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WHAT'S REAL? SOME THOUGHTS ON AUTHENTICITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Ann M. Johns
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Authenticity   of student needs and the learning environment

The first, and rather time-honored, definition of authenticity is very important in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) situations in the Third and Fourth worlds. Conservative estimates state that at **least** one-half of the academic papers in the world are published in English, and, in some disciplines, the figure is much higher (see Swales 1985). This means that there are academics and professionals in all parts of the world who will never speak the language, but must read and translate it for their colleagues. So although **we** in Oregon or California--or other English-speaking areas--may advocate modern methodologies which require spoken interaction in varied **socio-linguistic contexts, it may be that an up-dated form** of the Grammar-translation Method is more appropriate for the needs of the thousands of non-native speakers whose only necessary skill is reading.

It is unfortunate, I believe, that we have not **devoted more time to up-dating** translation

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techniques.   In my three years as co-editor of the <u>English for Specific Purposes</u> journal, a journal which should be attracting articles on translation, we have seen only one, rather poorly-constructed article on the subject. Though there is the occasional good article in journals published outside of the United States, e.g., <u>ELT Journal</u> and <u>RELC Journal,</u> the references which are accessible to teachers using Grammartranslation (e.g., <u>Waiguoyu,</u> published by the Shanghai International Studies University) offer little which is new for their readership, perhaps because of the isolation of the contributors. In fact, it is an unfortunate isolation for both parties: we, in developed nations, are producing and publishing materials which are appropriate for the needs of our own students and remain generally unconcerned with the complex conditions for teaching and syllabus design which exist elsewhere (see Markee 1986). As teachers in developing nations might benefit from some of the trends developing in our world (e.g., task and process-based syllabuses), so we might benefit from better understanding the cultural and political environments and the first language influences in other English-language programs (see Liu 1981 in Johns 1986) as we design curricula or think in terms of more general English needs in the world.

When overseas, as we all learn very rapidly, we must adapt to the needs of the teaching environment, even if they are not in concert with "hip" methodologies. That is why the ESP movement has concentrated so heavily on reading; because for most of the world, reading is the essential skill.

How are these needs determined, wherever teachers are located? For adult and professional students, in particular, we must look at the students' own perceived needs: what they believe that they will need in the target language and the actual tasks they will be required to perform. For my advanced adult classes, for example, we have developed a "Design a class questionnaire", asking students where

they will be using writing, what kinds of writ;ng
they are now doing and will be doing in the future,
how they believe they should be corrected in the
classroom, etc. But it's difficult to ask some stu-
dents about their needs. They may be too young; th
may want things that are not good for them; they may
not speak a sufficient amount of English and you may
not speak their first languages. So it is important
to ask a few questions of the English contexts in
which they will be operating. Watch, and listen, and
even tape if you can, the contexts in which they will
be using the language. One of my students, **for ex-
ample**, did not believe that the **"At the Supermarket"**
sections of the books she was previewing required the
English which our students must use. So she went to
the store, observed and taped and found that rather
than **being required to name** fruits and **vegetables,**
the only time a NNS used English was at the **check-out
stand. This, then, became the focus of her lesson.
However, she recommended that in future survival
syllabuses, the "At the Supermarket" section be
omitted altogether, for most**   of her adult students
went to their own ethnic markets, where their first
languages are spoken. Instead, she recommended **that
more language required of "gatekeepers" (e.g., wel-
fare workers, immigration officials) be taught, a
finding similar to that of the European studies of
adult immigrants (see Perdue 1984).**

**If you cannot survey the situation yourself, ask
students to be their own ethnographers, going into
the contexts in which they must use language and re-
cording it, both for linguistic items and cultural**
constraints **of the context (Johns, in press).**

**Then, after you have determined the situations
in which students must learn English, the roles they
must play, the topics they must discuss, and the lan-
guage they must use, don't stop, but continue to as-
sess their language needs and the target context as
the class progresses (Kennedy 1985).**

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Authenticity of discourse

So far, I have discussed the authenticity of needs and context for language use; now let's look at the authenticity of discourse. How many textbooks have you picked up recently that claim that they are based on authentic language? This "real language" issue is one which has been central to many approaches to language teaching.

In response to the artificial language of the Audio-lingual Classroom, with its memorized dialogues and drills, many teachers and researchers, especially in vocational ESL and other ESP areas, began, like my student in the grocery store, to record the actual language used in environments in which their students were working. They carefully analyzed this language; then they took it into the classroom. Analyses of oral language are particularly interesting, demonstrating how imperfect and imprecise spontaneous spoken language of English speakers is, with its false starts, its deletions, its lack of pronoun and subject-verb agreement. (For a good overview of the studies of oral discourse, consult Richards 1980.)

Literature on authentic written text is fully as plentiful. We have heard for years, for example, that 60% of all sentences in scientific texts are passive. How did we get that data? A number of people have counted the passive sentences in scientific texts. When I was in China in 1981-82, I visited my friend Zhang Yen-bing at Shanghai Jao Tung University as he busily used a Wang computer to analyze literally hundreds of scientific texts in order to determine the incidence of grammatical and lexical items. Counts also have been done of discourse items in various registers: one of the data analyses for my dissertation involved counting and classifying cohesive items in different types of business discourse (Johns 1981).

But the discourse analysis studies have now moved to more sophisticated issues. One important set of research questions deals with the functions of linguistic features *in* written discourse. For ESP, the landmark articles were by Lackstrom, et. al. (1973), who introduced the topic, and by Tarone, et. al. (1981), who, using an expert informant, determined the *use* of the passive in selected astrophysics papers (see also Swales 1985, for a discussion of the importance of these papers). Others have followed in the footsteps of these ESP leaders to produce very interesting analyses of form/function relationships, especially in scientific discourse (see, e.g., Malcolm 1987).

With the emphasis upon coherence in text as dependent upon the interaction between student text and that of expert reader, other types of analysis have become common. Some of the most useful of these come from schema-theorists, who speak of readers as having "conceptual frames" for particular text types with which they are familiar. Each frame has related content slots which must be filled if the readers expectations are to be satisfied. For example, in a text in which a physical structure is described, the expert reader expects content slots for "part", "location", "property" and "function" to be filled, not once but several times. T. Johns and Davies (1983), in an article which should be required of all instructors of ESL science students, discuss text realization of underlying content slots and how teachers of reading and writing can use these expert expectations and text realizations effectively in the classroom. I have been studying a classic text type, problem-solution, in which the content slots to be filled are "situation", "problem" (and causes), "solution" and "evaluation" and have discovered how the mapping out of these slots, with their content, is of great assistance in the essay revision process (Johns 1986b). I am now insisting on student identification of the main ideas which these slots represent in order to teach the summary, and have found that my

ESL students at a number of levels respond very well to this technique, which allows for both structure and freedom. The schema-theoretical models provide excellent insights to expectations for authentic discourse in the minds of expert readers. (For a thorough overview of schema-theoretical issues, see Carrell 1983.)

When discussing issues of authenticity, we must not only consider the expectations of the expert readers but the realization in text itself. Whereas schema theory provides guidance as to the kinds of content slots to be filled in different discourses, i.e., the underlying structure, work in "caricatures" of text-types within genre has been very useful in re-**vealing to students our knowledge about texts within certain registers. One of the most productive of these caricatures comes from the article introduction** work completed over the last several years by Swales (1981, 1984, in press), who, after a study of several **hundred introductions to scientific papers created a** four-step model or script which crosses disciplines and therefore is of great benefit to the teacher of "General Academic Purposes English". These canonical steps--and questions for students--are:

1. Field establishment: "What do I need to do to establish my research area at the out-set?"
2. Description of previous research: "How can I organize my description of previous re-search?"
3. Gap indication: "How can I show that there is a space or hole in the previous re-search?"
4. Introduction of the present research: "How do I make it clear that I am going to try to fill that space or hole?" (Swales in press)

His recent research indicates that science students who follow this model can produce text which is

coherent and seemingly authentic, even if they con-
tinue to make grammatical and lexical *errors* on the
sentence level.

Authentic written text is of great interest to
us and to our students: however, for the purposes of
this paper, it is also important to point out that
though we are doing a better job at identifying what
authentic text is, there is still a question of when
authenticity should be introduced to students.
Should we simplify at lower levels, as suggested by
many (see, e.g., Montford 1975)? If so, how can this
be done without interfering with the essential fea-
tures of the genre the text represents?

Or should we attempt to provide authentic dis-
course, whatever the level, as advocated by Tim
Johns:

> We wish as early as possible to introduce
> authentic **unmodified texts to students
> (1983:8).**

This question of simplification always arises in a
discussion of authenticity. It is one which, in my
opinion, must be given special consideration in every
teaching context.

Authenticity of classroom practice

Our first definition of authenticity related to
asking where the students must use English, what
roles they must play and what tasks they must per-
form, of authenticity of needs and tasks. Then we
talked of analyzing real language and introducing it
**to the classroom, i.e., of authenticity of discourse,
as an area of research and curriculum design. Now,
let's look at a third definition of authenticity,**
that of classroom practice, as it relates to activity
type and progress of activities. Robinson (1981) in
her history of ESP, refers to this concept when she

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states that,

> Relevance (of situations and discourse) is
> generally desired in an ESP course, but it
> is possible to have discourse which is
> nonetheless not exploited interestingly or
> usefully or which is simply not relevant
> to a particular class of students. Con-
> versely, such relevant and interesting
> material has been used in classes which is
> not authentic (1981:37).

According to Robinson, then, we cannot stop with
analyzing tasks students must perform with English or
with introducing authentic discourse into the class-
room. In fact, she claims that authentic discourse
may not always be the answer, since it is sometimes
idiosyncratic or too context-specific. We must ask
whether the sequence of classroom activities which
are performed to accomplish to the task are relevant.

Henry Widdowson, who, along with Chris Candlin
and Michael Breen, has done some very interesting
work on task-based syllabuses, suggests that the cen-
tral authenticity question is what is done in the
classroom, noting that the process of learning is
fully as important--or more important--than the goal.
Widdowson says,

> A process-oriented approach accepts from
> the outset that the language data given to
> the learner will not be preserved in store
> intact but will be used in the mental
> mill. Hence the language content of the
> course is selected not because it is re-
> presentative of what the learner will have
> to deal with after the course is over but
> because it is likely to activate strat-
> egies for learning as the course pro-
> gresses (1981:5).

