given a clear explanation of the USE and then the FORM. The FORM-focus section demonstrates the formation of positive and negative statements and questions, thus including meaning along with form. The unit continues with a variety of activities focusing on either MEANING or USE. Unit 2 emphasizes the contrast between simple present and present progressive. Here, also, the focus is either on USE or MEANING and the emphasis is on the contrast between stative and non-stative verbs. These two units thus present the students with a structure and let them practice it in meaningful communication.

Unit 1 of the Pollock (1982) text is a tense review, which starts by advising the student about what grammar is and is not, namely: "Grammar rules do not tell you what to say. Grammar rules tell you how to say something correctly" (p. 1). It goes on to emphasize that meaning and form

must fit, and that the form must fit the speakers' feelings and what we wish to communicate. But what is said in the introduction and what is done in the unit are not consistent. Although the focus is on MEANING and not FORM, the book gives a lot of explanations and rules but has few exercises or activities where the learners can practice and try to express their meaning or feelings. Thus, this text provides presentation and practice but no communication. Therefore, I question its appropriateness for a communicative classroom.

The Azar (1981) text explains simple present and present progressive with the help of a chart and a diagram, giving examples and explanations about their USE. Contrast exercises are given for contrast practice, but they are primarily at the sentence level. There is a suggestion for a communication activity at the end of the unit.

The text by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) is a traditional grammar book with no exercises. It is not intended for ESL classes but rather for very advanced learners of English or linguistics. Quirk and Greenbaum talk about the simple present and the present progressive in relation to all other tenses, including a discussion of aspect and mood. I find this excerpt makes grammar into an object. It is all sentence-level grammar explained through difficult terminology. I think this kind of book can be most effectively used for a resource text at high levels of proficiency when the learner has already mastered most structures. However, it is not consonant with the suggestions given by Larsen-Freeman (1991) and Celce-Murcia (1985).

The new definition of grammar discussed here offers an interesting and useful way of viewing grammar that can help a teacher decide when and how to teach it. However, there is still much to be learned in this area. I would like to see valid classroom research on the teaching of grammar since such research is virtually nonexistent. It would be especially interesting to see research on the effectiveness of this new way of teaching grammar, and if possible, contrast it with more traditional ways where the focus is primarily on form with sentence-level exercises. It would also be interesting to hear more about the process-oriented teaching of grammar and to see if it is possible to be totally process-oriented as a teacher.

However, before such research can be carried out, there is a need for good and effective instructional materials which realize this new definition of grammar.

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ADULT ESL WRITING JOURNALS: A CASE STUDY OF TOPIC ASSIGNMENT

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Abstract

Over the past ten years, the use of student writing journals has become increasingly widespread in the TESOL field. In this study, 144 journal entries generated by ten adult ESL students over a period of ten weeks were measured for length in terms of number of words per entry to determine the relationship of topic assignment to the length of resulting entries, as an indication of willingness to cooperate and interest in the topic. In addition, student reactions to instructor comments and attitudes toward journal keeping were explored in an end-of-term questionnaire for a more comprehensive view of journal use in the ESL classroom.

Introduction

ESL writing journals generally consist of a collection of informal writings generated over the duration of a course. For the most part, students are encouraged to write freely and to focus on content rather than form. The instructor's role is generally to collect, read, and comment on the journals, which may or may not be graded.

In the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field, journals provide a unique opportunity for both the language learner and the instructor to focus on communication and meaning rather than on grammatical or rhetorical form. Several studies have explored the use of journals with English as a Second Language (ESL) students and have concluded that journals are useful in teaching all skill areas: grammar (Peyton, 1990), reading (Dolly, 1990; Nemoianu, 1992), general speech and communication (Bell, 1984), and writing (Lucas, 1988; Vanett & Jurich, 1990a, 1990b).

Journals in the ESL classroom can also serve as a way to relate language learning and personal experiences (Bell, 1984), as an avenue for authentic

discourse (Dolly, 1990), or as a tool to explore student understanding of reacting material (Nemoianu, 1992). Furthermore, they can create opportunities for teacher/student dialogue (Peyton & Seyoum, 1988; Vanett & Jurich, 1990b).

Finally, in elementary school settings, dialogue journals have been shown to stimulate writing in greater length and quality than standard academic writing since, in addition to providing an avenue for personal expression and language development, journals serve a truly communicative purpose (Peyton, Stanton, Richardson, & Wolfram, 1990).

