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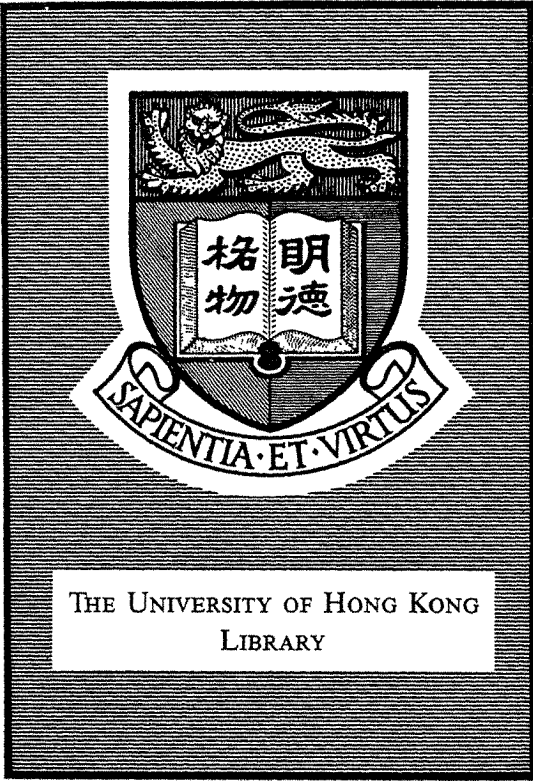
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## EDITORIAL POLICY AND INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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### Policy

*Hong Kong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching* publishes work in a number of language-related areas including general linguistics, teaching methodology, curriculum development, testing and evaluation, educational technology, CALL, language planning, and bilingual education. Articles on the teaching of languages other than English are also welcome. We are interested in articles that specifically address language teaching in Hong Kong, deal with the surrounding region, or are of particular concern to this region (e.g. language learning in other Chinese contexts, or Chinese students learning languages overseas).

### Submission Categories

The Editors welcome contributions of three broad types: articles, reports and book reviews. Contributions should not have been previously published, nor should they be under consideration for publication elsewhere.

- \* Full length articles should include an abstract of not more than 200 words and biographical data in not more than 50 words.
- \* Reports may cover any aspect of language-related research, development, and professional activities.
- \* Reviews may be of textbooks, professional literature or instructional materials.

All contributions should be addressed to:

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The University of Hong Kong,  
Hong Kong.

### Guidelines for Authors

- \* In general, the layout of the *Hong Kong Papers* conforms to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 3rd Edition; copies are available in the Main Library of the University of Hong Kong. On request, a style-sheet can be mailed to intending contributors.
- \* Submissions should be on MS-DOS format 3.5" or 5.25", floppy discs in Word Perfect 5.0 or 5.1, or Microsoft Word. The disc should be accompanied by one hard copy.
- \* Authors will receive a complimentary copy of the issue and 10 offprints of their article.

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## Editorial

This 16th issue of the *Hong Kong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching* marks a certain broadening of focus; from the ESP/Hong Kong orientation of prior years, we are hoping to encompass a wider range of articles and reports, both in terms of content and in terms of geographical reach. (For more information, see *Information for Contributors* on the previous page.) Furthermore, due to a large number of submissions for this issue, we are considering producing two issues a year. The new deadlines for these issues are **September 1st** for the (new) March issue and **March 1st** for the September issue. We would like to encourage colleagues to submit articles, book reviews or research and conference reports for review. We would also welcome submissions for a *FORUM* section, which we hope will encourage debate around published articles or other issues.

### In this issue

#### Articles

The first two articles in this issue point to two broad issues of interest for anyone concerned with recent trends in language teaching and testing. **Dave Coniam's** paper reports a study of the "summary cloze" section of the Hong Kong Examination Authority's (HKEA) Use of English paper. His research shows that while this part of the exam appears to be reliable and discriminates reasonably well among candidates, it is "low in construct validity," that is to say it does not really test what it claims to. He concludes that if the HKEA continues to claim that this test fulfills a specific purpose, "its role in the examination needs to be re-examined: indeed, we might ask whether it should remain in the examination at all." Summarizing recent trends in the rapidly-growing field of computer-concordancing, **Bruce Ma** points to a number of possible uses for small-corpora concordancing in language classrooms and language testing. Concordancing is also an important aspect of **Phil Benson's** research report, in which he discusses the development of a corpus of texts of Hong Kong English.

This edition of the *Hong Kong Papers* also reflects several of the key concerns of the new English Centre at Hong Kong University. The papers by **Nigel Bruce** and **Lily Leung** and **Max Hui** point to the difficulties in developing relations between a centre such as ours and other academic departments. Looking at the difficulties that have arisen in trying to link language and content instruction in social science courses at the University of Hong Kong, Leung and Hui conclude:

Our experiences of collaborating with subject teachers have... demonstrated the importance and usefulness of maintaining a dialogue between the two departments to ensure the adequacy of this disciplinary component in meeting the needs of students. However, the difficulties in its implementation...will need to be addressed if the link between language and content instruction is to be maximally effective.

Nigel Bruce takes up part of this challenge by asking whether it is possible to develop a "metalingua franca" that can help this communication across departments. While describing in some detail the constraints on such a possibility imposed by the exclusivity of disciplinary knowledge and the incommensurability of academic discourse communities, Bruce nevertheless concludes on a fairly optimistic note with a call to explore further how disciplinary cultures operate:

In aspiring to a 'metalingua franca'...,while we clearly need to be wary of accepting the easy translatability of discourses from one culture to another, we should question their permanence and their incommensurability, and seek the points of resistance to entering a wider communal language domain.

In a different way, the paper by **Shelagh Byron, Laurence Goldstein, David Murphy and Elfed Roberts** also takes up the question of interdisciplinary work, though in this case by exploring the potential of debate in different areas of university life. The co-authors, from the English Centre, and Departments of Philosophy, Law and Political Science, discuss the particular roles of debate in their respective disciplines and show how it may be both professionally and pedagogically important. Taking issue with the somewhat dogmatic dismissal of debate as "inauthentic" from a communicative orientation to language teaching, Byron argues that it may be able to play a more significant role in language enhancement than is often acknowledged. Finally, **Desmond Allison** takes up another aspect of the new status of the English Centre. Having emerged at the same time as a new emphasis on accountability in higher education, the English Centre has been faced almost immediately with challenges to show that it is "efficient". Allison argues against any simplistic definition of efficiency and suggests, by contrast, that we need "a multidimensional view of accountability": "While the notion of efficiency remains relevant to particular aspects of taught courses, full programme accountability eludes any single dimension of measurement of gain".

### Reports

The reports section of this issue shows the diversity of research projects going on here and elsewhere. **Shirley Lim** and her research team at the National Institute of Education (Nanyang Technological University), Singapore, report a study of the writing ability of students taking both English and Chinese at first language levels at the secondary level. **David Gardner** discusses the implications of recent changes to copyright laws for language teachers and particularly those involved in self-access. Self-access learning is also the main focus of two other research reports: **Elaine Martin** and **Peter Voller's** report of teachers' attitudes to self-access learning and **Linda Cooley's** report on the development of pathways in helping students deal with self-access materials. **Alastair Pennycook** and his co-researchers present a brief report of their study of plagiarism. **Phil Benson** reports his current work in developing a corpus of Hong Kong texts.

### Book Reviews

There are three book reviews in this issue. **Ray Mackay** provides a critical analysis of Henry Widdowson's *Practical Stylistics* and suggests that "if this is stylistic analysis, we really don't need it." **Desmond Allison** reviews Charles Alderson's and Alan Beretta's *Evaluating Second Language Education*, and questions criticisms that the editors' eschewal of claims to objectivity and emphasis on a case study approach to evaluation consign their approach to "the realm of the arbitrary, the makeshift and the convenient". The third review, by **Alastair Pennycook**, is a review essay of Richard Kearney's *The Wake of Imagination* and Jeremy Tambling's *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*.