The third definition of authenticity, then, concerns

the way in which students are encouraged to learn, whether whatever task they are given instantiates appropriate strategies. One successful task (or task series) that a colleague, Linda Little, uses in a low-proficiency adult class is the problem/solution model. First, the students suggest a problem which is important to them. The problem is defined and elaborated by the teacher. Then, the students consider solutions, discussing the pros and cons ("good and bad things") about each possibility. Finally, they decide upon one solution and role-play it for the class. This technique, which can be used among children and adults at various levels, activates learner strategies for defining, comparing and contrasting, arguing, evaluation, making decisions, and argumentation. **It can be used** in many situations, drawing from students' own lives and eliciting language from students who would never volunteer to speak in a more formal environment.

What Little has done, then, is devise a series of task-dependent exercises which are of interest to the students and activate learning and skills development at a number of levels.

So we have three definitions of authenticity: of needs, of discourse and of classroom tasks; and the greatest of these may be classroom tasks, because unless we devote time to activating learner strategies, the more traditional authenticities may become irrelevant.

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DO IT MY WAY: WHAT'S COMMON ABOUT COMMON SENSE?

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ABSTRACT

Problem solving from a culturalcentristic "common sense" approach is analyzed. Individual cultures define their own appropriate problem-solving behaviors and label these "common sense." It is suggested that there is nothing universally common about sense and intercultural communication might be more successful if the traditional phrase "common sense" were replaced with the phrase "cultural perception." Specific strategies are outlined to help interactants apply "cultural perception" thinking to intercultural communication.

Aristotle insisted that there was only one appropriate approach to any given situation. "Practical wisdom lisi a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man..." (Aristotle, 1140b5, p. 1026). Thus, non-Greek behavior was, for Aristotle, devoid of practical wisdom. In other words, non-Greek thinking lacked what is now called common sense.

The Stagirian Sage may have benefited from a dose of intercultural communication training. Myron Lustig (1988), writing about cultural values, after defining ethnocentrism as "a learned belief in cultural superiority," states that

cultural practices would not survive, and
the cultures themselves would disintegrate,
if members did not believe that their
values and customs were superior to the
alternatives (Lustig, p. 55).

It is precisely from this culturalcentristic belief
that this paper takes its impetus.

A review of literature yields a plethora of art-
icles addressing both ethnocentricity and its anti-
thesis, the understanding of cultural difference
(e.g., Dodd, 1987; Grove & Torbiorn, 1985; Gudykunst
& Kim, 1984; Rogers, 1983; Ruben, 1977; Tucher &
Baier, 1985). However, one phenomenon, overlooked in
the literature, merits detailed treatment. It is the
concept and intercultural application of a <u>common
sense approach to communication</u> that deserve closer
scrutiny.

During intercultural interactions, we have found
ourselves and others commenting on a lack of common
sense in the behavior of individuals from other cul-
tures and nations.   For example, we have overheard
the following: "This Chinese airline ticketing
system makes no sense at all," and "The drivers in
Mexico have no common sense," **and "My God, don't**
these Greek people have any common sense when it
comes to social etiquette?" It is our contention,
and the thrust of this paper, that interculturally,
the concept and application of <u>common sense</u> should be
renamed <u>cultural perception.</u> Furthermore, we contend
**that in actuality there is nothing that can univers-
ally transcend culture and be called** <u>common sense.</u>
The term <u>common sense,</u> as conventionally used, is no
longer needed. What do we usually mean when we use
the term <u>common sense?</u> Is it really common? Does it
really make sense?

It is apparent that <u>common sense</u> is a term that
refers to what is considered a <u>good-judgment</u> approach
to a given situation. When someone attacks a

situation with a different approach from that which
we would choose, we may label that interactant's judg-
ment as lacking in common sense. However, if what is
considered good judgment within one culture is con-
sidered bad judgment within another culture, then
what is common about common sense? Can common sense
be a universal trait that individuals possess or lack
to varying degrees (see Aristotle, **1141a25, p. 1028**)?
The trouble can be more clearly seen if we debate how
wide a scope the term <u>common</u> has. If by <u>common</u> one
means <u>common to all humans,</u> we are left with a trans-
cendental trait called <u>common sense.</u> But if <u>common</u>
is taken as "patterns of language... activity and be-
havior that act as models for both common adaptive
acts and styles of communication... in a society"
(Porter & Samovar, p. 19), then what the term <u>common
sense</u> connotes is as relative as musical preference
or phoneme choice.

If common sense behaviors vary from place to
place, from culture to culture, then the factors that
contribute to the formation of an individual's common
sense--and what defines common sense within her cul-
ture--must be examined. Whorf argues that culture
produces language and is thus a determining factor in
perception. Different languages produce different
parameters of common sense. Cultural norms such as
common sense are "closely integrated with the whole
general culture" (Wharf, 1943, p. 215). Contrary to
Whorf's emphasis on language as the determining fac-
tor in concept **formation, Rapoport and Horwitz (1960)**
argue that language, as a form of cultural behavior,
emerges along with common sense out of the "per-
sistent cultural patterns of evaluating meaning..."
(Rapoport & Horwitz, p. 346). Though each theory
approaches the common sense concept from a different
angle, both support the assumption that common sense
judgments are culturally defined.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983) approaches
common **sense from** another perspective. Geertz

relates common sense to the ability to cope effec-
tively with problem-solving situations.

> When we say someone shows common sense we
> mean to suggest more than that he is just
> using his eyes and ears, but is, as we say,
> keeping them, open, using them judiciously,
> intelligently, perceptively, reflectively,
> or trying to, and that he is capable of
> coping with everyday problems with some
> effectiveness. And when we say he lacks
> common sense we mean not that he is re-
> tarded, that he fails to grasp the fact
> that rain wets or fire burns, but that he
> bungles the everyday problems life throws
> up for him: he leaves his house on a
> cloudy day without an umbrella fin spite of
> knowing that rain wets]; his life is a
> series of scorchings he should have had the
> wit not merely to avoid, but not to have
> stirred the flames for in the first place
> (Geertz, p. 76).

What appears to be <u>common</u> about common sense is
that within any given culture, certain behaviors make
(cultural) sense, whether or not they appear reason-
able to an outsider (see Figure 1 below). Figure 1
offers an analysis of a traditional approach indi-
viduals from homophilous cultures may take when con-
fronted with a novel situation that requires an im-
mediate action. Each interactant considers multiple
behavioral choices filtered from and based on past
experiences, learned behaviors, patterns of thought,
etc. As a result, the behavior chosen by each indi-
vidual is not based upon "common sense," but rather
upon "cultural perception" which is itself a subjec-
tive examination of an event.

In fact, <u>common sense</u> is a misnomer if used
interculturally, since it not only suggests that per-
ceptions of a problem-solving situation should be
similar cross-culturally, but that the perceptions

FIGURE I

TRAOITIONAL INTERCULTURAL APPROACI I TO
cuctunAL PERCEP TIOI is Ann BEI volion
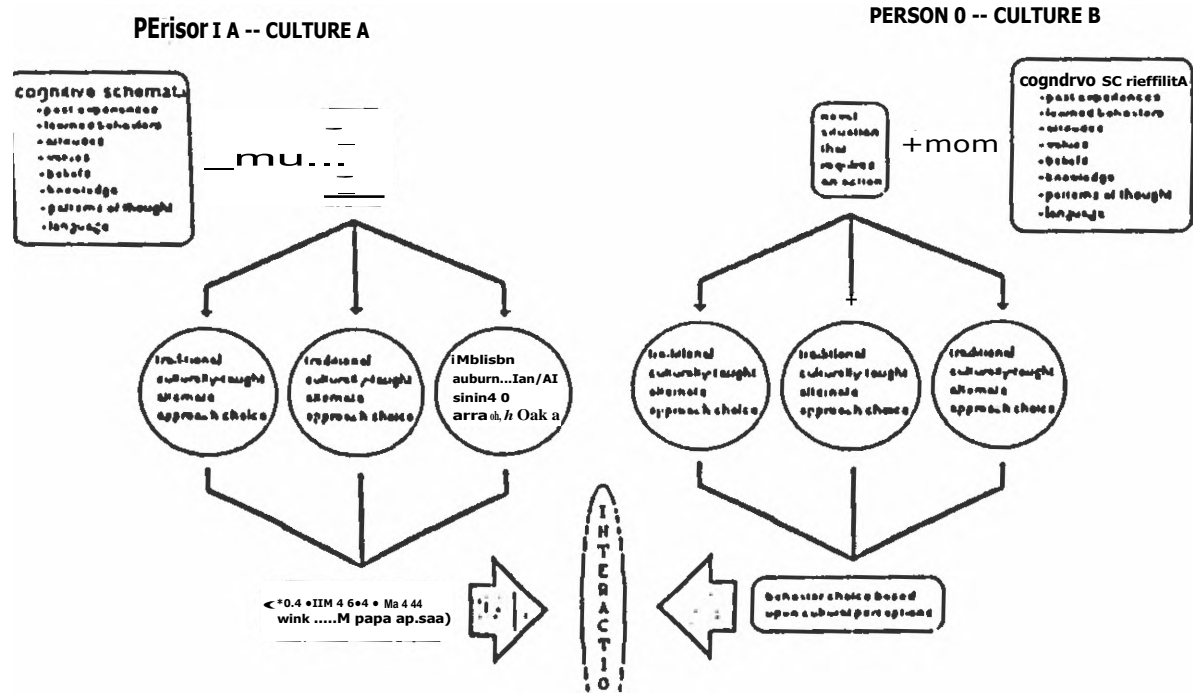
are arrived at almost instinctively. That is, the
sense derived from common sense suggests that percep-
tions may be instinctual as are other human senses
(e.g. touch and smell).

The constructivist approach to communication, as
first developed by Kant (Smith, 1988), supports the
assertion that an appropriate behavior toward a speci-
fic situation--labeled <u>common sense--is</u> prescribed by
the culture from which the event originates. In
other words, the world, according to this perspec-
tive, is "subjectively constructed by the meanings
that people assign to observations" (Smith, 1988, p.
310). Such subjective meanings fall within a range
that has been delineated by individual cultures.

Culturally-diverse interactants, approaching a
situation which requires action, problem solve by
examining their own culturally-conditioned cognitive
schemata (i.e., attitudes, values, beliefs, patterns
of thought, language, etc.), and a personally-
experienced past (see Figure 1). Thus, each inter-
actant constructs her own perception of the situation
(having subjectively considered feasible avenues of
behavior), and chooses what she perceives to be her
most appropriate alternative or solution. A frequent
outcome of this type of intercultural dyad is the be-
lief that the other has not problem-solved as effi-
ciently or as logically as possible. Consequently,
each labels the other as lacking common sense. In
fact each has constructed a cultural perception that
is impossible for the other interactant to duplicate.