The research reported here explores the influences of topic assignment and free choice, instructor's comments and questions, as well as student attitudes toward journal keeping on this important component of their language learning.

Review of the Literature

Journal Studies. Case study research primarily focuses on classroom practices and use of journals. Lucas' (1988) research provides insights into topic selection, individual variation, and the process of developing what she terms a "written genre" (p. 2). In a study of university-level adult ESL students, Lucas analyzed the students' journal writing in terms of five features: functions, content, audience, organizational form, and linguistic form. Some students were found to embrace certain topics and to continue writing on them for several entries while other students would write very little. She concluded that individual differences such as personality and previous writing experience had a greater effect on writing than cultural background, but did not discuss the possible influence of topic.

In a study exploring the effect of writing task on sixth grade ESL students' written production, Peyton, Stanton, Richardson, and Wolfram (1990) found that the quantity and maturity of writing produced in dialogue journals was at least equivalent and in some cases superior to formal assigned writing. The researchers suggest that this may be due to the communicative nature and authentic purpose of dialogue journal writing.

The view that journal writing may generate greater student interest and result in a higher level of student interaction is supported by Reyes (1991) in a study of journal use with bilingual children. The study indicated that journal

writing in which students were allowed to choose and develop their own topics resulted in greater cooperation and produced a greater quantity of writing than other more formal types of writing. Furthermore, the findings suggest that assigning or imposing a topic negatively affects student writing since students may have no personal interest in the topic or may find the topic irrelevant to their daily lives.

Theories of Task and Topic. It is generally agreed that teachers' questions have an important effect on their students' responses and understanding of class information. Teachers' questions are usually directed with a specific type of response in mind, requiring varying levels of cognitive complexity. In an ESL setting, the form and complexity of questions have great importance since the student response requires language processing in conjunction with thought processing. While a recall question may seem easier to answer, it also, in many ways, limits the amount and complexity of language the student can produce in response. Indeed, Brock (1986) concluded that responses to referential questions, open-ended questions eliciting information unknown to the instructor, tend to result in better oral performance than do display questions, those with a set answer known by the instructor. However, in responding to referential questions, it is equally important that students have some sort of background knowledge or frame of reference.

In written production, subject matter knowledge has also been found to influence performance. Cultural familiarity and prior knowledge have been shown to be a positive influence on university ESL students' writing (Tedick, 1990; Winfield & Barnes-Felfeli, 1982). Students wrote more and produced higher quality writing in terms of grammaticality when writing about their cultures or topics with which they were familiar. This research suggests that topics which allow students to relate to their respective cultures may result in more accurate indications of L2 writing proficiency.

The belief that the communicative nature of dialogue journals contributes positively to quantity and complexity of ESL student writing is also supported by a comparative study of dialogue journals and literature logs (Reyes, 1991). In a study of ten bilingual sixth graders, Reyes directly links personal background knowledge to success in journal writing. She asserts that in using dialogue journals, students are more effective in constructing meaning and generally write more when they could choose their own topic and were able to address a real audience. In contrast, the writing task of literature logs

usually involves writing about someone else's experiences, which may have less meaning to students than their personal experiences.

Task and topic are closely related, one often defining the other in writing activities. Hence, the task can also affect quality and quantity of written production. In a study of adult, advanced ESL writers, Zhang (1987) found that the cognitive complexity of the writing task is an important factor when raters judge writing quality. Questions with a higher level of complexity received more attention by the writer, as reflected in longer responses (number of words) and more use of complex language (clauses and structures) without proportionately more errors. These results suggest that meaningful, interesting writing topics do encourage student participation and effort in writing assignments.

Methodology

The methodological design used in this case study was descriptive. The data, journal entries, were generated by ten adult ESL students enrolled in a ten-week speaking and listening class. The length of journal entries was measured to determine the influence of topic on the amount of writing produced. In addition, other aspects of journals, such as, topic preferences, rate of response to instructor comments, and student attitudes toward journals, were explored in conjunction with an analysis of questionnaire responses.

Generation and Collection of Data. For the purpose of this study, the instructor assigned four specific topic types. Assignments were made twice a week and journals were collected once a week.

The following is a summary of the topic types:

- A. Entries reacting to lectures and class discussions.
- B. Entries linking the lectures or class discussions to the students' cultural or life experience.
- C. Entries based on current class or life experience, e.g., "Group Presentation Experience" or "Communication Experience with an American."
- D. Entries of student's choice, no assigned topic.