### Conference Reports

Finally, **Annie Mueller** reports on a lecture/workshop and **Christine Heuring** writes about the City Polytechnic Conference in Hong Kong, while **Cynthia Lee** reports on the RELC Conference in Singapore.

## Co-text or No Text? A Study of an Adapted Cloze Technique for Testing Comprehension/Summary Skills

David Coniam<sup>1</sup>

This paper examines one section of the objective paper of the Hong Kong Examination Authority's (HKEA) Use of English examination. One of the test types in this section of the examination involves candidates completing a cloze passage based on a text. It is the HKEA's contention that the exercise involves summarizing/paraphrasing skills. The findings of the current study, however, suggest that the validity of this test type is questionable since a substantial number of the blanks can be filled in without reference to the text. While it appears to be reliable and discriminates among candidates, as a test type, it would not appear to be achieving this by tapping the intended summarizing/paraphrasing skills.

### Introduction

This paper examines an adaptation of the cloze testing procedure - the summary cloze. This is one of the test types in the HKEA's Advanced Level Use of English Section C (Reading and Language Systems) examination (UEC). In this section of the examination, candidates complete a cloze passage based on a text. As this test type is in the examination paper, it is therefore widely practised in schools. It is the HKEA's claim that the exercise involves summarizing/paraphrasing skills. The opinion of the author, however, is that the validity of this test type is questionable, since a substantial amount of the blanks can be filled in without reference to the original text.

### Background

Approximately 20,000 students take the UEC at the end of their final year in school, generally when they are about 18 years old (in Hong Kong this is called Form 7; it equates to Upper 6th Form in the U.K. and is one year above 12th grade in the U.S.A.). Candidates take the more specialised Advanced Level examinations two years after the more general Form 5 Hong Kong Certificate of Education (CE) Examinations. The candidature of UE is, then, understandably of a higher standard in terms of their English language proficiency, as well as being considerably more homogeneous in terms of ability in English than the comparable CE candidature.

The Use of English examination was totally revised from 1983 to 1988: so much so, in fact, that when the 'new' examination was first administered in 1989, it bore virtually no resemblance at all to its predecessor. In re-designing the examination, the HKEA strove to include test types which tapped candidates' abilities at processing discourse, rather than test types which simply involved discrete sentence-level competence (which is more the focus of the Form 5 CE English language examination.) The UEC syllabus reads as follows:

...[the UEC examination] tests the extent to which the systems of the English language have been internalised by the candidates:

---

<sup>1</sup>David Coniam has been involved in English language teaching and teacher education for almost 20 years. He has taught in the U.K., Spain, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. He is currently a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where his main duties are teaching English Language Teaching Methodology. His main interests are computer analysis of language, language testing and methodology.

- the lexicon
- the morphology
- the syntactic relationships within and among phrases and clauses, and
- the structural relationships among sentences within paragraphs and in discourse  
(1992 HKAL syllabuses, p.31)

It can be observed that the majority of the test types do focus on more than simply sentence-level proficiency.

The UEC examination is a 90-minute paper, divided into six sections of 'objective' type questions - three multiple-choice and three short-answer questions. In the design of this paper, it would have been all too easy to revert to discrete-item testing due to the short-answer nature of the items; nonetheless, the focus is on discourse-level skills. Of the six test types in UEC, only two - the multiple-choice cloze passage and the proof-reading exercise - have a focus which is more at sentence level than at discourse level, and it can be argued that even these two do involve skills of text processing across sentence boundaries. (See Johnson (1981) for a discussion of the extent to which MC cloze appears to be as sentence-based a test as individual discrete-point MC items.)

#### **Focus of the current study**

The cloze technique was devised by Taylor in the 1950s as a test of native-speaker reading ability. Since then it has undergone many modifications and extensions. From the original every nth deletion principle, we have seen variable deletion rates, deletions according to certain grammatical structures, and multiple-choice cloze, amongst others. More recently, Deyes (1984) puts forward a suggestion for a 'discourse cloze', where items are selected for deletion in such a way that the discourse context - whether cohesive ties, or lexical cohesion need to be taken into account. Lewkowicz (1991a, 1991b) puts forward a proposal whereby a type of paraphrasing cloze (somewhat similar to the HKEA summary cloze) is used to sample listening abilities.

The current study is an examination of the summary cloze. This is an adaptation of the cloze technique whereby the blanks are filled on the basis of a text the candidate reads. Reference to this type of exercise was originally made by Pollitt and Hutchinson (1987) with respect to testing L1 reading ability in U.K. secondary schools. Pollitt and Hutchinson were also advisers in the development of the International English Language Testing System examination (IELTS), which includes an adaptation of the summary cloze technique as one of its testing types for sampling reading comprehension. The credit for inclusion of the summary cloze in the UEC should go principally to Rex King of the HKEA, who had substantial involvement in the development of the new Use of English examination<sup>1</sup>.

The idea of the summary cloze - as briefly outlined above - is that it tests comprehension in an indirect way in that candidates are required to paraphrase certain elements of a text that they have just read.

The attractions of the summary cloze technique on an objective paper such as the UEC paper are several:

- the paper needs to be able to be marked as simply and objectively as possible. The one-word blanks of the summary cloze are therefore reasonably straightforward in this regard.

- the HKEA did not want an examination which was totally multiple-choice (even though this would result in greater ease of marking). The fact that the summary cloze is not multiple-choice consequently improves the UEC's face validity.
- the summary cloze - as a test of reading - appears to tap discourse level skills. This again improves the UEC's face validity in light of the fact that it is not a discrete-point item test type.
- the summary cloze is a new test type in Hong Kong. While this is not a tremendous advantage in itself, it does mean that in the lower level forms in schools, it will not have been 'practised to death' as is the case with other test types. To a certain extent then, initially, there was some novelty value for teachers and students.

However, as a test type, the summary cloze does have its disadvantages. Through personal communication with teachers in secondary schools, the matter has been raised with this writer as to how the test type is different from the standard cloze passage as a test type. It has been suggested that the reading load demanded of candidates does not reflect the demands - or the rewards - of the task<sup>2</sup>, in that candidates can complete certain blanks without reference to the text. The rubric in the summary cloze instructs candidates to:

'Read Version 2 [the cloze] and then fill in the blanks in Version 2 in such a way that the meaning of Version 1 [the original] is preserved.' (UEC 1989, p. 8)

There are a number of instances, however, where candidates can 'cheat'; where by applying their general reading skills, and by using their general knowledge - either of the world or their proficiency in English - they can supply an appropriate word, which is acceptable in terms of the marking scheme. For example, in the cloze passage under analysis, the first blank appears in the following context:

"The 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards have now been in Hong Kong for nine months. As part of their training they recently staged an (1) \_\_\_\_\_ in the Sek Kong area."

The clues which the context offers for item 1 are, syntactically, that it is a noun, and one that begins with a vowel; and semantically that it is something that soldiers do as part of their training. The connection with a word such as 'exercise' or 'operation' should then not be too great a leap for a Form 7 student who is reasonably proficient in English. The facility value of this item on the 1989 examination was 72% - substantially higher than the overall summary-cloze part mean of 41%.

The passage continues:

"Operation (2) \_\_\_\_\_ involved 600 Guards in a mock action against 400 (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_\_, who acted as the (5) \_\_\_\_\_."

The facility value of item 5 is again high at 72%; the context again giving candidates considerable syntactic and semantic clues towards the word 'enemy'.