Cultural perceptions of differences in problem-
solving exist from the obvious to the subtle. *For
example*, a currently-recognized problem is the in-
creasing number of older adults within each coun-
try.' Cultural perception led the United States to
suggest designing more comfortable, affordable and
convenient homes for the elderly. Mediterranean coun-
tries, on the other hand, concluded that families and
their surrounding neighborhoods needed to concentrate

on caring for the older adult. And still other cultures would never consider the possibility of the older adult moving away from the extended family's home. Each culture believed its solution to be a universal one (i.e., the sensible solution), though it was merely the most (culturally) appropriate solution.

The science of chronemics provides another example of a subtle difference among cultures, often leading to the use of the misnomer lack of common sense. Arrival times for events are prescribed by cultures and adhered to without much further thought. However, these culturally-understood arrival times may lead to intercultural misunderstandings. Each culture defines the appropriate arrival time to an informal gathering ranging from arriving before the appointed hour to an extended length of time after the appointed hour. An often heard remark is: "Don't they have any common sense? Who ever heard of someone arriving at a party at the exact time specified?" Or conversely: "Don't they have any common sense? If they were going to be an hour late, why didn't they call?"

In our experiences at home and abroad we have observed case after case where foreign observers have criticized another culture, or individuals from another culture, for lacking common sense.

Example 1: In China, interior walls are generally whitewashed and then painted from the floor up to a height of approximately four feet. In a culture where paint is expensive and whitewash is cheap, this method makes good (cultural) sense. Yet foreigners often grumble about how the painting system makes no (common) sense.

Example 2: In Greece, a sizeable portion of the population keeps its savings in cash at home. In a culture where interest rates

are low, banks are not federally insured
and bank employees are frequently on
strike, would it make common sense to put
all of one's savings into the bank? Yet,
non-Greek temporary residents often remark
about the Greeks' lack of sophistication
and common sense with regard to money.

Example 3: In Japan, even *in* the frigid
north, often only one room is heated and
outside walls are frequently paper thin.
Do the Japanese, as some foreigners say,
lack common sense? Or does the economic
saving, architectural beauty and pleasant
summer weather suggest that the construc-
tion makes perfect (cultural) sense?

Example 4: In the mid-1970's, many people
from southeast Asia immigrated to the
United States. Finding animals (especially
dogs) running wild in the cities, some im-
migrants trapped and slaughtered the *ani-
mals* at will. They may have thought:
"These Americans have no common sense. Why
haven't they been taking advantage of this
plentiful resource?" On the other hand, ac-
cording to American norms, the killings
were shocking. Americans were saying:
"How can they be so stupid? Don't they
know that one does not eat pets?"

It appears that using the term common sense dur-
ing intercultural interactions hinders understanding
and communication and fosters ethnocentric evaluative
behavior. To illustrate a preferred intercultural ap-
proach to cultural perceptions and behavior, we sug-
gest the model in Figure 2. This model suggests that
when interactants from homophilous cultures recognize
their own "cultural perceptions" filtered from their
cognitive schemata, and also consciously consider
possible "cultural perceptions" of the interactant,
the resulting behavioral choice will be based upon

FIGURE 2

SUGGESTED ATRADITIONAL INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO PROBLEM-SOLVING BEHAVIOR

cognitire schemata
- -past expenences
- learned behaviors
- -attitudes
- -values
- -beliefs
- -knowledge
- -*patterns* et thought
- -language

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N.

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It is essential that the individual recognize the traditional sequence of evaluating alternate approaches to problem solving when encountering a novel situation (see Figure 1). Further, the solution-reduction process is itself based upon the cognitive schemata of the individual. Since the cognitive schemata is obtained through the subtleties of our own cultures, it is important to recognize that intimate awareness of these factors is **nearly impossible** (Rokeach, 1968), even for the individual who possesses them. The realization of the near impossibility of personal awareness of each actual building block leading to our own cultural perceptions frees us to experiment with possible problem-solving alternatives (see Figure 2) that are not based upon the interactant's own cultural perceptions.

The U.S. English-as-a-second-language classroom is an ideal area for obviating **traditional common** sense/cultural perception thinking. Imagine an ESL instructor presenting a new concept to her students. U.S. students are conditioned and rewarded for promoting instructor/student verbal interchange regarding material presented during class. However, other cultures discourage this same interaction. Thus, if no questions or comments are initiated by students concerning the lecture, the instructor should not assume that the material she presented was understood by the students (Figure 1). If this were the case, the instructor, after some students performed poorly on the examination questions concerning this same material, might think or even remark, "Don't these students have enough common sense to ask questions during the lecture? I am more than willing to spend more time on a specific area if they would just let me know. I am not a mind reader. I cannot second guess what they do not know." She might believe she is problem solving by attempting to elicit questions from the students, but she is merely employing another teaching technique accepted within the U.S. culture. For example, she might ask the class, "Do you have any questions?" Or she might ask specific students,

"Maria, do you wish to have me clarify anything have said?" This approach may not promote student questions or comments and it may further discourage classroom interaction. This would be particularly inappropriate if the student is named Wang or Nguyen and comes from a cultural setting where public criticism of a teacher by a student is extremely rude.

The instructor may approach the problem of maximum student understanding by combining her traditional and personally comfortable U.S. approach to teaching and experimenting with several atraditional strategies. After asking if there are any questions, she might pass out anonymous questionnaires asking students to cite points in the lecture that they found confusing. Or she could introduce an anonymous pop-quiz, informing her which lecture topics were generally misunderstood by the class. Or she might divide the class into small groups, allowing students to explain the lecture topics to one another.

Regardless of the variety of methods employed, the instructor should never assume that there is common sense approach or behavior that ought to be exhibited by both herself and the students. Rather, she ought to try as many traditional and atraditional approach choices to learning in the intercultural classroom setting as possible (Figure 2).

Our aim is not to say that there is a correct or incorrect approach to problem-solving. Yet, this approach will reduce the misuse of common sense thinking, because the interactants will realize that there is no such thing as common sense, but merely culturally originated and defined perceptions.

This leads to thinking outside traditional lines. We are forced to examine all possible alternatives without prior determination of what is acceptable. Considering as many atraditional alternate possibilities for a given novel-situation-problem-solving-solution should resolve into understanding

beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the culturally diverse.

Cultural perceptions tell us that it is appropriate to have closure on a subject when presenting an introduction and a body in a technically-correct paper. Consequently, a concluding paragraph should be necessary to summarize all we purported about <u>common sense</u> and <u>cultural perceptions.</u> If we ended this paper here, without a summarization, would the reader feel that the paper was incomplete?

Perhaps.

FOOTNOTE

[1]One of the authors attended the United Nations Assembly on Aging in Vienna, 1982, and this is her observation.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Teaching Language In Context: Proficiency-Oriented
Instruction.
Alice C. Omaggio.   Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle,
1986. Pp. xiv + 479.

Reviewed by
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Proficiency-oriented instruction has for some
time been a buzz word in second language acquisition
circles. Theorists, researchers and practitioners
continue to be engaged in a lively debate over both
the meaning of proficiency in a second language and
over the "best" ways to reach such proficiency within
a variety of language classroom settings. Given the
controversial nature of the field, it is not surpris-
ing then that publications which suggest fresh, crea-
tive and dynamic approaches to second language acqui-
sition are receiving considerable attention in our
field today. One of these timely publications aimed
at the foreign language classroom teacher at the high
school level is <u>Teaching Language in Context: Profi-
ciency-Oriented Instruction</u> by Omaggio.

In the preface, Omaggio makes the following dis-
claimer regarding the agenda of the volume:

> This book is not designed to raise new
> dust. It does not propose yet another re-
> volutionary theory of language acquisition
> or promote new methodologies. Rather it
> seeks to extract from our rich heritage of
> resources and practices those elements that
> seem most sound and to suggest a way to or-
> ganize that knowledge and expertise so we
> can maximize opportunities for the develop-
> ment of proficiency among our students (p.
> xii).

Although Omaggio's intent may not be to raise "new dust," her book on the other hand has set a standard for an adjustable framework to guide proficiency-oriented classroom practices and criteria in high school contexts. Her standard hinges on a set of principle-governed curriculum and instruction practices on which to base proficiency-oriented language instruction. Rather than focusing on any one specific approach, method, or technique, Omaggio suggests that instead language teachers organize the life of the classroom around proficiency-oriented principles of instruction. Such principles are centered on five hypotheses and their corollaries which will be discussed shortly. Underlying these hypotheses is the assumption that the appropriate methodology to complement the philosophy, goals and objectives of the program will emerge naturally. The working hypotheses of her proficiency-oriented framework are:

> <u>Hypothesis 1.</u>   Opportunities must be provided for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target language (p. 35).

>> <u>Corollary 1.</u> Students should be encouraged to express their own meaning as early as possible after productive skills have been introduced in the course of instruction (p. 35).

>> **<u>Corollary 2.</u>   A proficiency-oriented approach promotes active communicative interaction among students (p. 35).**

>> **<u>Corollary 3.</u>   Creative language practice (as opposed to exclusively manipulative or convergent practice) must be encouraged in** the proficiency-oriented classroom (p. 35).

>> <u>Corollary 4.</u> Authentic language should be used in instruction wherever possible (p. 36).

Hypothesis 2. Opportunities should be provided for students to practice out a range of functions (task universals) likely to be necessary in dealing with others in the target culture (p. 36).

Hypothesis 3. There should be concern for the development of linguistic accuracy from the beginning of instruction in a proficiency-oriented approach (p. 36).

Hypothesis 4. Proficiency-oriented approaches should respond to the affective needs of students as well as to their cognitive needs. Students should feel motivated to learn and must be given opportunities to express their own meanings *in* a nonthreatening environment (p. 36).

Hypothesis 5. Cultural understanding must be promoted in various ways so that students are prepared to live more harmoniously in the target-language community (p. 36).

The above hypotheses introduced in the first chapter serve as guideposts for the entire book. In the remaining nine chapters--"Methodology in Transition," "The Role of Context in Comprehension and Learning," "A Proficiency-Oriented Approach to Listening and Reading," "Developing Oral Proficiency," "Becoming Proficient in Writing," "The Accuracy Issue," "Classroom Testing," "Teaching for Cultural Understanding," and "Planning Instruction for the Proficiency-Oriented Classroom: Some Practical Guidelines"--Ommagio examines in greater detail each one of the above principles and suggests illustrative classroom procedures and activities. Each chapter includes a thorough review of the literature, and activities for discussions, and references. The book also has a combined index listing both topics and authors.