Topic Assignment and Preferences. When considering topic assignment, 74% of the students stated preference of an assigned topic, yet 60% actually wrote more when given a free choice of topic. Also, on the individual level, students stated a variety of topic type preferences that roughly corresponded with an increase in entry length. Figures 2 and 3 show the stated preferences for topic assignment and type.

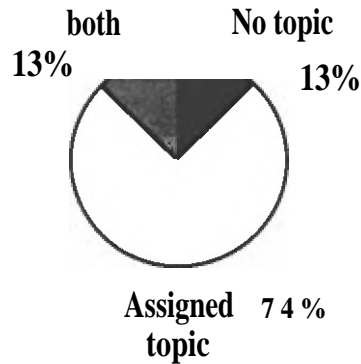


Figure 2. Student preferences of topic assignment.

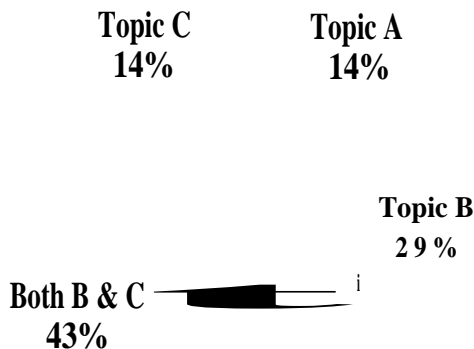


Figure 3. Student preference of topic type.

Reaction to Instructor Comments. In reaction to instructor comments, all the students stated that they read the teacher's comments, but only two students stated ever responding to those comments. This is also consistent with the researcher's findings. In terms of frequency, the response rate to

instructor questions and comments was very low: only six responses resulted from the instructor's 65 direct questions, a response rate of 9.2%. No responses resulted from the 113 instructor comments. The reasons for the lack of response to instructor comments were various. Most stated that they thought about the teacher's comments or questions but did not know they were supposed to answer or did not know if the instructor would go back and read their answers.

Student Attitudes. Finally, students generally seemed to have a positive attitude toward journal keeping, as 80% stated they would like to keep a journal next term, and those who did not wish to do further journal writing expressed a strong dislike for writing in general but preferred journal writing to formal writing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

"I like writing about my culture, it's fun!"; "I want to keep journals next term"; "I hate writing"; "It's better the teacher give me topic"; "Sometimes Hike to choose my own topic." The diversity of responses to the end-of-term questionnaire reflects the wide range of opinions and preferences of the students themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that when averaged together, the results of their journal entries fail to show any group trends. Each student had his or her own topic preferences and approach to writing journal entries.

From the results of this study and the many other studies and project descriptions (see, for example, Bell, 1984; Dolly, 1990; Peyton, 1990; Vanett & Jurich, 1990a, 1990b), the researcher recommends journal use in general as a format for personalized communication with students, as journal format can be adapted to almost any skill area or proficiency level. Furthermore, as the questionnaires indicated, adult ESL students do seem to enjoy the journal format, and the majority of students responded that they would like to keep journals in the future.

For the TESOL professional who wishes to use journals as part of an adult ESL class, the following advice results from this study:

Topic Assignment. In the case of topic assignment, it was found that preferences among students varied widely and that no single topic type resulted in longer or higher-quality entries for the entire group. Instead, it

seemed that students had individual preferences for topic types, and the reasons for preferences may have been one or a combination of any of the following factors: like or dislike for writing, personality, ethnicity, gender, or writing ability. Some students simply do not like writing regardless of the topic. Some students may feel more comfortable sharing their journals with the instructor or may feel the need to communicate while others may not. The ethnic background of the student may play a role as students from an oral tradition may feel more comfortable with the conversational format of journals, while others may not feel it is appropriate to speak freely to the instructor. The results of this study indicated that males tended to write more when given a free choice, so gender may also be a consideration.

Writing ability may also influence a topic preference since more advanced writers may rise to the challenge and benefit from more abstract writing while lower-level students may benefit from more personal, narrative style writing. Results from this study support this conclusion; the most advanced writer in the class wrote more on type A topics, those which encouraged students to react to the class, while the lower-level writers tended to write more for the type D "free choice" topics.

To suit the diversity generally found in adult ESL programs, the assignment of a variety of topic types is recommended, including no topic assignment or free choice entries. A variety of topic types can help each student find their area of interest, or what Bell (1984) termed a personal "genre" (p. 2). More analytical topics may be favored by advanced writers; lower-level students may feel more comfortable in discussing their own culture and personal experiences; while others, especially male students, may benefit from the autonomy of choosing their own topics.