The focus of the current study is, therefore, the extent to which the summary cloze is tapping co-textual or extra-textual knowledge. The hypothesis is that the 'without-group' subjects who complete the summary cloze without the original text will achieve comparable results to the 'with-group' subjects who complete the summary cloze with the original text.

It is expected that mean and standard deviations of both groups will be quite similar, and that item analyses of both the with-group's summary cloze and the without-group's will be comparable with the 1989 whole group analysis. That is, the items that on the 1989 examination discriminated well, or

items which had high or low facility values, will demonstrate similar patterns with both groups.

### Method

Two different test batteries were assembled from the 1989 UEC, each consisting of two parts. One consisted of the 20-item multiple-choice cloze passage, and the 21-item summary cloze passage together with the original text. The second comprised the multiple-choice cloze passage, and the 21-item summary cloze passage alone - with no text. The multiple-choice cloze passage was included in both tests to provide an indicator of both groups' abilities vis-a-vis each other compared with the 1989 whole group, as well as to provide a reliability anchor against which the two groups' performances could be measured on the summary clozes.

Two comparable groups in terms of ability level were then assembled. Some of these were drawn from Form 7 classes in Hong Kong secondary schools, as well as a small number of students from certain of the Chinese University's Faculty of Education Diploma in Education classes, the majority of whom were recent graduates. In each case, the class was divided arbitrarily into half, with approximately half (N=152) randomly assigned the without-text test, and the other half (N=145) the with-text test. As the timing of the six sections of the UEC examination is 90 minutes, it was decided that giving the groups 30 minutes to complete the two sections of their respective tests would approximate the live test time conditions. Care was taken that none of the subjects had taken or seen the paper before: for this reason the 1989 paper was selected for use.

The 1989 whole group figures for the multiple-choice cloze passage, the summary cloze, and the whole paper are presented in table 1:

Table 1: 1989 Whole Group figures

	MC cloze	Summary cloze	Whole UEC paper
No of items	20	21	99
Mean	67%	41%	55%
SD	15.6%	21.4%	13.0%

The HKEA considers 50-55% as the optimal mean for the various papers of its English language examinations. Table 1 above shows that while the overall UEC paper was on target here, the MC cloze was somewhat easier, but the summary cloze rather more difficult than the 'ideal'.

The results were then analysed under the following parameters:

- mean and standard deviations of both groups: to see how these compared with the 1989 whole group,
- Pearson product-moment correlations for both test groups between the multiple-choice cloze and the summary cloze: also for comparison with the 1989 whole group figures,
- item analyses of the two test groups,
- two-sample t-tests for the two groups, i.e. comparing group means to see if they differ

significantly.

### Results

The mean and standard deviations of both groups are presented in table 2:

Table 2: Mean and standard deviations

	With-text Group		W/out-text group		1989 Whole group	
	MCC	SC	MCC	SC	MCC	SC
Mean	62%	38%	66%	26%	67%	41%
SD	18.6%	18.7%	17.5%	15.4%	15.6%	21.4%

[MCC = multiple-choice cloze; SC = summary cloze]

As can be seen from table 2 above, the multiple-choice means for the two groups are very close to the 1989 whole group figures: this demonstrates that in terms of English language ability, the results of the current sample are reasonably comparable with the Use of English whole group.

Table 3: Inter-subtest correlations

	With-text group		Without text group
	MCC		MCC
SC	.58 (p < .001)	SC	.44 (p < .001)

As table 3 illustrates, the subtests for the two groups both correlate significantly. In terms of student ability on the subtests, it can therefore be assumed that the more able subjects are performing well - in terms of their rank position on the test - on both summary cloze tests<sup>3</sup>.

After applying the correction for attenuation to control for measurement error variance, the resulting corrected correlations were .77 for the with-test group and .61 for the without-test group. The shared variances of 59% for the with- and 37% for the without-test groups suggest that there is a considerable degree of overlap in what the two subtests are tapping. Given that the MC cloze arguably taps general proficiency rather than reading skills<sup>4</sup>, a similar argument might therefore also be put forward regarding summary cloze. The focus of the current paper is, however, to investigate the extent to which summary cloze is a test of summarizing/paraphrasing skills rather than to speculate on the exact nature of the constructs that summary cloze is actually tapping.

Table 4: T-test significance levels

	Pooled t value	Variance DF	Estimate 2-tail prob.
MCC	1.77	295	.078
SC	-6.11	295	.000

As table 4 demonstrates, at the 5% level the t-test reveals no significant differences between the two groups on the MC cloze; it can be reasonably assumed therefore that the two groups are similar in terms of ability. Significance has emerged, however, between the two groups on the summary cloze; this will be discussed later.

Item analyses were run on the summary cloze test for the two groups. The results are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Item analyses of summary cloze items

Item	89WG	W/Text	Wo/Text	Item	89WG	W/Text	Wo/Text
1	58%	53%	58%	12	14%	12%	6%
2	72%	71%	* 1%	13	25%	16%	11%
3	25%	27%	* 5%	14	13%	10%	26%
4	21%	38%	*11%	15	36%	25%	18%
5	72%	63%	48%	16	45%	26%	12%
6	12%	8%	28%	17	43%	25%	11%
7	31%	34%	40%	18	46%	42%	35%
8	10%	9%	20%	19	56%	49%	63%
9	49%	41%	40%	20	68%	59%	38%
10	33%	33%	*15%	21	69%	59%	38%
11	68%	53%	* 1%				

\* X<sup>2</sup>(2), p < .05

Chi-square values were calculated for the 21 items to ascertain whether the observed facilities in the without-text group were significantly different from the 'expected' facilities of the other two groups. Item facilities significant at the 5% level (df=2) were identified. It can be seen that slightly over half the item facilities of the without-text group are comparable with the 1989 whole group's, and with the with-text group's.



The easiest item for the 1989 examination and the with-text group was item 2:

Operation \_\_\_\_\_ involved 600 Guards ....  
(VILLAGE FACTORY)

[Facilities: 1989 WG - 72%; With-text - 72%; Without-text - 1%]

This was an interesting item, in that it was the item which the with-text group and the 1989 whole group both found easiest; by contrast it was the most difficult item for the without-text group, as the answer was essentially a direct 'lift' from the text. Understandably, virtually no candidate in the without-text group was able to get the correct answer.

Item 8 was the most difficult for the 1989 whole group, and second most difficult for the with-text group:

....find hidden stocks of \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(WEAPONS)

[Facilities: 1989 WG - 10%; With-text - 9%; Without-text - 20%]

On this item, ironically, the without-text group did better than the with-text group and the 1989 whole group, possibly because the subjects had to infer from their general knowledge. The answer here was 'weapons'; since the text had distractors such as 'guns' and 'ammunition' (which were incorrect in the context), many of the subjects with the text scored no marks. Not having the text in this situation proved, in fact, to be an advantage!

An examination of the ten items from the without-text group identified as substantially below the other two groups in terms of facility values, reveals that they principally involve direct 'lifts' from the passage. It would appear that with items such as these the text is necessary since it is here that subjects have to employ their reading skills in order to locate the correct information, rather than inferring or guessing the answer from their general knowledge and/or using their general language proficiency.

In order to further test the assumption that the text was not necessary for the summary cloze, a 'linguistically naive' native-speaker informant was asked to complete the summary cloze, again without the passage. Her score was 13 out of 21, i.e 67%. Of the eight items that she got wrong, four (items 2, 11, 16 and 17) were asterisked as significantly different in table 5, and all appeared to involve direct 'lifts' from the text.