From the point of view of the ESL teacher it is important to note both the similarities and differences between   the proficiency-oriented approach suggested by Omaggio and the Natural Approach proposed by Terrell and Krashen (1977, 1982). They do, of course have much in common--namely Hypothesis 1 and corollaries 2, 3, and 4; and Hypotheses 2, 4, and S. There are, however, some important distinctions to consider regarding corollary 1 of Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3. These differences stem both from the nature of the populations being served (high school *in* Omaggio's case vs. kindergarten to developmental adult ESL from Krashen and Terrell's perspective) as well as from the theoretical underpinnings of such widely accepted approaches to ESL as Terrell and Krashen's Natural Approach. Regarding the first corollary of Omaggio's first hypothesis, it seems that Omaggio's curriculum would have students involved in the production phase sooner than is usually the case with the natural language approach. The rationale for doing so under a proficiency-oriented approach is to encourage students to become involved as quickly as possible in expressive language behavior that transcends rote memorization and parroting of dialogues. While advocates of the natural approach would not disagree with the creative and exploratory use of language, they would, however, question the premature involvements of students in such a process. The position of advocates of the natural approach would be that students need ample incubation time before they are expected to become intensely involved in the production phase of language behavior; production is not necessary in the early stages in order for development to occur.

With respect to Hypothesis 3, there is even a sharper difference between the two camps. Omaggio seems to take a middle of the road approach regarding language acquisition vs. language learning. She, for example, sees the role of grammatical accuracy as necessary in foreign language classrooms early in the process of language acquisition. Her position is

that students in foreign language classrooms do not have sufficient time to acquire the second language without **errors**. **Therefore, if accuracy is not stressed right away in the instructional process,** language development will become "fossilized" at either Level 1+ (Intermediate--High) or Level 2+ (Advanced Plus) on the FSI 5 point proficiency scale. To buttress her above position she cites research evidence by Higgs and Clifford (1982). **While correcting errors,** Omaggio suggests that the procedure be handled **creatively and subtly. As she sees it, the flow of communication should not be stopped when a student makes a grammatical error. Instead, "proper" grammatical features should be modeled indirectly by the teacher during the natural flow of the conversation. Alternatively, the teacher may call on another student to model correctly the flawed phrase, sentence,** or word so that other students may emulate. **If necessary, however, the teacher may provide explicit negative or corrective feedback to a student whose message is unacceptable, faulty, or not understood.** She does, however, caution teachers to use sensible error-correction policies based on native-speaker reaction studies which **examine acceptable levels of comprehensibility, irritation, and acceptability. In any event, conscious learning of the rules of a language are not considered questionable in the process of developing accuracy in Omaggio's view. Unlike** Omaggio, Terrell and Krashen would say that the focus from the beginning should be on communicative tasks in the target language. And it is via such tasks, not through the conscious learning of grammatical features, that students, given appropriate time and experiences, will develop linguistic accuracy.

Why would ESL theorists, researchers or practitioners be interested *in* a book which was written for high school foreign language settings? **First,** Omaggio does a superb job of relating second language acquisition theory with proficiency-oriented principles in classrooms. And even though the nature of ESL and foreign language classrooms are quite

distinct one can glean useful information about the dynamics of curriculum and instruction in environments detached from their natural language context. Secondly, the book resonates with the names of ESL theorists and researchers who have made an impact on foreign language instruction in this country--names such as Burt, Canale, Cohen, Krashen, Rivers, Terrell, Savignon, Stevick, Stern, and Swain to mention a few. Thus it is useful to examine the ways in which these two fields are relating to each other. Thirdly, the book is a gold mine of resources which all language educators will find useful and timely. I for one thoroughly appreciated the way Omaggio treated the chapter entitled "Methodology in Transition." In this chapter she takes each one of the major methodologies and does the following: first, she gives a background of the method; next she identifies its major characteristics; then she provides a sample lesson plan based on the particular method; and finally she relates the method to proficiency orientation principles and concludes the discussion with potential drawbacks.

I predict that Omaggio's book, <u>Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction</u> will continue to make an even greater impact in second language education circles in the years to come. Whether an English as a second language, English as a foreign language or a foreign language educator, I highly recommend this book for your library.

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SYNTACTIC COMPLEXITY, ERROR AND THE HOLISTIC EVALUATION OF ESL STUDENT ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to answer two general research questions: 1) Are measures of syntactic complexity valid indices of ESL writing quality as measured by the holistic rating of ESL student essays? 2) Would a measure of frequency and seriousness of error reflect evaluators' perceptions of ESL writing quality? Many researchers in language development have argued that greater syntactic complexity may be indicative of better writing quality. Researchers have disagreed, however, over what constitutes the most "valid" index of syntactic complexity. Some studies of ESL writing have concluded that a measure of frequency and seriousness of error is essential in analysis of ESL student writing. A clause analysis technique designed by Louis Arena (1982) was used in this study to determine syntactic complexity in ESL student essays. The "Correctness Score" devised by Brodkey and Young (1981) was used to measure frequency and seriousness of error. The essay corpus analyzed in this study consisted of thirty ESL student compositions written for a practice Test of Written English (TWE) examination. The essays were graded and then analyzed in terms of Arena's clause analysis technique, using three measures of syntactic complexity: sentence length, information block length, and embedding depth; and the Correctness Score.   The results were subjected to statistical analysis.   The findings revealed that no significant correlation could be established between the three measures of the clause analysis technique and the holistic ratings.   A significant correlation was,

however, established between the Correctness Score
and the holistic ratings. These results indicate
that frequency and seriousness of error is a major
factor in rater judgment of ESL student writing qual-
ity, but that complexity of syntax appears to have
little relationship with evaluators' perceptions of
what constitutes "good" writing. However, the re-
liability of the holistic ratings and the Correctness
Score was not ideal and the findings would have to be
supported by further research.

1.   The Problem

     A perennial problem in first and second language
instruction has been the construction of a valid ob-
jective index of writing quality. Beginning with
Kellogg Hunt (1965) and the "T-unit," the search for
a valid objective measure of writing quality has
focused on measures of syntactic complexity. While
much of this research has concentrated on growth and
development in first language writing skills, signifi-
cant attention has recently been given to the measure-
ment of syntactic complexity in ESL writing. Several
studies (Larsen-Freeman and Strom 1977, Gaies 1980,
Perkins 1980, Homburg 1984) have concluded that a mea-
sure of syntactic complexity cannot be a valid index
of ESL writing quality unless it accounts for the
factor of error.

     Critics of objective measures of writing quality
have asserted that "there is no one-to-one relation-
ship between complexity and comprehension" (Hatch
1983: 76). On the other hand, intensive research
starting with Hunt (1965), has determined that there
may be strong correlations between complexity of syn-
tax, as measured by various indices, and evaluators'
perceptions of student writing quality at various
levels of proficiency. Some (Arena 1975b, Gaies
1980) have questioned the validity of applying these
measures to the writing of students of English as a
Second Language. Others, however, have found various

measures of syntactic complexity to show a strong correlation with independent ratings of ESL compositions (Kameen 1979, Flahive and Snow 1980, Homburg 1984).

2. Method

The essays of thirty college-level ESL students who wrote a practice TWE (Test of Written English) examination were rated holistically and analyzed with regard to syntactic complexity and incidence of error. Measures devised by Arena (1982) for syntactic complexity, and Brodkey and Young (1981) for error, were adapted and used in this analysis. The data obtained from the analysis were correlated with the holistic ratings of the essays to determine the relationships between syntactic complexity, incidence of error, and evaluators' perceptions of the ESL essays.

3. Subjects and Testing Conditions

The subjects of this study were thirty college-level ESL students who wrote a practice TWE examination in May, 1987. The students came from three proficiency levels identified with TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores of below 460, 460-490, and 490+ respectively. Two-thirds of the subjects happened to come from the highest proficiency level.

The students wrote the practice TWE according to the standards described by Stansfield and Webster (1986). The topic for the particular essay used in this study was given as follows:

> Some people believe that the best way of learning about life is by listening to the advice of family and friends. Other people believe that the best way of learning about life is through personal experience.

Compare the advantages of these two dif-
ferent ways of learning about life.
Which do you think is preferable? Use
specific examples to support your pre-
ference.

The students were seated in a large room and in-
structed to write on the topic for a maximum of
thirty minutes. The topic was not revealed until the
time of the examination. Students were advised to
make notes and organize their essays before beginning
to write.

4.   <u>Rating the Sample</u>

The thirty essays used in this study were rated
holistically by two experienced ESL teachers accord-
ing to the six-point scale provided for the TWE. The
scoring guidelines give the following broad defini-
tions to identify each of the six levels of writing
competence:

6 Clearly demonstrates competence in writing on
  both the rhetorical and syntactic levels,
  though it may have occasional errors.

5 Demonstrates competence in writing on both the
  rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it
  will have occasional errors.

4 Demonstrates minimal competence in writing on
  both the rhetorical and syntactic levels.

3 Demonstrates some developing competence in
  writing, but it remains flawed on either the
  rhetorical or syntactic level, or both.

2 Suggests incompetence in writing.

1 Demonstrates incompetence in writing.
                (Educational Testing Service, 1987)

5.   <u>Analysis</u>

     In order to facilitate the analysis, each essay
was typed, with all misspellings and errors faith-
fully recorded. At the time of the analysis, student
names and proficiency levels, as well as the holistic
ratings for the essays, were not known, or marked on
the essay copies.

     The clause analysis technique devised by Louis
Arena involves three measures: sentence length (the
number of clauses per sentence), information block
length (the number of clauses per main clause), and
embedding depth (the average "value" of embedding).
Arena defined the clause as "a potential group of
words which has one and one only verbal in the string
and which typically operates on the sentence level"
(1975a: 48). In accordance with examples given by
Arena in his explication of the technique (1982),
"verbals" were taken to include finite verbs, infini-
tives, active and passive participles, exemplifica-
tion beginning with "such as" and "for example," and
comparative structures after "than" and "as." The
following symbols, after Arena (1982), were used in
the analysis:

        A = a main clause
        B = a subordinate clause embedded into A
        C = a subordinate clause embedded into B
        D = a subordinate clause embedded into C, etc.

        * = a boundary sign for the beginning and end of
            a sentence.
        + = a clause block initial boundary inside of a
            sentence.