The researcher also made the following qualitative observations. When given a free choice, many of the students felt free to open up and discuss their lives and experiences in the United States. This kind of writing gave the instructor a better sense of her students' personalities and attitudes about living in the United States. The following are excerpts from several students' free choice entries:

I like Portland! Since I came here I have been wondering what a beautiful nature of Portland is! The mountains, rivers, many parks and beautiful places always are attracted me to go outside on the weekend. I can't stay home if I have free time.

I have two children, two sons...It is very interesting for me to watch how they are playing...I miss my children very much when I am not at home...I want to spend with them most of my time, it is difficult for me doing something else...

When I had worked for five years, I was tired. I was busy every day...I think I am a machine...I could not have new idea...I wanted to touch a new field in life. I did not want be a machine. Finally, I decided to go back to school, and chose America. I want to learn different knowledge and know different culture...

These journals revealed some of the reasons for student absences and failure to turn in assignments and helped the instructor in understanding her students' situations as well as providing a better understanding of the students' motivation and goals in learning English. Also, students tended to write more freely about their experiences when given a free choice than when assigned the Type C topics which were designed to explore personal and class-related experiences.

Instructor Comment Strategies. Although a specific dialogue journal format (where students write short daily entries as a conversation with the instructor) was not used for this study, the response rate to instructor questions was surprisingly low. It is suggested that if instructors desire responses to their questions or comments, they clearly voice this desire in class several times, since many of the students in the study indicated that although they always read the instructor's comments and questions, they did not realize the instructor really wanted them to respond or would read their responses.

The low response rate may have been partially due to the length of the entries, which often exceeded one page, and the frequency of journal assignments. This may have led students to believe that once an entry was written and read by the instructor, it was finished and that their attention should focus on a new entry. Therefore, a second recommendation is to give students the specific task of responding to one of the instructor's questions or comments, perhaps as a follow up journal assignment after journals have been returned. Another option is to use a true dialogue format in which instructor comments are used to generate individualized journal assignments. However, if this is the case, journals must be collected and read after every entry, which presents difficulties if the journals are written outside of class.

ESL journals provide a strong link between students and teachers; not only do students express themselves in an informal, communicative manner, but they also share information about their own cultures, language learning experiences, and perceptions of the surrounding American culture. The most interesting and informative aspect of journals was the content or information found in the entries themselves, the opinions, experiences, cultural notes, and personality revealed to some degree by each student. Assigning topics that appeal to the individual interests of students is not an easy task, but by providing a variety of topics and a degree of free choice, both teachers and students can learn from each other.

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Appendix A

Topic Types

- (A) Class Topic relating to lecture or discussion.
 - (B) Topic relating student's culture to class discussion or lecture.
 - (C) Personal life or class related experience.
 - (D) No assigned topic.
-

lt Date Title/Topic (type)

1. 1-10 Breakfast in Your Country (B)
2. 1-12 Importance of Meals (A)
3. 1-14 What You Learned in Class (Martin Luther King Jr. Lecture) (A)
4. 1-17 Your Choice (D)
5. 1-21 Divorce, Your Opinion (A)
6. 1-24 Asking for Advice (C)
7. 1-28 Immigration Trends in Your Country (B)
8. 1-31 Your Choice (D)
9. 2-4 Communication Experience with an American (C)
10. 2-11 Group Presentation Experience (C)
11. 2-14 Reason for Social Change in Your Country (B)
12. 2-18 Your Choice (D)
13. 2-21 Interview Experience (C)
14. 2-25 Religion in America (A)
15. 3-2 Things I Wish I Knew Before Coming to America (C)
16. 3-4 Manners/Customs in Your Country (B)

Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom

Review Article

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Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom (2nd ed.). Andrew Cohen. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1994.

A very useful contribution to the important area of language testing is offered by Andrew Cohen's new book on language assessment *Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom*, which is likely to be very favorably received by second and foreign language teachers. While his earlier 132-page book *Testing Language Ability in the Classroom* (1980) was intended for teachers without any background in language testing, this second version addresses test constructors, professionals involved in assessment activities, and research students as well as classroom teachers.