The native-speaker informant was then asked to complete the summary clozes without use of the texts for all the years that the UEC examination has been run. Her results were as follows:

Table 6: Native speaker informant scores without text

	1989	1990	1991
NS informant	67%	62%	48%
WG score (with text)	41%	52%	28%

As table 6 demonstrates, the text would not appear to be necessary in order to obtain a score of around 50%. The native-speaker's score has remained fairly constant, and would appear to correlate

with the actual difficulty level of the text. (The subject herself commented in fact that the 1991 summary cloze appeared much more difficult than the other two. This is supported by the statistics which show that the 1991 UEC candidature also found the summary cloze considerably more difficult than in previous years.)

While it can be argued that native speakers cannot but draw on general knowledge and reading skills in their interpretation of a text, if a non-native speaker subject can get 26% on a test such as the summary cloze without reading the passage, then there is a mismatch between the aims and the outcomes of the test.

### Discussion

The null hypothesis that the text accompanying the summary cloze test makes no difference has, on the face of it, to be rejected. The t-test indicated significance, so it is not possible to say that the text simply does not make a difference: it does. The results need, however, to be viewed in the context of what is demanded of candidates on the test. In terms of ability, both groups in the current study are reasonably equivalent to the whole UE population. The direct comparison to be made would therefore appear to be that a group with the text scores 41% (8½ out of 21), and one without 26% (5½ out of 21). Although this 15% differential may look significant in terms of the test itself, in the context of the whole UEC paper, it equates to the with-text group scoring 3 more marks overall on the UEC paper through having invested 5-10 minutes reading the text and matching the questions to it. The questions to be asked here then are:

(1) To what extent it is fair that candidates spend 5-10 minutes processing a text, an investment of time which may not pay off in commensurate benefits in terms of added score?

- As the examination requires candidates to complete approximately 100 items in 90 minutes, if they are only going to be 3 marks better off, might they not be better advised to spend that time concentrating on other sections of the examination?

(2) Is it possible that the summary cloze passage under review was badly set?

- The fact that a native speaker consistently achieved approximately 50% without the text would appear to suggest that the 'problem' or whatever is occurring with the summary cloze in this study is not a weakness in design of this particular test but that it is endemic to the summary cloze test type in general. The papers at the HKEA are, however, set under the auspices of a rigorous committee which attempts to maintain parity across years, as well as scrutinizing the validity of the material and test types they are involved in setting<sup>5</sup>.

(3) To what extent is the summary cloze actually tapping summarizing/paraphrasing skills?

- The answer here has to be a rather guarded one: if the without-text group's raw score is 26%, the with-text group's is 41%, and a native-speaker's is 67%, the answer has to be that some element of summary completion is being tested but only to a limited extent. The shared variance of 37% for the without-test group on the two subtests suggest that there may be some general factor - or factors - which both subtests are tapping. Without further investigation, however, this is a matter that cannot be speculated further upon at present.

## Conclusions

A cynical recommendation for teachers, of course, would be that they should advise their students to maximise their time: this would entail them answering as much as they can of the summary cloze as an initial step without reading the passage. Then they should continue with the other sections of the examination, and only return to the summary cloze as the last section they attempt.

Should it be possible for the summary cloze to be better set? In theory, it would be desirable that every word required of candidates is a content word or a paraphrase from the passage alone - one that cannot be deduced from candidates' general knowledge or general proficiency. Given the fact that similar results emerged from a native-speaker informant completing the three summary clozes produced to date without the text, it would appear that the problems relating to this test type are not likely to be the result of poor setting.

The main argument that has been advanced is that the summary cloze as a test type for the testing of reading comprehension is low in construct validity. Any recommendations to the HKEA would have to be made in the light of how that body perceives the function of the summary cloze. If it forms part of the examination as an alternative yet reliable way of assessing general proficiency levels (but not specifically reading or summarizing/paraphrasing skills) in English, then the summary cloze is a viable - and valid - test type. If the HKEA takes the point of view that the summary cloze forms part of the UE examination to fulfill a specific purpose - i.e. what it currently purports to do - then its role in the examination needs to be re-examined: indeed, we might ask whether it should remain in the examination at all.

## Notes

1. The name 'summary cloze' originated with King, although it is a term that Pollitt does not like (personal communication). He claims the test type was designed as a test of reading comprehension rather than simply as a variety of cloze test. He prefers the term 'Summary completion'.

2. Each blank in the summary cloze is worth one mark. This is the case for every item on the whole UEC, with the exception of the multiple-choice reading comprehension, where each question is awarded slightly more than one mark.

3. Such detailed test-type correlations are not released by the HKEA, only whole paper correlations; for 1989, these were in the region of .5 to .6.

4. Johnson (1981) describes an experiment where two sets of subjects were given an MC cloze - one group with the whole cloze, and the experimental group with the cloze as a set of scrambled discrete-point items. Performance was comparable across both groups, indicating that an MC cloze is not a text-based test: it is essentially a series of discrete-point testing items which tap general language proficiency. Johnson concludes:

...this cloze passage [...]intended as a measure of reading comprehension is not in any important sense a different measure from a set of equivalent discrete point items. (1981: 42)

5. The committee which actually sets/moderates the UEC has been together for a number of years and knows the test types they are involved in setting and moderating extremely well. (Personal communication)

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## Small-corpora Concordancing in ESL Teaching and Learning

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For many years, computerised concordancing has been the domain of computational linguists, corpus linguists, lexicographers and dictionary compilers, working with large corpora of millions of words. The use of small-corpora concordancing in ESL settings is a relatively new application and has sparked keen interest among many researchers and teachers since the mid-80s. This paper discusses the use of small-corpora concordancing in the three domains of ESL: 1. syllabus design and evaluation, 2. classroom teaching, and 3. test construction. In particular, the classroom concordancing approach as an evolving ESL methodology is discussed with reference to its rationale, its potentials, its current applications and its impact. The paper concludes with some critical comments on what has been achieved so far with small-corpora concordancing and points out some directions for the future.

### Introduction

This paper reviews from the perspective of ESL teaching and learning the roles and applications of small-corpora concordancing (SCC), focusing mainly on SCC for the classroom, and touches briefly, as far as present literature shows, on SCC in syllabus design and evaluation, and in test design.

#### What is concordancing?

The term concordancing originates from what has been known as concordances. The COBUILD dictionary defines a concordance as "an alphabetical list of the words in a book or a set of books which also says where each word can be found and often how it is used". Tribble (1990a) refers to a concordance as "a reference work designed to assist in the exegesis of biblical and other socially valued text". Tribble and Jones (1990) point out that concordances have been produced since the Middle Ages on popular works of well-known writers, such as the works of Shakespeare, and most of these have been undertaken manually, and, as one can imagine, painstakingly.

With the advent of the computer, concordances can be generated with the "speed and reliability" (Tribble and Jones, 1990) that perhaps manual concordancing could never match. As Sinclair (1991) puts it :

Thirty years ago, ...it was considered impossible to process texts of several million words in length. Twenty years ago it was considered quite possible but lunatic. Ten years ago it was considered quite possible but still lunatic. Today it is very popular. (p.1)

Tribble (1990b) also remarks, "the effort involved in such a task [concordancing], when taken manually, was intimidatingly large, and ...was more than most individuals would ever want to take on." This could be true even with any text more than a few hundred words, let alone texts measuring up to the millions. As Foulds (1991) observes, "the time required to do such a thing [text processing] on a

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regular basis for texts more than a few hundred words long would have been so great as to render the value, if there were any, totally uneconomic".

So the whole idea of computerised concordancing lies in making feasible what people might have always wished to do but have avoided doing because of the labour and time involved; and as computerised concordancing popularises, more and more people have come to realise its potential and subsequently embarked on various concordance-related projects in linguistic research and ESL applications.