An analysis of the following piece of writing, taken
from the research sample, illustrates the application
of the clause analysis technique:

Learning about life is to get skill to make personality and to make money. Therefore learning about life is how to survive through my life. We listen to the advice of family and friends or we get it through personal experience. These category depenpend on what I want to learn. I believe both category but on whole my life I think personal experience is better than advising of the other person.

We usually learn education, job or how to do from the other person. Then it must be good way and I can get information which aren't know before. We should listen the advice of the other person and we should judge by myself if information fit to me.

```
# A  1. Learning about life is
   B  2. to get skill
   C  3. to make personality
+  C  4. and to make money.
# A  5. Therefore learning about life is how
   B  6. to survive through my life.
# A  7. We listen to the advice of family and
          friends
+  A  8. or we get it through personal
             experience.
# A  9. These category depenpend on what
   B 10. I want
   C 11. to learn.
# A 12. I believe both category
+  A 13. but on whole my life I think
   B 14. personal experience is better
   C 15. than advising of the other person
# A 16. We usually learn education, job [17]
             from the other person.
   B 17. or how to do
# A 18. Then it must be good way
+  A 19. and I can get informations
```

```
    B  20. which aren't know before.
#   A  21. We   should   listen   the   advice   of the
              other person
+   A  22. and we should judge by myself
    B  23. if information fit to me.
```

I.   Sentence   Patterns   (8   sentences,   23
        clauses)

```
        1.  ABC+ C
        2.  A B
        3.  A + A
        4.  A B C
        5.  A+ABC
        6.  A B
        7.  A + A B
        8.  A + A B
```

Sentence length = clauses/sentences
                = 23/8
                = 2.88 clauses per
                   sentence

II.   Information Blocks (12 blocks)

```
        1.  ABC+ C
        2.  A B
        3.  A
        4.  + A
        5.  A B C
        6.  A
        7.  +ABC
        8.  A B
        9.  A
        10. + A B
        11. A
        12. + A B
```

Block length = clauses/main clauses
             = 23/12
             = 1.92 clauses per
                information block

III. Embedding Depth

```
12 "A" clauses = 12 x 1 = 12
 7 "B" clauses =  7 x 2 = 14
 4 "C" clauses =  4 x 3 = 12
                   Total = 38
```

Embedding depth = total "value" of
                  clauses/number of
                  clauses
                = 38/23
                = 1.65 **average value of
                  embedding**

The figures of 2.88 for sentence length, 1.92 for in-
formation block length, and 1.65 for embedding depth
are the syntactic complexity data for the passage.

A means for computing the incidence of error in
the essay sample was adapted from Brodkey and Young's
(1981) three-point scoring system, the Correctness
Score. The criteria established for evaluating the
seriousness of individual errors were taken from the
following general description:

A score of 3 is a severe distortion of
readability or flow of ideas which throws
the reader off the sense of the message
through the intrusion of an erroneous
linguistic element; 2 is a moderate distor-
tion; 1 is a minor error that does not af-
fect readability in any significant way
(Brodkey and Young 1981: 160).

The Correctness Score for the essays in the sample
was reached after the following procedure: 1) the
first 120 words of an essay were counted; 2) each
error was assigned a score according to the three-
point scale; 3) the Correctness Score was computed by
dividing the number of words (120) by the total
"score" for error.

Some limitations were noted when applying the clause analysis technique and the Correctness Score to the essay sample. Student errors in syntax often necessitated subjective judgments on the ESL writer's true intent. This presented some problems in interpretation at the clause level. On the whole, however, the clause analysis technique was found to be a reliable index of syntactic complexity for college-level ESL student writing. The Correctness Score presented its own problems of reliability. Despite Brodkey and Young's assertion that the Correctness Score was a reliable objective index for measuring error, inter-rater and intra-rater reliability studies indicated that this measure was not highly dependable. Subjective judgments still had to be made in allocating scores to individual errors, and the methods advocated by Brodkey and Young would have to undergo some refinement if this measure were to be applied for research purposes.

6.   Results

The data for sentence length, information block *length,* embedding depth, and the Correctness Score were correlated with the holistic ratings using Spearman's rank order correlation.   The findings are presented in Table I.

The correlation coefficients for sentence length, information block length, and embedding depth were statistically insignificant. Moreover, the data for information block length and embedding depth, the two measures which Arena (1982) considered "valid" *indices* of syntactic complexity because they measured **subordinate structures, showed a remarkable lack of** variety. The highest figure for embedding depth was 2.27 and the lowest was 1.41, indicating, in fact, that there was little difference in subordination ratios among the essays, although holistic ratings ranged from 2.0 to 5.5.

TABLE I
SPEARMAN'S RANK ORDER CORRELATION (rho)
OF THE CLAUSE ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE,
THE CORRECTNESS SCORE, AND
THE HOLISTIC RATINGS

Index	rho	significance (p)
Sentence Length	-.158	ns
Information Block Length	+.252	ns
Embedding Depth	+.296	ns
Correctness Score	+.644	.01

A high, significant correlation was, however, established between figures for the Correctness Score and the holistic ratings. This finding indicates that evaluators' perceptions of ESL writing quality may be influenced rather strongly by the frequency and seriousness of error.

The results must be qualified by questions concerning the reliability of the holistic ratings. Two trained, experienced raters were used to grade the thirty essays of the sample. The TWE guidelines indicate that a difference of 1 between raters indicates a dependable score and the grades can then be averaged. Twenty-seven out of thirty pairs of ratings showed a maximum difference of only one point on the six-point scale, indicating a high degree of reliability. However, only eight pairs of ratings were identical, posing some question about the dependability of holistic ratings as a research tool.

7.   Discussion

Since the data for the subordination measures of information block length and embedding depth showed

little variety, it is not surprising that significant
correlations could not be established between these
measures and the holistic ratings. Arena (1975b)
stated that syntactic complexity measures were de-
vised to reflect the understanding that American
composition teachers regarded "well-written" composi-
tions to be those which demonstrated the "ability to
'say more,' on the average, with every statement"
(282). While the measures of information block
length and embedding depth were shown to be reliable
indices of syntactic complexity, the data resulting
from the analysis cannot support or refute claims re-
garding the relationship between syntactic complexity
and ESL writing quality. Indeed, the TWE guidelines
(Educational Testing Service 1987) stress <u>variety</u> of
syntax, rather than complexity, and the fact that
two-thirds of the subjects *in* this study came from
one proficiency level may also have been reflected in
the lack of conclusive data.

The high, significant correlation between fig-
ures for the Correctness Score and the holistic rat-
ings do reflect the contention of several researchers
(Larsen-Freeman and Strom 1977, Gaies 1980, Brodkey
and Young 1981, Homburg 1984) that the tabulation of
error is an essential in the objective assessment of
ESL writing. Unfortunately, the Correctness Score
did not show a high degree of reliability (0.60 in an
inter-rater check), and would appear to be more use-
ful as a gross, rather than fine, discriminator among
different levels of proficiency.

B.   <u>Conclusion and Implications</u>

The results of this study do not support the con-
tention that measures of syntactic complexity on the
sentence level (sentence length), or the clause level
(information block length and embedding depth) would
be valid indices of evaluators' perceptions of ESL
writing quality. The Correctness Score, a measure of
frequency and seriousness of error, did, however,

show a high correlation with the holistic ratings.
This finding indicates that raters were heavily in-
fluenced by the factor of error in their evaluation
of the essays. The results of the analysis must be
qualified, however, by questions regarding the relia-
bility of the holistic ratings and the Correctness
Score, and the nature of the sample, which did not
contain an even distribution among different pro-
ficiency levels.

Several implications can be drawn from the find-
ings of the study. First, since the rating guide-
lines emphasize variety, rather than complexity of
syntax, raters may have been looking for more than
simple subordination ratios. The two measures of in-
formation block length and embedding depth appear to
be reliable indices of syntactic complexity, however,
**although they may have to undergo further refinement
for application to ESL writing. Only a larger sam-
ple, with an even distribution of subjects from dif-
ferent proficiency levels, can lend credence to**
theories regarding the **relationship between syntactic**
complexity and evaluators' perceptions of ESL writing
quality.

The high correlation established between the
Correctness Score and the holistic ratings indicates
that this measure may be a useful assessment tool.
On the other hand, a reliability check showed that
the Correctness Score was not an entirely "objective"
**measure, and its value as a fine discriminator is
questionable.** The findings also indicate that the
raters may have paid an inordinate amount of atten-
tion to the incidence of error in the essays. This
may reflect the raters' concentration upon error as a
deciding factor *in* **grading the essays, implying that
training sessions should de-emphasize error in favor
of other criteria, such as organization, content,
development, attention to detail, etc. Since error
appears to be a major concern, more time could be de-
voted, in the ESL writing class, to the analysis of
student errors, emphasis on student correction of**

error, and instruction *in* those areas which may allow
for rapid progress, such as spelling. Care should be
taken, however, not to over-emphasize error to the ex-
clusion of organization, coherence, *range* of vocabu-
lary, and all the various criteria established by
guidelines, such as those set by the TWE, as indica-
tive of "good" writing.

Many variables may affect evaluators' percep-
tions of ESL writing quality. Only further research,
using objective measures, can establish strong con-
clusions regarding the relationships between syntac-
tic complexity, incidence of error, and rater judge-
ments of ESL writing quality.

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**AN ESL/MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL
TRAINING PROJECT MODEL***

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INTRODUCTION

　　Within the greater Portland metropolitan area
there are now 3,000 limited-English proficient (LEP)
students speaking 45 different languages. These K-12
students attend a number of different public schools
in various school districts in the area. In addition
to the 3,000 LEP students in the area, another 1,500
formerly LEP students are still in the public schools.

　　While the state of Oregon has only 1.1 percent of
the nation's population, it has 2.3 percent of the
nation's refugees and 3.8 percent of the nation's un-
accompanied minors. Eighty-five and a half percent of
Oregon's total refugee population resides in the
Portland metropolitan area.

NEED

　　The nationwide statistical estimates of the need
for ESL/Multicultural education are alarming. "Of the

3.6 million limited English proficient (LEP) students (ages 4-18) identified in the 1978 Children's English and Services Study, only 3⎕ percent were being served through bilingual and/or ESL instruction" (Collier, 1985:2).

The Portland metropolitan area is also in need of assistance for those who work with LEP students. Within this geographic area there are 3,000 LEP students speaking 45 different languages. These K-12 students attend a number of different public school districts in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties *in* Oregon as well as in contiguous school districts in the southern part of Washington state. Because of the settlement pattern and the culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse LEP student body in the area, an ESL/Multicultural program was developed as it best meets the needs of this diverse community.