As can be observed from the title, one of the differences between the first and second edition is the employment of the word *assessment* rather than *testing*. As the author explains, this substitution reflects the trend of the last 14 years of searching for better means of evaluating language ability beyond the more traditional quizzes and discrete-point tests. Other differences between the two editions reflect additional changes in the field of testing over the last decade. In *Testing Language Ability* the most practical issues of testing, such as test taking, test scoring, and preparing a test, are addressed right at the beginning of the book. Although given the essentials of language testing early in the first edition, the reader is not, however, shown the broader theoretical context in which to consider language testing and learning.

In *Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom*, Cohen first updates the key issues in language assessment. By giving a detailed overview of the factors inherent in language testing, he provides the theoretical framework necessary to the preparation of an assessment measure. The first five chapters contain a description of both the assessment instrument and the respondent, an analysis of the process of responding to an assessment instrument, and some guidelines for evaluating these instruments. Only halfway through the

book does the author address the issue of how to create an assessment measure, finally providing the reader with several examples and illustrations. Noteworthy are the additions of chapters six, seven, eight, and nine which more thoroughly explain the preparation of an assessment instrument; the assessing of the areas of reading, listening comprehension, speaking, and written expression; as well as separate sections for discussion, questions, research notes, and activities at the end of all the chapters.

The first chapter of *Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom* contains a "Language Assessment Needs Questionnaire" aimed at guiding the readers in identifying the assessment framework most appropriate for them. The questions listed are those that professional language educators need to ask themselves when evaluating an assessment measure, including what language abilities need to be assessed and to what extent it is necessary for the teacher to test not only grammar but also sociocultural and sociolinguistic ability. It is the author's goal to provide answers throughout the book to these and other crucial questions of language assessment.

The second chapter examines key issues that may be encountered by a language educator or test creator in language assessment. The author suggests the assessment of sociolinguistic, sociocultural, grammatical, and strategic abilities in a modified version of the Canale and Swain (1980) framework. The kind of assessment to be used can be administrative, instructional or research-oriented depending on its primary function. A distinction is made between proficiency testing, which is used for administrative purposes to establish the level of student language competence before enrolling in a class, and achievement testing, which is used for assessing instructional efficiency. Depending also on what is being assessed, it is necessary to distinguish between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment. The author presents current issues being debated regarding the use of more discrete-point versus more integrative testing and chooses a compromise between the two as a multiple means of assessment. Quizzes and tests are then compared not only to illustrate their differences but also to clarify how they may be more effectively used. Finally there is an overview of the criteria teachers may wish to adopt to evaluate the effectiveness and applicability of a test, summarized in a useful checklist at the end of the chapter.

The third chapter focuses on the nature of language assessment. In the past, the primary focus of testing was to assess linguistic competence or "skill getting"; but more recently the focus has been on "skill using," in other

words, the ability to use the skill in order to convey meaningful and/or personal information. The key for a successful assessment instrument is to be able to combine the two, so that grammatical ability is assessed within a communicative framework. In this chapter the author also describes the different forms that an assessment instrument may take, such as a *checklist* of objectives the learner has successfully completed, *rating scales* that indicate how often the learner can produce certain objectives, *teacher observation* of students while they interact with each other to determine whether the objectives have been met, *homework assignments*, and *portfolios*. Next there is a description of the two parts that make up the assessment instrument, the item to elicit data from the student and the item for the student to respond to the elicitation. The author discusses at length the value of the different response formats, e.g., the alternate and multiple-choice response format, as well as the true/false, correct/incorrect, and yes/no types, and the factors necessary for their effectiveness. Regarding the multiple choice approach, it is suggested that student errors be used when selecting the distractors of a multiple-choice response format, rather than choosing them intuitively.

The entire fourth chapter is dedicated solely to the scoring and evaluating of the assessment instruments. As the author states in the language testing discussion, very little attention has been given to this difficult and complex task, since teachers have mostly been left to their own devices after the test has been administered. Different formats of scoring and the interpretation of these scores are considered (e.g., explanations of the raw score percentages and the student's score in comparison to the norm group). Teachers will find particularly useful the "Guidelines for Evaluating Assessment Instruments" listed at the end of the chapter. This comprehensive checklist allows the teacher to evaluate the instrument prior to its administration and to spot areas that can be problematic for the students when taking the test or for the teacher when scoring it.

The fifth chapter focuses on the process of responding to an assessment instrument, particularly on the strategies that students use when taking a test. Since responses to the assessment instrument alone are not sufficient to determine why the student chooses an incorrect answer, teachers are encouraged to rely on oral and verbal report measures (e.g., small group discussions, checklists, and questionnaires) to gather more complete data on their students' performance. If teachers become more aware of the test-taking strategies that respondents use, they can teach strategies to their students and thus help them more fully demonstrate their true skills in the language.