The term concordancing is, however, generally used in the literature relating to ESL teaching and learning without a very clear definition. It is generally understood to refer to a way of analysing texts. Tribble and Jones (1990) describe concordancing as "locating all the occurrences of a particular word and listing the contexts" (p. 7), while Levy (1990) defines a concordance as "a collection of all the occurrences of a word, each in its own textual environment together with references and word frequencies" (p. 178).

As computerised concordancing developed, manual concordancing disappeared as a matter of course and the term concordancing has become understood to be computer-based rather than manually performed, whenever it is used. In a review paper discussing the MSDOS concordancers, Higgins (1991) provides the following definition: "A concordance of a word is a set of citations or line references, allowing every occurrence of that word within a corpus of text to be retrieved." (p.92)

What the computer does in concordancing is to display all the contexts in which a certain word or string appears in a text or collection of texts, called a corpus. Software employed to achieve this end is thus called concordancing software. Sometimes, computer programs are referred to as concordance generators or concordancers (Tribble and Jones, 1990) and sometimes a concordancing facility may be included as one of the functions of a set of programs for text analysis. COMPAID is one example of this (see Fang, 1991). Utility programs attached to a computer's operating system, such as FIND.EXE in the MS-DOS environment (Higgins, 1991), or home-made macros to be run under more sophisticated word processing packages, like WordPerfect and Microsoft WORD, can also serve the purpose. (See Tribble & Jones, 1990, pp. 84-89.)

The ways in which a computer can display the context of a search word or key word may vary depending on the software used and the operation selected. The sentence concordance displays the sentences in which the search word is used, and paragraph concordance displays the paragraph (Johns, 1988). KWIC (key-word-in-context) concordances, by far the most widely used among researchers and teachers, display the search word in the middle, with as much context as will fit into the line which is truncated at either side (Tribble & Jones, 1990; Higgins, 1991). Concordances thus generated by the computer can be sent either to screen, or to printer as hard copy, or to file for future manipulation. An example of a KWIC concordance output is given in Appendix A.

### **Large-corpora concordancing**

The use of concordancing software for text analysis has, for many years, been limited to the domain of computational linguistics and corpus linguistics, both being relatively new areas in the study of language, made possible by the advent and availability of the computer. These analyses have been carried out mainly with mainframe computers on very large corpora running into tens of millions of words. The interest in these analyses has stemmed mainly from the desire to provide objective descriptions of how the language really works, involving people like lexicographers and dictionary compilers.

Among the major projects, the most well-known include the COBUILD project carried out at the University of Birmingham (Sinclair, 1987), from which quite a number of dictionaries and reference works have been completed and marketed commercially (Sinclair, et al., 1987, 1990). Other examples

include the Brown University project on its Corpus of Present-day Edited American English (quoted in Yang, 1985) and the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) project at the University of Lancaster (quoted in Levy, 1990), and the JDEST project on English for Science and Technology (Yang, 1985) at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

### Small-corpora concordancing (SCC)

Apart from concordancing with large corpora, there has also been a growing interest in the use of small corpora analysable with microcomputers. This growing interest coincides with the surge of interest in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and is catalysed by an era when microcomputers are becoming more and more accessible to ESL teachers and researchers.

This interest in small scale corpora concordancing began in the mid-80's, most notably with the work of Higgins and Johns (1984), and Johns (1986, 1988), which stirred up a movement in SCC. The result of the movement is that computerised text analysis has been brought much more closely to teachers, course designers, materials developers and learners alike, and SCC as a tool for text analysis or as a pedagogic activity is increasingly brought to test and experimentation in various places all over the world where one or more microcomputers are available.

### SCC for syllabus design and evaluation

As early as 1988, Sinclair and Renouf put forward the idea of designing a general English syllabus based on "the common uses of common words" as identified by the computer-generated frequency lists of the COBUILD corpus (Sinclair & Renouf, 1988). Using data from the same corpus, Willis and Willis (1988) further developed the idea and completed a general English course while Willis completed designing his lexis-based syllabus, called the lexical syllabus (Willis, 1990).

As far as SCC is concerned, Flowerdew took the lead in its application in syllabus and course design. Flowerdew (1991) used concordanced-based word counts to establish the relative importance of vocabulary items and provided criteria for syllabus selection and grading. Using a specialist corpora of transcription of Biology lectures, he compared the word frequencies with those in the COBUILD general corpora and observes some overall similarity and some significant differences. It is argued that these observations could form a basis for course design in ESP contexts. Flowerdew suggests that SCC can be employed to identify useful items to teach, reveal syntactic patterns in which certain words occur and locate functional and notional areas which might be included in a syllabus (Flowerdew, 1991, pp. 38-39).

Ma (1993a), in his concordanced-based analysis of the genre of direct mail sales letters, discovered the attachment of certain mood and modality to distinct sequenced moves exhibited in his 50-letter corpus. Imperatives are found to abound in both the opening and action-getting moves but in the former they are never used with the polite marker *please*. *Can*, *will* and *may* appear in large numbers in the product-description move while *must*, *ought to*, and *should* hardly exist. Thematised purpose clauses with *For* or *To* belong to the overwhelming majority of the action-getting move. It is suggested that these observations should contribute valuable references for the design of syllabuses and materials of business writing courses where students need to write this kind of sales letter.

Apart from designing syllabuses, SCC can also be used for evaluating an existing course or programme and its materials (Flowerdew, 1991). In Flowerdew's corpus, connectors like *then* are found to appear between the subject and verb, rather than sentence-initial as taught in many published materials (p.38). The defining function is seen to be expressed almost entirely by the word *call* while commercially available materials tend to focus on the word *define*. Published materials are also found to have overlooked the intervening adverbials in many of the passive constructions (p.40). In Ma's corpus, on the other hand, the postscript component in a sales letter, shunned in most published materials as being a sign of poor planning, is shown to be the rule rather than the exception (Ma, 1993a). The language of refutation, which receives heavy emphasis in an EAP course, is refuted, quite ironically, by Pickard (1992)

with reference to corpus evidence.

### SCC for the classroom (Classroom concordancing)

The idea of using SCC in the classroom for the teaching of ESL, generally known as classroom concordancing (CC), is strongly supported by a number of researchers and applied linguists (notably Stevens, Johns, and Tribble & Jones).

#### Why: SCC as methodology

In the ESL classroom, concordancing is seen more as an approach to teaching or learning than as a way of text analysis. The rationale for the CC approach is one of authenticity and discovery. Johns (1986) describes this concordance-based approach as data-driven learning (DDL). As the name suggests, this approach is characterised by language data taking on a primary role in language learning. Johns suggests that concordances provide "intake", (after Corder, 1967) i.e. the part of input that is actually helpful, to the language learner, which strikes a healthy balance between the "highly-organised, graded and idealised language of the typical coursebook" and the "potentially confusing but far richer and more revealing authentic communication" (Johns, 1986).

With regard to authenticity, Stevens (1988) points out the "realism and relevance" that CC can offer. While teacher-invented exercises for vocabulary can often contain inadvertently interjected artificiality, concordance-based material "assures that contexts will always be real ones" and "relevance is achieved when the corpus of text used is appropriate to the language learners for whom the exercise is being prepared".

Johns (1988) further breaks down the idea of authenticity into three aspects: authenticity of script, of purpose and of activity. He believes that in CC, the teacher takes the role of an authentic text presenter rather than the traditional text preparer. Authenticity of purpose is achieved by concordancing texts that "students are having to work with on their courses or in their research" and authenticity of activity is achieved when what is done with the text is transferable to real world situations.

Levy (1990) thinks that concordances "present the facts of the language in a precise way" as they are based upon "actual usage". Concordance users are thus consulting "the source, the original instances of a word's use" rather than trying to peep at its usage via an intermediary, e.g. a dictionary. As Johns (1991b) states: "What distinguishes the DDL (CC) approach is the attempt to cut out the middleman as far as possible and to give the learner direct access to the data, ..." (p.30).