At the present time there is no place in the Portland metropolitan area to receive formal educational training on how to work with LEP students *in* the public school setting. Perhaps the main reason that there is no formal training for people interested in learning how to work with LEP students in public schools is that the state of Oregon's credentialing body, the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, does not certificate ESL or Bilingual personnel.

IMPACT

The Portland metropolitan area, like many major cities all over the nation, has been receiving unprecedented numbers of Southeast Asian students beginning in 1975 as an aftermath of the Vietnam War. Around 1980-82, the ethnic composition and the social/educational status of the new refugee students arriving from Southeast Asia began to change drastically. Many of the new arrivals are the "boat people" from Vietnam and tribal people (Hmong and Mien) from the Laotian mountains. The Vietnamese "boat people," unlike their

compatriots of the first mass exodus immediately after the fall of Vietnam in 1975, were from a less privileged stratum of their society. And, the Laotian mountain people, unlike the lowland Lao, were mostly preliterate in their native settings. The percentage of these incoming preliterate LEP students (K-12) in the Portland Public Schools jumped from 10% in 1978-79 to 65% in 1981-82.

The significance of prior experiences in school learning has been demonstrated by monitoring and comparing the progress made by distinct Southeast Asian groups (Strouse, 1985; Shi, 1985).

Most of the local school districts that have considerable populations of minority students are also working to achieve minority students/staff balance. For example, the largest school district in Oregon, Portland Public Schools, has an affirmative action plan to encourage applications for employment from members of racial and ethnic minority groups, women and handicapped persons. This plan is strongly endorsed by the School Superintendent, Dr. Prophet. Other nearby districts have similar plans.

According to a recent report "A Statistical Portrait of Culturally Diverse Children in Portland Public Schools" (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1985), it has been pointed out that the Portland Public School District's teaching staff generally does not reflect the cultural diversity of its students. Except for the Anglo student population, teacher percentages are generally less than one-half of the respective student percentages. For *example,* the percentage of Asian students is 6.7 and the percentage for Asian teachers is only 2.1. Discrepancies between teacher and student ethnic distribution become even more pronounced at the high school level.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

PROJECT PLAN

Since the early spring of 1986, Portland State University personnel have been meeting with the Oregon Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, **the Portland Public Schools, the Northwest Regional** Educational Laboratory, the **Multnomah County Educa**tional Service District, the Oregon City Public **Schools, the Evergreen Public Schools (Washington),** and the Beaverton Public Schools to give technical assistance to this project. A parental advisory group composed of parents, teachers, and others interested in the education of LEP students was also formed to monitor and give input on the project. This group included representation of the linguistic, cultural, and racial minorities that would be directly served by this project. These groups met to develop a project that would train personnel to better serve the LEP **population in the area.**

There are approximately 60 bilingual aides employed by local school districts to help in ESL/ Bilingual classrooms in the Portland area. In many cases, these people were teachers or other types of professionals in their home countries but now find themselves in the USA without enough documentation to let them enter the regular teaching labor market. Because of their vast experiences, once certified, they would make welcome additions to the staff of the public school districts in the area. The opportunity for these individuals to study and become certified teachers would increase employment opportunities, offer advancement, and career development for individuals while providing strong role models for public school students and would help school districts meet their affirmative action guidelines. This model project will allow participants to obtain a basic Oregon teaching certificate while also taking courses in ESL/ Multicultural Education. These credentials will make participants eligible for positions as classroom teachers, ESL/Bilingual teachers in either ESL/

Bilingual classrooms or sheltered content classes for LEP students.

Many of the bilingual **paraprofessionals have had** good teaching skills, especially in meeting the learning needs of LEP students. Their usually strong math and science backgrounds can serve to help meet the graduation needs of LEP students and further their academic interests for future careers or professions. The opportunity for these individuals to study and become certified teachers will provide strong role models for the younger generation to look forward to.

The project also allows currently certified classroom teachers to take part *in* the courses designed for the teaching and administration of LEP classes. This need for professional enrichment has been found to be desirable among those teachers who are being misassigned to teach ESL classes, especially in some smaller school districts where budgetary constraint does not allow the employment of additional qualified ESL teachers. Many of these teachers show great interest, not only in methodology and techniques of ESL, but also in cultural understandings and assessment procedures. PSU will offer ESL/Multicultural education training to graduates of this project.

PSU and the members of the advisory committee felt that something needed to be done regarding the training of teaching personnel for LEP students. The nature of the training that PSU will offer will make a difference in the teaching capabilities and qualifications of the personnel who work with LEP students.

COURSEWORK

The ESL/Multicultural Training Project includes coursework in ESL, linguistics, program evaluation, cross-cultural studies, counseling, and methodology. The following courses comprise the ESL/Multicultural Training Project.

Second Language Acquisition

This course will focus on the process of language acquisition as it concerns first and subsequent language learning and how that varies with different age levels, educational background, socio-economic background, and ethnicity. Included will be an overview of the current theories of language acquistition and current models of instructional support for LEP students.

Introduction to ESL/Multicultural Education

This class is designed to give an overview of the field and will help ensure that participants gain *an* understanding and respect for LEP students and their cultural, linguistic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. Students will study the nature of language and language varieties. Participants will spend time in public schools with LEP students; they will be expected to **attend ethnic cultural events. Participants** will be exposed to topics such as acculturation, ESL methodologies, and language program planning.

Teaching Strategies and Materials: ESL/Bilingual Methods

This course is designed to acquaint prospective teachers with the content and methods of teaching listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as well as content subjects to LEP students in the public schools. Participants will have an opportunity to observe ESL/Bilingual classrooms in the local public schools, where they will be expected to present some lessons and be critiqued on **their experience.**

Evaluation and Assessment for the LEP Classroom

In this course students will gain an understanding of the principles and knowledge of the techniques of first and second language assessment and interpretation of the results. Some emphasis will be given to difficulties in first language assessments and the implications of this for LEP students with learning difficulties and of those who come from a preliterate background.

LEP School-Community Relations

Participants will become familiar with different parent involvement models in local schools, become aware of ethnic organizations and current issues in local LEP communities, and will develop their own building-based parent involvement plan to provide participation to the parents of LEP students.

Counseling the LEP Student

A majority of LEP students and their families are faced with unique and often overwhelming obstacles. This course will help classroom personnel learn how to identify cultural factors that affect cultural adjustments, and to become familiar with learning and counseling theories as well as intervention strategies using both monolingual English and bilingual cross-cultural staff.

This mixture of course offerings provides students with a balanced curriculum of coursework in culture, language acquisition, linguistics, general issues of bilingual education, ESL, program development, assessment and methods of teaching content area subjects to LEP students.

PLACEMENT

Clearly the success of this project will be felt when project graduates are placed and hired in the public schools. The credentials and training that participants will get at the end of the project will make them eligible to become regular classroom teachers who have the additional skills to work with LEP students.

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FROM WHAT WE KNOW TO WHAT WE DO

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ABSTRACT

More and more American English teachers are currently seeking ESL teaching positions in China. Upon arrival, however, they are often surprised to find that the available texts are quite traditional and quite different from modern texts used in the U.S., and that student expectations are also quite different.

This article, mainly based on a number of class observations and questionnaire surveys of English study, presents a discussion of characteristics of English teaching and learning for science students in China. The present classroom teaching remains largely teacher-centered and knowledge-oriented. It is shown that these problems, coupled with some harmful factors related to large class and students' classroom psychology, seriously affect the development of learners' language skills. To alleviate these problems, group work of various types, choral work and after-class activities are suggested--all of which are adapted from modern methodology to fit the special needs of Chinese students of English in China.

I. INTRODUCTION

One general problem facing EFL teachers for science students in China has been that classroom instructions do not seem to achieve as much as they

should in developing the students' English skills. From junior middle school up to college, students spend an average of about 1,400 hours on English in class, but their proficiency level is low. Take their reading ability for instance. The skill of extracting information from an English text is the focus of classroom instructions from senior school up through college. The students may know every word of a text, but fail to understand the main ideas. Their reading speed is about 32 WPM on average according to a study carried out among 3,864 students in 24 colleges (Appendix II to _A General Syllabus of College English for Science Students,_ 1985). In a recent reading test given to the graduate students at Hunan Agricultural College, we found that they could only cope with the intermediate readings at a speed of 60 WPM. This is a long way behind the generally recommended minimal speed for effective reading which is 200 WPM (Bowen & Madsen, 1985).

Thus low instructional efficiency is the major problem discussed in this article. What accounts for this situation of English teaching-learning? What is going on in our language classroom? What can we do to improve the situation? Many valuable observations have been made concerning TEFL in China by field-workers. Alan Maley pointed out our accuracy oriented teaching and teacher's authoritarian role (1984). Fiona Miller mentioned "spoon-feeding" (1986). Ann V. Martin described the operating pedagogical theory that the teacher is the sole provider of knowledge (1986).

What we attempt to do _in_ this article is: (1) to provide additional support for their findings; (2) to investigate other issues not considered in the previous literature. First we shall examine some of the characteristic features of our methods of teaching. Then we shall turn to class size and its effects upon teaching-learning process. Our third concern will be students' classroom psychology. In answering the last question we will propose some techniques that

might suit our English classroom for science stu-
dents.

II. DATA SOURCES

The data used for this article are chiefly from
the following three sources:

1. Classroom teaching.   We have been teaching
    English as a foreign language to students of
    agricultural sciences since 1983 at Hunan Agri-
    cultural College.   The courses we gave, with a
    duration of 240-280 hours spread over four
    semesters, are basically intensive ones which
    emphasize the development of reading skills.
    The experiences and classroom findings were
    collected and summarized in teaching reports.

2. Class observations.   During the 1986 academic
    year, we observed twelve classes, ten at four
    provincial colleges in Hunan and the rest at one
    middle school.   Of the ten college classes two
    belong to the first year and eight to the second
    year. The two middle school classes include one
    of the 6th grade and one of the 9th grade. Most
    of the lessons are similar to what we have been
    teaching, containing a little listening and
    speaking, some reading and lots of grammar/
    vocabulary work.

    We followed a rather simple observation scheme.
    The points of our concern were who is listening,
    speaking, *writing* or reading, what medium is
    used and to what an end such activities are
    carried out. A class period was evenly divided
    into fifty parts, which are marked in the left-
    most column of our observation form (for observa-
    tion form, see Appendix I). Then in two other
    columns, entries were made every minute of what
    the teacher and the students were doing, respec-
    tively. In tallying up the result, we assigned

one score to each interval and found out the percentage of the use of time by teacher and students. These class observations also enabled us to see certain aspects of class-size effect and students' classroom psychological traits.