In the sixth chapter the actual preparation of a classroom test is discussed at length. Teachers are guided through a step-by-step process on how to create their own tests. The discussion begins by making the important distinction between discrete-point and integrative items. Focusing on the latter, Cohen examines the three different formats (oral, written, and nonverbal) that can be used both to elicit and to produce responses. Lastly, he gives guidelines for preparing clear and unambiguous instructions for the respondents. Specific attention is also given to the preparation of self-assessment measures, which, if regularly administered, are a valid way for the students to observe their own language learning progress and may result in a much-needed motivational boost.

The last three chapters dealing specifically with the assessment of reading comprehension, listening and speaking, and written expression represent the most useful additions to the previous edition.

For assessing reading comprehension, the author discusses the multitude of testing methods available: communicative tests; multiple choice; and alternative formats such as the doze test, the C-test, recall protocols, the testing of vocabulary, and computer-based testing.

Regarding the assessment of listening comprehension, only a brief overview is given and some means for assessment are discussed. Cohen dedicates most of the eighth chapter to the assessment of speaking, concentrating on the advantages and disadvantages of using interviews and the rating scales to evaluate them. He suggests the use of role play as a way to test not only speaking ability but also speech acts and other language functions. He proposes the use of role play as a substitution for, or in conjunction with, a more structured task focusing primarily on grammatical accuracy.

Concerning written expression, the author begins with an overview of current practices in teaching composition, then links these to the problems of assessing written products. Examining three sample essays, he analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the holistic, analytic, and the primary and multi-trait scales used to evaluate writing ability. An exercise rating compositions gives the reader a more tangible sense of what the scales actually mean. Finally, the assessment of written ability through portfolios is illustrated and evaluated as an alternative way of testing written composition. The volume concludes with a list of the important issues

emerging from the book, which Cohen urges teachers to consider as a continual reference for language assessment procedures in their classrooms.

Since many teachers are both developers and users of testing procedures, this book is an invaluable reference when creating, administering, and evaluating assessment measures.

This edition will be useful for a variety of users. It can be used as a guide for researchers as the research notes, presented throughout the book, provide useful summaries of the most important studies conducted in specific areas of language assessment. They offer an update on the direction research is taking and may be of particular interest to those who wish to continue in this area of language teaching. If the book is used as a textbook in language testing courses, the student will be able to analyze traditional methods of testing language ability such as multiple choice, true or false tests and more current methods of evaluating. In the area of reading, for example, the author explores the use of communicative tests, such as the storyline test, doze test, C-test, recall protocol and computer assisted testing. With its extensive list of references covering a variety of topics discussed throughout the book, *Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom* is destined to become an extremely useful reference book.

Because of Cohen's attempt to encompass all aspects related to the assessment process, the reader sometimes has the feeling of being too quickly rushed through a variety of topics without exploring any one in sufficient depth. The book's weakest point, however, is in the arrangement of the table of contents. Since all the ten chapters are subdivided in several sections and subsections, one expects the table of contents to reflect such organization. Instead only their titles are listed leaving, at a glance, the specific content of each chapter unknown to the reader.

Despite this minor flaw, the language educator, the practitioner, and the researcher will find the book interesting and up to date. Teachers will come away with the most recent theories on language assessment and will gain practical ideas to apply in their classrooms. For the variety of issues presented, *Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom* is definitely recommended for anyone seeking to create alternative and constructive measures to assess language ability.

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Tim CompLExrry OF LYING: HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND 'THROUGH LITERATURE

Teaching Notes

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Abstract

Lying is a complex human behavior. Trying to understand the phenomenon of lying in a new culture and through the medium of a new language can be difficult for ESL youngsters. This article highlights several examples of lying behavior found in children's literature. By discussing such examples with children, teachers can approach this cultural area in a non-threatening way. The article concludes with several teaching suggestions.

In his article "Logic and Conversation," Grice (1975) sets forth four general principles of conversation that people are expected to observe when speaking to one another. His purpose is to characterize the nature of conversation, a task that remains a challenge for linguists. It is far easier to identify the constituent parts of a sentence than the constituent parts of a conversation. It is important, however, to examine conversations because, as Grice observes, "Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks...They are characteristically cooperative efforts" (p. 45).