Johns (1991b) also sees CC as an attempt to contextualise and demythologise language. By looking at natural language in use, SCC "dispels the myths and distortions that have arisen from reliance on 'armchair' linguistics" and it also dispels the need for the language teacher to answer learners' queries by resorting to intuition alone.

As far as discovery is concerned, Johns (1988) points out that SCC is in line with the assumption that effective language learning is a form of linguistic research. He believes that the teacher is potentially most effective when he or she is most at risk, and thus when the teacher is placed alongside the learners in attempting to solve communication problems, made possible by concordancing subject-related texts, the teacher is then able to gain valuable insights which might be otherwise inaccessible (Johns, 1988).

In relation to the concepts of authenticity and discovery, Tribble and Jones (1990) point out that the real value of concordancing lies in the question of visibility. Concordancing software enables the user to visualise text features in ways that have never been possible. Tribble (1990a) describes the use of CC as "making the invisible visible" and he comments that CC is a "very new approach to the very old task of teaching and learning a language". Taking this visibility dimension of concordancing further, Rundell



and Stock (1992) remark, "Perhaps the single most striking thing about corpus evidence ... is the inescapability of the information it presents." Though Rundell and Stock are speaking from a lexicographer's point of view, their comments are certainly applicable to learners using the concordancer as a language learning tool since learners also assume a role very similar to that of a linguistic researcher.

On the learner's road to discovery, the role of the computer and the concordancer is described as a special type of informant, giving the learner access to linguistic data (Johns, 1991a). Johns (1991a) describes this approach as a break away from the rule-based approach into the data-driven approach and identifies it as a kind of inductive learning where it differs from the traditional approach in that data replaces the teacher as the basis. It is believed that the CC approach can build learners' competence by giving them access to the actuality of linguistic performance.

#### **How: getting a concordancer to work**

There are two prerequisites for classroom concordancing. First, there must be the computer hardware and software which operate the concordancing and second, there must be a corpus for the computer to work on.

**Software selection.** Tribble and Jones (1990) make a distinction between three different types of concordancing software: streaming concordancers, text-indexing software and in-memory text consulters. Streaming concordancers read a text one line after another and produce concordances as they work through the texts. Text-indexers are those that create an index of the text in one operation and then allow for different types of text retrieval activities, including concordancing. One example of these is WordCruncher. The last type, in-memory text concordancers, reads the whole text into the computer's working memory and then operates on it to show different types of information as desired by the user. Longman Mini-concordancer is an example (Tribble and Jones 1990, p.13).

Tribble and Jones (1990) recommend, though rather implicitly, using in-memory concordancers for classroom concordancing. They point out that this type of software is limited by the memory size of the computer but has the advantage of a variety of text-handling capabilities once a file, or set of files, has been loaded. Streaming concordancers are seen as too slow to justify classroom applications while text-indexers are viewed as too sophisticated and should be left only to large-scale researchers (p.14).

Higgins (1991), in his review of MSDOS concordancers, makes a distinction between three types of concordancers: dedicated research concordancers, dedicated classroom concordancers, and text utilities. Dedicated classroom concordancers are characterized by their "rapid results and clear displays", and are what he thinks to be appropriate tools for the ESL teacher in the classroom.

**Corpus creation.** While most people talk about concordancing with a corpus of some kind, it is worth pointing out that concordancing can actually be done with individual texts. Tribble and Jones (1990) point out that individual texts could be the target for concordancing if the objective is to analyse the language of that text (p.15).

In corpus creation, a distinction is generally made between a general corpus and a specialist corpus, the choice depending obviously on the needs of the learners. Tribble and Jones (1990) specify the following criteria for the creation of a general corpus for classroom use:

1. Use authentic, natural language
2. Use contemporary texts
3. Exclude archaic forms
4. Exclude dialect
5. Stick to prose
6. Exclude technical material (p.18).

To create a suitable corpus for the general English classroom, Tribble and Jones (1990) describe the following possible methods. Similar methods are also advocated by Sinclair (1991), who works mainly with mainframes.

1. Keyboarding
2. Optical scanning
3. Adaptation from ready-made text files, including word-processed documents, READ.ME files accompanying software packages, sources of text by access to a network or to colleagues (Tribble and Jones, 1990, pp. 19-21).

As optical scanning facilities become more and more popular, with prices of high-technology products falling all the time, it can be expected that more and more people will take advantage of this convenient means of input for corpus creation, both in research and classroom applications, rather than relying on manual keyboarding. It must be pointed out, however, that the margin of error with most optical scanning hardware and software today is still disappointingly large, which makes them less than an ideal means of input. Any heavy reliance on machine-read operations must be offset by a sufficiently large corpus to make the database a useful and dependable one.

Tribble and Jones (1990), advising on teacher-created corpora for classroom concordancing, suggest accumulating a number of specialist corpora to form a general corpus. While seeing this as an easier job than trying to assemble a large general corpus at one time, they point out that accumulation in this way also addresses the need to achieve "balance and variety" in a general corpus, (p.16) though one might wonder how this could avoid including technical material, one of the principles Tribble and Jones (1990) put forward for general corpus creation.

**Corpora size.** It is said that "small corpora can play a subsidiary role in investigating specialised varieties of texts that are neglected in large corpora or where the classification systems of the large corpora are insufficiently delicate to recover the information required" (Johns 1986, p.158). But how small should a small corpus be? According to Tribble and Jones (1990), it appears as a general rule that, even working with small corpora, a bigger corpus gives richer, more interesting and more representative information while too small a corpus may result in distortion (pp.15-16).

Tribble and Jones suggest that a corpus of 50,000 words should be very useful for classroom purposes (p.14). The corpus Tribble and Jones used in their experimentation, the ELT Text Pack Corpus, consists of texts from both written and spoken English running into 45,000 words, which is not as large as one might have imagined necessary. The rationale behind this 50,000 word threshold is unclear, but a study of the size of the corpora used by some of the researchers mentioned in this paper, as given in Table 1, will give a rough idea of how small small corpora generally are, noting that some of them are not meant for classroom use.

Table 1. SCC in ESL: Corpora

Researcher	Corpus	Number of words
King, 1989	Academic lectures and tutorials	155,000
King, 1989	Scientific & technical journals	11,400
Tribble & Jones, 1990	ELT Text Pack Corpus	45,000
Tribble, 1990a & 91	English Historical Review Corpus	104,555
Tribble, 1990a & 91	Longman Corpus of Learners' English	54,861
Mparutsa et al., 1991	Economics corpus	20,749
Mparutsa et al., 1991	Geology corpus	33,687
Mparutsa et al., 1991	Philosophy corpus	6,854
Johns, 1988	Transportation & highway engineering corpus	100,000
Johns, 1988	Plant biology corpus	100,000
Johns, 1991a	New Scientist Corpus	760,000
Johns, 1991b	Byte Corpus	> 1,000,000
Johns, 1991b	Corpus of academic papers	250,000
Roussel, 1991	New Scientist Corpus	760,000
Flowerdew, 1991	Biology lecture corpus	104,483
Pickard, 1992	Applied linguistics papers	> 50,000
Ma, 1993a	Direct mail sales letters corpus	16,345
Ma, 1993b	Computer software user manuals	52,000

**Corpora type.** While general corpora are thought by many (e.g. Tribble and Jones, 1990) to be useful for ESL, specialist corpora with ESP texts certainly address the needs of a particular group of learners with "relevance" (Stevens, 1988) and have a definite value in ESP settings. Levy (1990) says:

Concordances drawn from a specific subject area (e.g. scientific texts), a specific mode (e.g. journalism) or a specific medium (e.g. spoken language) can provide very helpful data on the range of words and their particular patterns of usage within a given context or genre (p.179).