3. <u>Questionnaire survey.</u> In September, 1986, a survey of English study was conducted among 600 freshmen at Hunan Agricultural College (see Appendix II). The questionnaire used consists of 26 items in form of multiple-choice or open-end questions, concerning students' classroom experiences at middle school, their learning habits, language expectations, etc. One hundred and sixty completed questionnaires were randomly sampled and tallied. For multiple-choice items, the times the subjects made a choice were counted and divided by the sample number to obtain the frequency. With open-ended questions, the answers were grouped and generalized according to the similarity of what students said. An answer like "A big class is too noisy", "A small class is quiet and disciplined" and "We can hear better in a small class" would go under the category of "A quieter and better disciplined learning environment".

III. TEACHER-CENTERED
AND KNOWLEDGE-ORIENTED PROCESS

The present way of teaching English in China is by no means totally grammar-translational as it was in the past. It is in the slow transition from teaching about the language to teaching the language under the impetus of the general syllabus. As the aims of teaching change so also the methods. Even in a very traditional class, more attention is being paid to learners' ability of using the language. Textbooks have been adopted such as <u>New Concept English</u> and <u>Mainline English</u> (Alexander, 1978), <u>Modern English</u>

(Lake & Evans, 1986), College English (Shanghai Communication University, 1986), which give students more chances to use the language and train their skills. Tape recorders are in general use, enabling the class to listen to the voice of the native speakers and imitate their pronunciation and accent, thus being rather audio-lingual. Types of exercises like cloze, dictation and precis writing have been *introduced* to make the drilling somewhat more communicative.   Some teachers use English to organize classroom activities.   Although changing to some extent, the traditional teaching approach still retains two important **features: teacher-centeredness and** knowledge-orientation.

What is meant by teacher-centeredness?   As Larsen-Freeman (1984) pointed out, the students do as the teacher says so that they can learn what s/he knows. The teacher is the teacher all the time, quite neglecting the equally important role of participant and facilitator in the learning process, as were suggested by Clark and Silberstain (1977). What we found in our observations may illustrate this feature.

In the classes we went to, teacher activities were generally of two types: writing on the blackboard (indicated as TW), talking to the class (TT). Student activities generally fell into two categories: trying to follow the teacher so as to understand or record what s/he says and writes (S/FT), and drilling either orally or with written texts S/D). The time distributions in observed classes are shown as follows:
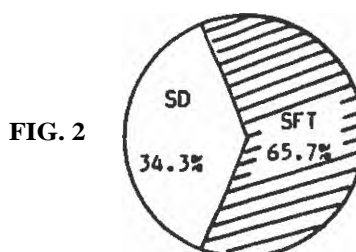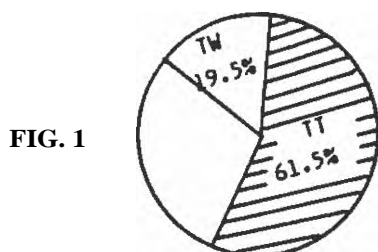

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

Figure 1 shows that the teacher was talking (TT) 61.5% of the 100 minutes and writing on the blackboard (TW) for 19.5% of the time. Let us see in detail what teachers did.

TT:

a.   reading the text aloud;
b.   explaining either in Chinese or in English the words or expressions the teacher thinks useful or difficult in each sentence;
c.   asking questions about the text or the usages studied;
d.   giving answers to the questions or reading out translations of the text;
e.   correcting students' errors;
f.   assigning classroom exercises from the textbook; and,
g.   assigning homework.

TW:

h.   writing the definitions of the explained words and expressions or writing an example sentence when finding the students at a loss; and,
i.   supplying additional usages relevant to those in the text.

From Figure 2, we see that only for 34.3% of the time the students were practicing with the target language. In the time allowed for them, the students were:

SFT:

a.   reading after the teacher;
b.   listening to the teacher for explanation of the text;
c.   reading the text while they couldn't understand the teacher's explanation in English;
d.   looking at the board to read what the teacher has written down there;

e.   copying down what the teacher gives in their
     notebooks or just between lines of the text; and

f.   checking a dictionary to clarify a vocabulary
     item in the text or given by the teacher.

SD:

g.   responding in English to the teacher's questions
     orally;

h.   doing the reading exercises in the drill pack;
     and,

i.   giving the teacher the translation of a sentence
     in the text.

The blank area in Figure 1 would include the time the teacher organizes the class, goes around to solve the problems the students encounter in their classroom exercises, or stops the students who might be reading something else. The shadowed areas in the two figures indicate that, for a greater part of the instruction process, the teacher was giving the language while the students were passively taking it. Therefore the teacher is not only the manager and controller of the learning process but also the provider of the correct language forms. Thus the feature of teacher dominance is obvious.

One could argue of course that the SFT activities such as listening to the teacher or reading the blackboard are also exposures to the target language and thus enhance learning. But the real learning can hardly take place when the learners only receive instead of being actively involved. Moreover, the so-called exposures are often not the target language. Thirty and a half percent of the time the teacher was talking in Chinese. We are not saying that the teachers should totally abandon their role of organizing the class and getting the knowledge across, but if they exercise the role to the extent of "taking everything in hand", they may well make the students passive and inefficient learners and deprive them of the already limited opportunities for practice.

The second traditional feature our teaching retains is that it focuses upon handing to students the knowledge about the language. Effort made for skills training is far from enough. The teacher's task has become to give what and to tell why.

One typical example is with the teaching of vocabulary. The teaching mostly is through teacher talk, more or less as in the following scheme. The word to be taught is 'suppose'.

A.   Write on the board: suppose v.t.

   1)   To take as likely: consider as true.
         E.g., "We supposed he has gone home",
         "He must be back now", "Yes, I suppose
         so".

   2)   To believe.
         E.g.,   "He was commonly supposed
         foolish".

   3)   to allow
         E.G., "You're not supposed to smoke in
         here".

The teacher gave the items one by one. When finding the explanations too difficult for the students to follow the teacher switched to Chinese or wrote them on the board.

The emphasis of the vocabulary work is not on how a word fits into the context, but how many dictionary entries it has. The exercises like fill-in-blanks with the right word or make a sentence with the word might be helpful efforts, but more often if the textbook does not provide the drills, the students may be asked to do Chinese-English translations, either with one word alone or in a sentence. This again encourages them to remember the word sense rather than use it. Similarly, with the teaching of grammar, about half of our subjects in the survey

said they got introduced to English tenses in the fol-
lowing way: example sentences--concept of a tense
(often given in Chinese)--rules for use.

The knowledge-oriented approach puts a heavy
load on learners' memory. Therefore they are usually
busy taking notes in class as shown by Activity (e)
under SFT.   The notes are for them to recite after
class.   In turn, this challenges the teachers'
memory.   They should know lots of words and gram-
matical structures, be able to tell the differences
between them and to deal with students' questions or
problems which are often knowledge-oriented.

IV. CLASS SIZE

Like the problems of teacher-centralism and
knowledge-orientation, class size, one of the environ-
mental factors, may effect the development of the lan-
guage skills. It has been suggested that the optimum
size for intensive language instruction is between 7
to 15 students. But at most colleges in China, a
class of 30 students is considered a small class for
the English course upon which the task of developing
students' language skills almost totally depends. We
have investigated seven colleges and found that the
number of students in one class ranges from 30 to
100[2].   The twelve classes we observed all had over
30 students.   Next, we will look at the undesirable
effects of the large classes on teaching-learning pro-
cess.

Let's first go to the questionnaire survey and
see the students' reaction to class size (see Item in
Appendix II). To our knowledge, a questionnaire of
this type containing these particular aspects of stu-
dent reactions has not been considered in previous
studies. Of the 158 sampled students, 82% of the
subjects preferred small classes to large classes.
Seventy-three percent gave specific reasons, which

are shown in the following table along with frequency
that each reason was mentioned.

Reasons	Frequencies
IN A SMALL CLASS	
I. A quieter and better disciplined learning environment	38
II. More chances to get help from the teacher	24
III. Better concentration of attention	15
IV. More chances to practice English	14
V. (For the teacher) better attending to students' individual needs and interests	8
VI. Closer teacher-student relation	4

The reasons students gave generally are in accordance
with what we find are the major weaknesses of large
classes. Firstly, in a large class it is easy for at-
tention to go astray owing to noise or inability to
see clearly. This is aggravated by the fact that
class organization is usually loose and the instruc-
tion materials do not involve the students much.
Secondly, the students do not have enough time to dis-
cuss language and learning problems with the teacher.
During the break the teacher, exhausted by talking,
needs to take a breath or is besieged by a few "bet-
ters".

Besides lacking sufficient practice, students'
individual needs and interests are not well attended
to. Sometimes the teacher wants to individualize the
class as s/he would do a small class, but the

managerial difficulties often hold her/him back.
Thirdly, the amount of students' exposure to the tar-
get language may be further reduced. Homework is an
important chance for students to practice the lan-
guage forms learned. For the teacher it is a main
channel to supply correct language forms and get feed-
back on student progress. But when one has a class
of sixty, the marking of drills becomes so burdensome
that some teachers, instead of finding a better way
of marking, cut down the amount of take-home tasks.
Fourthly, the types of exposure may also be changed.
The teacher may tend to give students more mechanical
drills, the marking of which will not take too long
and cancel such productive exercises as sentence-
making and precis writing.

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

In the whole teaching-learning process, there
are, we may say, two types of factors at work. One
is the content of the teaching materials, the manner
of presentation and class management. This largely
depends upon the teacher. The other is the learner
factors, the psycho-state of which will be our con-
cern here. The question is--is the mind fully open
to 'language input' and always ready to cooperate
with the teacher in accomplishing learning tasks? We
shall examine those psychological factors typical of
the students, which, to some extent, affect their
classroom performance.

1. <u>Interest decline.</u> As the survey revealed, stu-
    dents come to college with high expectations for
    English study. They hope that they will be able
    to read well, and listen and speak tolerably in
    the target language after a few years of college
    English instruction. These college freshmen
    never grudge time for English. The class at-
    tendance rate is high and the students try to be
    responsive and cooperative with the teacher.

This enthusiasm is important as it can help increase the comprehensible input and thus enhance the development of language skills (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 'affective hypothesis').