According to Grice (1975), there must be a common understanding that holds between the interlocutors in a conversation. He characterizes this understanding as the cooperative principle. He then postulates his four maxims associated with this principle. These include the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The maxim of quantity means making a contribution to a conversation that is only as long as it needs to be. The maxim of relation means making a contribution that is relevant, and the maxim of manner deals with how the contribution is stated. Under the maxim of quality, Grice states:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (p. 46)

Stated affirmatively this maxim means that one should make contributions that are true. When the truth value of a contribution is questioned, it may be subject to classification as a lie. Generally, lying is not considered acceptable behavior, at least on cursory examination. When placed within a cultural context, however, lying is not always an offense. It is an extremely complex human behavior. Thus, when young children encounter lying, they frequently do not know how to interpret the situation or how to respond. For ESL students to deal with these complexities in a new language and perhaps a new cultural tradition can be even more difficult.

For these reasons, the issue of lying can and should be approached within the classroom environment. ESL instruction has long included teaching more than just the technical aspects of English. Cultural mores and traditions are also a vital part of the curriculum. Values and ethical concerns, such as lying, are part of a cultural context.

One domain that clearly illustrates how lying operates within a cultural context is children's literature. Many excellent examples of lying behavior can be found in the stories and tales we read to children. In literature, lying is not always condemned behavior. It is, in fact, often sanctioned. The examples which follow, taken from literature, illustrate the contradictions and ambiguities associated with lying. At times, lying behavior is condemned and punished. At other times, it is forgiven, provided the speaker makes appropriate amends. In still other instances, it is accepted as evidence of cleverness and is even condoned, if done for a just cause.

In Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" (Childcraft, 1980), a young shepherd watching his flock pretends a wolf is menacing and cries for help, just for fun. Twice, his ruse works on the townspeople as they come running for help. Each time the boy only laughs. On the third call the boy really needs help, but this time no one believes him and no one comes. All the sheep are killed. Aesop's moral is clear: "People who tell lies find it hard to be believed, even when they tell the truth" (p. 76). This moral may well represent a simple view of lying, that is, that anyone who lies will receive punishment. Clearly, the consequences of lying, in this instance, are serious.

In other examples, however, the consequences of lying are far less severe and forgiveness is often awarded provided the liar shows some form of contrite behavior. A classic example is Collodi's (1969) story Pinocchio.

When questioned about the location of some gold pieces, Pinocchio (Collodi, 1969), a wooden puppet, states, "I lost them." The story continues, "...But he told a lie, for he had them in his pocket. As he spoke, his nose, long though it was, became at least two inches longer" (p. 130). Pinocchio's lies continue until his nose grows so long that he begins to cry, having realized the consequences of his words. Eventually, after the good fairy is sure that he is sufficiently sorry, she tells some woodpeckers to peck at his nose and return it to normal size. Thus, Pinocchio learns his lesson and is forgiven.

A similar example can be found in the Seuss (1975) book How the Grinch Stole Christmas. In an attempt to spoil holiday fun, a nasty grinch steals Christmas trees by shoving them up the chimney. He is, however, caught in the act by a young girl who asks, "Why are you taking our tree? WHY?" The story continues:

But, you know, that old grinch was so smart and so slick
He thought up a lie, and he thought it up quick!
"Why my sweet little tot, ...

There's a light on this tree that won't light on one side.
So I'm taking it home to my workshop, my dear."

But in the end, the grinch decides that perhaps the holiday is supposed to have some meaning. He returns the stolen goods and participates in the celebration. His lie and Pinocchio's serve to teach a lesson. As long as the lesson is learned, serious consequences do not result.

In Pie-Biter, Ruthanne Lum McCunn (1983) makes lying respectable. In order to get a job loading freight, Pie-Biter, a Chinese immigrant, tells his competitors that the emperor of China has ordered two weeks of vacation for everyone to celebrate military victories. While his competitors believe Pie-Biter and take advantage of the holiday, Pie-Biter takes on all of the business himself and becomes rich. When they find out about his trick, his competitors merely laugh saying, "There's plenty of work for all of us."

Pie-Biter (McCunn, 1983) is never punished for his lie. Rather, his competitors admire his behavior as a ruse that works. The consequences of his lying behavior contrast sharply with those illustrated in "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf." Pie-Biter is more of a trickster than a liar.