Tribble (1991) demonstrated the need to achieve what he called "face validity" in the use of corpora. With an analysis of speech-related verbs in one learner corpus and three different specialised native speaker corpora, Tribble demonstrated the need to use "corpus resources appropriate to the domain with which the students were already familiar" as different corpora, apart from showing up different words, are shown to have sets of words used in dramatically and interestingly different ways.

Although most existing corpora are collections of well-formed authentic native speaker texts, there is also value in assembling a specialised corpus of ESL learner texts. Johns (1986) suggests that concordancing with learner texts provides an excellent tool for examining recurrent patterns of errors or

successes, and also for studying "the ways in which they manage to avoid syntactic and lexical problems in the target language" (p.159). Tribble and Jones (1990) takes a step further to suggest that corpora of learner texts, besides helping to identify and analyse learners' problem areas in lexis, grammar and semantics, could shed light on how the native language influences the way English is learnt as a second language.

In fact, King (1989) used a corpus of learner texts from his students studying English for Science and Engineering to compare with a corpus from professional scientific and technical journals and was able to observe the differences in the use of sub-technical vocabulary and to point out implications for teaching. So the use of a student corpus can have its value in informing the teacher and in helping to devise strategies for teaching before the teacher enters the classroom.

### **What: potentials and applications**

The 'what' of SCC includes what can be done and what has been done with SCC.

**What can be done** A lot has been said about what can be done with classroom concordancing. Johns (1988) suggests the following six main uses:

1. CC can be used as "a resource for small scale on-the-ground research by the teacher in order to inform teaching decisions".
2. The teacher can use concordance output to prepare teaching materials.
3. The teacher can incorporate concordance output directly in teaching materials and "devise activities that get students to puzzle things out for themselves".
4. Concordances can be used for "serendipity learning", which is the kind of free-ranging and open-ended linguistic enquiry made possible by the rich information concordances provide.
5. Concordancing can be used interactively as a focus of classroom activity.
6. The concordancer can be used as "a sleeping resource", offering help when the need arises.

Tribble and Jones (1990) summarise their suggestions of uses of concordancing in the following ways.

#### A. Using concordance outputs for:

1. deducing the meaning of keyword from context
2. study of grammatical features of particular words and of general grammatical features
3. study of homonyms and synonyms
4. group work activities
5. gapfill exercises
6. matching exercises
7. remedial exercises based on learners' own writing (p.55)

#### B. Interactive uses:

1. learning about grammar
2. vocabulary development
3. English for specific purposes

Levy (1990) strongly recommends the use of CC for the teaching of collocations, which he views as one of the most frustrating features of the language for students and teachers at higher levels. He believes that "a set of examples as given in a concordance would give the students the correct sense of how a word is used" (p.178).

Levy (1990) also suggests using on-line concordancing, and integrating it with a word-processor to give a fully integrated word processing environment. Concordances are seen as an explanatory device,

useful for learners using the computer as an electronic writing tool. When a concordancer is integrated with a word processor with a full dictionary and a thesaurus, the entire system will serve to answer a student's query about a word or phrase better than a dictionary, a concordance or a thesaurus alone.

The concordance contributes in the following activities when used in combination with the dictionary or thesaurus.

1. checking meanings
2. checking general syntax
3. checking usage
4. exploring special lexis especially ESP vocabulary
5. checking derived forms
6. checking collocates of words
7. exploring set pieces, e.g. phrasal verbs, cliché's

Figure 1 shows a diagrammatic representation of Levy's idea of an ideal electronic writing environment.

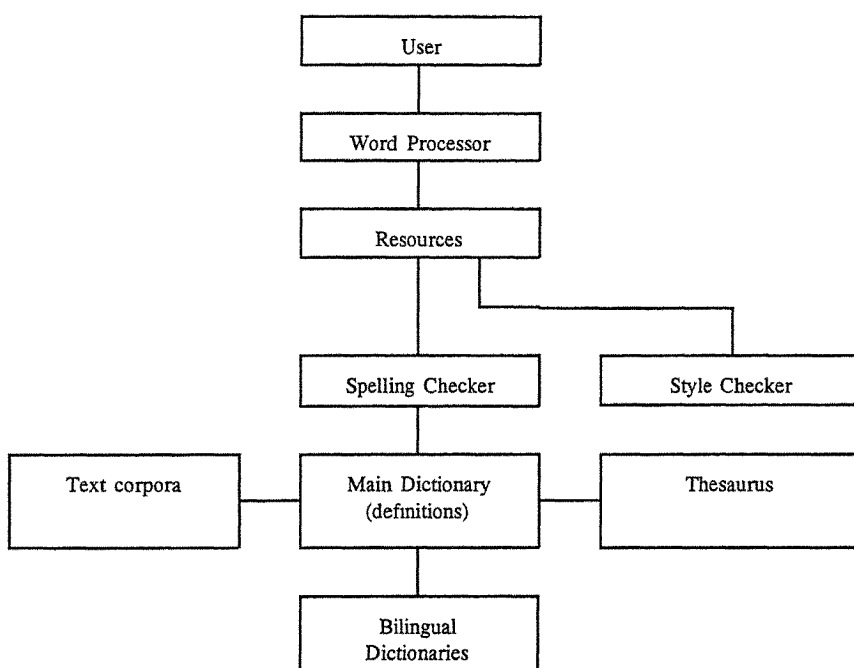


Figure 1. Concordancers and word-processing for language learners (From Levy, 1990)

For concordances to be useful, Levy (1990) contends that flexible selection mechanisms are necessary. Students need to be acquainted with the search and retrieval techniques used in concordancing software. He further suggests that the success of any concordance program depends on "flexible and efficient user interface" as well as the "quality and relevance" of the text corpora.

Levy suggests concordancing with

1. adjacent words ordered alphabetically,
2. common words, and
3. small specific corpora.

According to Levy, the teacher will need to have at his disposal all the large and small, general and specific, corpora in order that students can refer to the most appropriate corpus of text for a relevant

use of concordances. But one cannot help wondering whether it is practically feasible, and worthwhile, to do so.

More concerned with how concordancing can be carried out to benefit learning, Honeyfield (1989) develops a typology of exercises based on concordance-based material and suggests a four-step procedure for concordance-based teaching activities, as follows:

1. The student becomes aware of a need for data, for information about how the language is used. Such awareness may arise from a more communicative task, such as writing a report, or from a more language-oriented exercise, e.g. a vocabulary or grammar exercise.
2. The student consults relevant concordance material, either through direct access to a computer or by using concordance material supplied by the teacher.
3. The student analyses the data and draws conclusions.
4. The student applies the insights gained to the task in Step 1. (p.44)

Flowerdew (1992) suggests a process approach to the teaching of professional genres and believes that concordancing has a role to play in helping students discover specific features of a genre or compare features of two genres.

Going beyond ESL learners, Berry (1993) suggests using concordance printouts to help language teacher trainees to increase their awareness of the language, the rationale for which in fact does not differ very much from that applied to ESL learners at an advanced level.

### **What has been done**

Experimentation with CC has been reported by quite a number of researchers, though what has been reported may represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Apart from being seen as an approach in teaching and learning, SCC is also seen as a pedagogic activity. Stevens (1990) sees concordancing as a form of text manipulation activity, which can be seen as parallel to other forms of text manipulation such as text reconstruction activities with jumbled sentences or paragraphs. Taking it a step further, some ESL teachers take SCC as a type of lesson, which could parallel listening sessions or writing workshops, and SCC in the classroom has thus been called concordancing sessions (e.g. in Mparutsa et al., 1991).