We have observed, however, that the interest level of many students in English study unfortunately drops a lot when they have completed a semester or so. A similar phenomenon has been found among the junior middle school *(grades 7-9)* students (Wu Guangfan, 1986). This decline may be owing to the interaction of students' motivational orientation and the way of teaching. McDonough (1981) distinguished integratively motivated learners from those instrumentally motivated ones. Those who are integratively motivated want to learn the language so as to survive in the English-speaking community or to become part of the English culture. Those who are instrumentally motivated just learn the language for professional or academic purposes. Chinese learners *of* English mostly belong to the latter type.

Of the students we surveyed, 82% said they learn English in order to read scientific literatures written in the language. But the danger about this kind of motive is that learners *tend* to shift their interest and efforts onto something they find more attractive and more necessary. In this sense we say that instrumental motivation is not as dynamic as integrative one.

For our students, classroom instructions are almost the only way to get exposed to the target language (particularly so in colleges where teaching-learning resources are limited), so students' emotion or attitude towards the language study is greatly affected by the way classes are carried out, and thus is reflected in their attitudes towards the language

classes. We asked a number of second-year or third-year students to comment on the English classes they have taken. Many of their polite understatements are "A little bit disappointing", "Anyway, the teacher has been working hard for us", "We don't feel we're losing much when we're absent". In class observations, we found students reading textbooks of other subjects or even popular magazines, or students nodding away over their notebook. Takehome assignments are frequently neglected. Therefore, the observed decline of interest in the English course means that the instrumentally motivated learners are demotivated by the way of teaching which fails to arouse interest in the learners.

2.   Dependence.   Students too often depend upon the teacher or the bright students for correct explanation of the text, words or expressions. They always expect the teacher to help them solve problems.   As shown in Section IV, the second largest number of subjects listed this as a reason for preferring a small class. This psychological trend, partly being the result of teacher-centered 'spoon-feeding', manifests itself as students being passive in class (B. Jackson, 1986).   The tendency of depending on someone else may curtail students' initiative and the ability of self judgment and result in poor self-confidence.   Just imagine a learning community in which each one waits for another to say the right thing. If nothing is done for the group, no proper student-student interaction is possible.

3.   Alienation.   With a teacher's authoritarian role, the respect for the teacher may lead to a feeling of remoteness, forming a gap between the teacher and the learners, a gap that can only be moderated but not totally filled by the teacher's conscious effort to be more accessible.   In many cases, consulting the teacher

becomes an anxiety-causing situation. It is an interesting phenomenon we have observed that many students would rather ask their classmates for help than the teacher when they encounter a problem. A similar phenomenon also exists in middle schools. The problem of alienation puts students in a rather difficult situation. They want the teacher's help but are often too shy or too nervous to get it.

4. <u>Anxiety in class.</u>   Particularly in large classes, students find it hard to speak eloquently in front of so many people. Their voices falter, and breath quickens. They are fearful of making an error before such a large crowd because it will hurt their self-esteem. Worse than that, if they fail to answer a question which they could have easily done if relaxed and unconfronted, they feel frustrated. This anxiety often weakens the learners' responsiveness. When the whole class are invited to answer a question, there may be responses in the manner of general murmuring. But individual volunteers are rare. Silence may last until the teacher calls by name.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

What can we do to improve our present way of English teaching in China? How can we introduce into the classroom some activities which are pedagogically sound and practicable? By "pedagogically sound" we mean that the activities encourage the use of the target language in meaningful context, work towards the building of communicative skills and help foster in the students' self-confidence, creativity and the habit of 'working together' to solve problems. By 'practicable' we mean that the activities can be carried out without causing too many management problems or waste of time under the circumstances of large

NOTES AND COMMENTS

classes and inadequate teaching resources, which are
not likely to improve very quickly in many colleges.
We'll first see how group work (we include pair work
in group work as its minimal form) can be usefully
applied to our English classroom in China, followed
by a discussion of 'choral work' and 'after-class
work'.

Michael H. Long (1980) suggested group work as
one solution to large class problem for its increas-
ing learner's chances to practice, reducing tension
and individualizing the class. Besides the three ad-
vantages Long described, group work is good for our
classrooms in that it helps shift teacher-student
interaction to more student-student interaction so as
to moderate teacher-centeredness *and* **develop stu-**
dents' self confidence in learning and enable them to
truly help each other.

How can we properly group a large class? If the
strong students always stay with the weak ones, won't
they be pulled back? If we always put those of
similar ability in the same group, can they be suffi-
ciently stimulated and solve tough problems they
meet? The way of grouping should depend upon the pur-
pose of teaching and the type of materials for the
class.

1. Level-grouping is to put the students about
the same level in one group for tasks that aim at
eliciting discussion, ensuring total participation,
or those language tasks which involve mechanical
manipulations. Take reading lesson for example.
When beginning a text, the students are divided into
groups and asked to read it, then discuss its main
ideas according to the few general pre-questions set
by the teacher. The members of the weak groups with
very limited aural-oral skills may write down the
answers and compare each other's. The strong groups
can write down and discuss them in English or the
teacher may give them a few extra questions to do.

As for language manipulation tasks, the students benefit more by group work than our conventional one-after-another way.

In eight of the twelve classes we observed, the teacher called up one student after another to do grammar or vocabulary exercises. Often those who think their turn wouldn't come this time or those who have done their part are paying no attention. When the teacher called randomly, the students were nervous. Usually they were anxiously doing the next question in preparation for the call. They never listened to the teacher explaining or correcting the error. However, in groups, every student would work **on all the sentences, then put** the answers together to reach an answer they can all agree on. When the teacher wants to check the **result, one representative** of the group can give it.

Another activity we tried with groups is 'unscrambling'. Type the unscrambled materials on a slip of paper, ask the groups to read, discuss, and work out the correct order. Then the teacher can check it before the whole class. As an alternative, the **teacher** can dictate the material to the students when xerox or mimeograph is not available. We tried this and it worked well. A more challenging form, suggested by Stevick (1983), is for each member to memorize the sentence given and then destroy the paper. The students repeat their own sentence to one another. When the right order is worked out, write the text out in full. This can be given to stronger groups. Unscrambling exercise is not only easier to manage with a large class, but particularly a good way to make reading exercise a communicative activity and train students reading/writing skills and the ability to organize ideas.

2.   <u>Balanced grouping</u> is in fact a further step of level-grouping. That is, assign one or two strong students to the average and weak groups. Balanced groups are balanced in the sense that all the groups

will likely have similar capacity to deal with prob-
lems and will come up with somewhat the same solu-
tions. This grouping enables the weak to aspire to
the strong and the strong help with problems that the
weak cannot solve, developing mutual-help atmosphere,
and it is suitable for the contents the teacher ex-
pects all the students to grasp, or the tasks which
involve difficult vocabulary or structural items.
One activity we tried in such groups is peer correc-
tion and editing. Each student was asked to write a
precis of the text. Then they moved into groups, and
corrected each other's work. One member was chosen
to write out the precis based upon the different ver-
sions, and hand in to the teacher. The teacher had
few to mark and did not have to worry about the big
stack of compositions usually found with large
classes.

Choral Work is one of the most efficient ways to
handle big classes, and is good for training pronunci-
ation, intonation, etc. But in many classes insuffi-
cient attention is paid to actual results. For ex-
ample, the teacher often stands in front of a large
class, asks the students to read something aloud
after him/her, while the students spread out, some
even out of reach of the teacher's voice. In this
case either the teacher should move to the center of
the room, or the student should sit closer to the
front of the room. As a result of the difference in
reading-aloud ability, when recordings are used part
**of the next sentence in the recording is overwhelmed
by the voice of the slower readers. The students
thus never get a clear and complete sentence. For**
the purpose of training pronunciation and intonation,
we can make the material brief and effective, concen-
trating on certain phonological problems our students
have. Each sentence can be recorded twice, but be-
fore repetition there should be a pause long enough
even for the slower students.

After-Class Work is another way to give students
more practice.   As with learning natural sciences,

learning English also needs individual work. One rea-
son is that the students will have lots of time after
graduation to deal with English literatures of their
field on their own. But the work should be guided
and its end-products appropriately checked. Before
students preview a lesson at home, the teacher can
provide some background information about the topic
concerned. Peer correction as described in balanced
grouping can be helpful feedback on students' written
work such as sentence making, composition, summary or
translation. For after-class reading the students
can hand in a reading report which records the main
ideas, new words and expressions and problems (Juffs,
A., 1984).

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

China's present four modernizations necessitate
a reform in the teaching of English as a foreign lan-
guage. The reform, based on the characteristics of
our teaching-learning process and on psychological as-
pects of our classroom, i.e., what we know, involves
changing the idea of teacher-centralism and knowledge-
orientation, and the methods of organizing the class
and presenting the teaching materials, i.e., what we
do. Besides the effective use of choral and after-
class activities, group work can be an interesting
and fruitful solution to the problems of our English
classroom. Teachers need to change their attitudes
towards the students and learn more about them. They
should be confident that the class can help them-
selves with many of the problems occurring in their
studies. They should give them the autonomy in learn-
ing. Teaching is not simply to walk into *a* class-
room, open the book and teach. Teachers should *be*
well informed about students' language levels, their
previous learning experiences and their psychological
outlook so that they can know the right thing to do
in class.

   Since changes are inevitable, and since our peda-
gogical tradition has been teacher-central, why don't
we teachers take advantage of our powerful role one
more time, start the reform within ourselves, and
influence the many learners by us few?

NOTES

[1] "A General Syllabus of College English for Science Students" was written by ten key universities in China, authorized by the Ministry of Education and published in March, 1985. The syllabus sets as the objectives of the English course the building of reading/listening/speaking/writing skills with special emphasis on reading. It specifies the grammatical structures, vocabulary items and functions which the course ought to cover in its four basic and two advanced grades.

[2] The information was supplied by the teacher trainees of 1986 Summer Session at Hunan Medical College, PRC. These colleges include the ones specializing in medicine, agriculture, mechanical engineering and teacher-training.

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APPENDIX I
CLASS OBSERVATION FORM

General Information				
Time	**Class**	**Class Size**	**Teacher**	**Coursebook**

Observed Details		
Minutes	What students are doing	What the teacher is doing
1		
2		
3		
6		
. .		

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE

1.   How many students did you usually have in your
     class at middle school?

2.   Let's say a class with less than 30 students is
     a small class and one of more than 30 students
     is a big one.   Now would you prefer a small
     class or a big one for your English course?
     Why?

3.   What do you learn English for? Please underline
     the item(s) in the following which suit your
     case:

     talk to native speakers; read the literatures
     relevant to your major; translating; go and live
     in an English speaking country; pursue higher
     academic degree; work as a teacher of English;
     pass exams; merely for pleasure

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