Fo&tales of many cultures include tricksters. The issue is then one of determining the difference between a trickster and a liar. In the author's experience, young children often resort to the notion of a trick as an explanation of behavior that parents and teachers might well categorize as a lie.

In his work Women, Fire and Dangerous Things, Lakoff (1987) looks at the complex phenomenon of the relationships between categorizations, the mind, and language. He points out that there is often a best example in any set of items that belongs to a given category. Other members of that group may be closely related but do not qualify as best examples. Concerning the category of falsity he states

there is agreement that if you steal something and then claim that you didn't, that's a good example of a lie. A less representative example of a lie is when you tell the hostess 'That was a great party!' when you were bored stiff. (p. 71)

It is this matter of categorization that contributes to the difficulty of understanding the many cultural aspects of falsity. The distinction between a trick and a lie may have to do with intentions. If no harm is intended, the behavior can be classified as a trick. Tricks are often associated with humor and cleverness. Sometimes, however, harm occurs despite the best of intentions. In such cases the distinction between a lie and a trick becomes blurred. The sets overlap adding to the comprehension difficulties of the young ESL student.

The issue becomes even more complex in a work such as White's (1952) Charlotte's Web. In this story, lying constitutes the basis of the plot. In order to save the life of Wilbur, a barnyard pig, a cunning spider named Charlotte weaves complimentary language about the pig into her web:

...one morning in the middle of July, the idea came. "Why, how perfectly simple...The way to save Wilbur's life is to play a trick on

Zuckerman. If I can fool a bug...I can surely fool a man. People are not as smart as bugs." (p. 67)

Thus, she spins expressions such as "some pig" into her web and succeeds in saving the pig's life. Her lies are carried out for a noble cause, and, as a result, she is the heroine of the book. Readers never consider Charlotte a liar.

From these examples, it is evident that lying is not always wrong, and it is not always a punishable offense. There is considerable latitude allowed for its purpose and the context in which it is told. Under some circumstances, lying behavior is dismissed as a trick while in others such as Charlotte's Web, it is deemed necessary to achieve a noble aim.

Activities to Promote Understanding

Examples from literature show that lying is complex behavior, heavily grounded in context with cultural traditions. As such they provide opportunities to discuss some of these issues in a non-threatening environment. The stories cited above are ideal for reading aloud to children. Numerous stories contain examples of lying and tricking. In many, however, the lie is just a small part of the plot. Thus, it is important to recognize lying behaviors in stories at the point where they occur. Then discussion can begin. Teachers can ask questions such as:

**Did (name of the character) lie?
Why? Was it necessary?
Was it a trick?
What kind of person is (name of the character)?
What do you think is going to happen?**

For younger students (kindergarten, first and second grade) teachers can write the various answers on the board. Older students can write the answers on the board themselves. When the situation in the story is resolved, these answers can be discussed with respect to the cultural context of the story and the motivations of the character. If it is appropriate from the context of the story, the discussion can continue with questions such as:

**Is it all right to lie to help someone?
Is it all right to lie to avoid getting into trouble?**

Although such discussions may seem extremely high level, children can relate to these ideas provided they are presented in an appropriate manner with language geared to their ages and English proficiency levels.

A discussion of lying also presents opportunities for vocabulary enrichment. Numerous terms highlight the nuances associated with lying. There are, for example, distinct differences in connotation among the verbs "to lie," "to fib," and "to exaggerate," as well as among expressions such as "a white lie," "a whopper," and a "tall tale." Clarifying the meanings of such terms will also help children better understand the complexity of lying.

The ethical and moral dimensions of our society cannot be ignored within the classroom. Literature can provide children an opportunity to discuss complex and potentially loaded issues, such as lying, in a safe and detached environment. The dynamics of lying are a very real feature of human behavior that students need to explore.

Post Script

The different attitudes toward lying discussed here could have easily been illustrated with other literary works. For example, a very didactic work, in which punishment is promptly meted out to the liars, is The Berenstain Bears and the Truth (Berenstain & Berenstain, 1983). In another of Aesop's (1969) fables, "The Fox and the Crow," a fox flatters a crow so much that she opens her mouth to sing and drops a piece of cheese which the fox immediately devours.

An excellent multicultural story in which lying is a central theme is Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (Aardema, 1975). In this African tale, all of the jungle animals lie to avoid blame for the death of a baby owl. In the end, a guilty mosquito rightfully takes the blame.

In many ways, children's literature mirrors very complex aspects of society today. It is a very rich source of classroom material for the careful study of these complexities.

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