What has been reported in the current literature about CC applications falls into either pre-classroom or classroom use. Pre-classroom use of CC refers to the transformation of concordance outputs into teaching materials in the form of either overhead transparencies (OHTs) or paper-based classroom tasks or exercises. Classroom applications of CC, on the other hand, represent the interactive use of concordancing, sometimes also called on-line concordancing (Levy, 1990). This is where either the teacher directs the learners to generate concordances for discovery-type study of language features or language use, or learners are allowed self-access to the corpora for carrying out student-initiated linguistic enquiry and research.

**Grammar and vocabulary teaching.** Most reported work relating to CC in an ESL setting is concerned with the teaching and learning of grammar and vocabulary. Table 2 gives an overview of the kind of work reported.

Table 2. Summary of CC applications in ESL

Researcher	Year	Students	Teaching area	Nature of application
Johns	1988	Post-experience MSc students	'to' as infinitive or preposition, differentiating 'therefore' and 'hence', the use of articles	Paper-based exercises and interactive concordancing
Tribble	1990a	Advanced students in EAP programme	Use of prepositions and articles	From paper-based exercises to interactive concordancing
Isle	1991	Students studying investing and financing in a vocational training programme	Subject-specific	Interactive searching and selecting activity
Johns	1991a	Postgraduate research students	Comparing 'convince' & 'persuade', the use of 'should'	Paper-based exercises
Johns	1991b	Postgraduate research students	The use of 'should', 'recommend', that-clauses, 'such as', articles and 'have to'	Paper-based exercises
Mparutsa et al	1991	Undergraduate students from a teacher-dominated rule-based learning system	Subject-specific vocabulary	Interactive concordancing
Stevens	1991a	First-year science undergraduate	Subject-specific vocabulary	Interactive concordancing
Stevens	1991b	Undergraduates	Subject-specific vocabulary	Interactive concordancing
Taylor	1991	Learner teachers	Grammar in general	Edited concordance outputs presented on OHTs
Ma	1993b	Third-year students in a higher diploma course in computing	Use of the corpus to aid writing part of a software user manual	Interactive concordancing

As most discussion centers around the teaching of vocabulary, whether general or ESP, it is worth pointing out that Stevens (1988; 1991a; 1991b) puts forward a strong case for the teaching of vocabulary with classroom concordancing. Stevens (1991b) suggests selecting "the most revealing contexts for the same word" from concordance outputs for making gap-filling exercises with multiple contexts, which is argued to reduce the chances of error and increase student confidence and improve performance (p.38). After students are familiar with how concordances can be generated, they can be directed to self-access vocabulary study by running what Stevens calls "exploratory concordances". An example of a concordanced-based gap-filling exercise, taken from Stevens (1991b), is shown in Appendix B.

An empirical study (Stevens, 1991a) comparing the traditional gap-fillers and the KWIC concordance-generated ones draws the conclusion that the latter can be seen as a viable alternative to the former. The pedagogical value of traditional gap-fill vocabulary exercises is questioned as an incorrect choice of word at the beginning could "compound the error" by taking away yet another contextual clue which might be needed for further decoding of the text. It is argued that, though not necessarily superior, concordance-based gap-fillers are more easily solved provided that students are given a brief familiarisation phase. Stevens claims that "the truncated demi-context typical of concordance output does

not seem to be a hindrance to the their discerning the word missing from the contexts" and that the "multiple of disjunct contexts helps them more in settling on a correct word than do the clues inherent in a passage of discourse with the same words missing" (p.55).

**Cross-Linguistic Parallel Concordances.** Although CC does not seem at first sight to have any face validity for the teaching of pronunciation, Roussel (1991) advocates the use of Cross-Linguistic Parallel Concordances (CLPCs) for teaching tonic placement. Roussel carried out a study on transcribed speech of English and French and finds that CPLCs could be of help in teaching tonic placement related to auxiliary verbs in English. Roussel's experiment, using her own intuition about tonic placement with a largely written corpus, may be at fault. But the use of CPLCs-based exercises could indeed help heighten learners' awareness of the difference in the two languages they speak. And the opportunities for CLPCs to be used in the classroom for comparing two languages are no doubt open for more research and investigation, though for many pairs of languages, like English and Chinese, parallel concordancing is still far from being technically possible.

### **Impact of classroom concordancing**

The impact of the CC approach is perhaps best summarised by Johns (1991a), who reports having used concordances in his teaching for four years with overseas postgraduate students. Johns claims that CC could have an impact on the process of learning, the role of the teacher and the place of grammar in ESL teaching. While Johns' first claim is supported by a number of practical applications of CC, his second and third claims remain unexplored and open to further research.

Johns claims that "concordances stimulate enquiry and speculation on the part of the learner", and help the learner "to develop the ability to see patterning in the target language and to form generalisations to account for that patterning." (p.2) He reports that by using interactive concordancing, his learners were able to provide more valid answers than the teacher could provide intuitively (Johns, 1991a).

This claim of Johns is supported by a number of researchers. Mparutsa et al. (1991) found that concordancing could help "develop students' learning skills with written text" as well as "promote independent and group learning". They also report changes in students' attitudes from the acceptance of the textbook as the supreme authority to having a more interactive and inquisitive approach to learning.

Taking it a step further, Taylor (1991) reports high transferability of discovery learning from concordance-based lessons when students showed better performance in subsequent text evaluation tasks. And Mparutsa et al. report cases where the student was seen to "contribute his/her developing subject knowledge" and the teacher could "contribute knowledge of language functions", leading to an understanding of the text through joint-discovery (p.131).

In addition, a number of other researchers (e.g. Butler, 1991; Isle, 1991; Mparutsa et al., 1991) report boosted motivation with the new approach. Isle (1991) points out:

The motivation is undoubtedly there: my students found the concordance program a fascinating piece of software and appreciated its potential for investigating and extracting information whether on facts and figures or linguistic questions (p.107).

As regards the impact on the teacher, Johns concludes that the teacher's role is to have undergone a healthy change from the traditional roles to "a director and coordinator of student-initiated research". Syllabuses, teacher's key books and many traditional practices have to give way to the natural data of language and this role is a challenging one as there are a lot of new questions that remain to be answered.



And the third major impact observed by Johns is that the CC approach makes possible "a new style of grammatical consciousness-raising by placing the learner's own discovery of grammar at the centre of language learning". Johns theorises that "when grammatical description is the product of the learner's own engagement with evidence, that description may show a far greater degree of abstraction and subtlety than with a given description" and as a result the place of grammar in the ESL classroom has to be entirely re-evaluated.

### SCC for test design

So far, references made to the use of SCC by teachers and researchers lie in a teaching-related context. Butler (1991) is perhaps the first person to use SCC in an ESL testing environment. Butler used SCC for test construction. He argues that SCC could improve the very popular cloze test in that the bias of the text content of just a single piece of text could be eliminated by concordance-generated tests of the gap-filling type where a test item appears in a set of different sentences drawn from a number of different texts in a corpus.

Drawing on Oller's (1979) idea that a cloze test "deals with contextually interrelated series of blanks", Butler (1991) believes that sentence concordance outputs can be easily manipulated, with the use of word-processing software, to provide computer-enhanced cloze tests which, though not providing a complete discourse, meet Oller's criterion for a cloze test. What Butler did was to run a concordancer through a corpus and had it generate sentence concordances of certain selected words. The role of the test designer changes from that of selecting and/or modification of a text to selecting the test words and the appropriate citations. An example of the test Butler used is given in Appendix C.

Of course much of Butler's argument lies in whether one is convinced that a collection of sentence concordance outputs as such can be viewed as the equivalent of a "contextually interrelated series of blanks" suitable for the design of cloze tests and also whether one approves of the test being constructed without a complete discourse. The criteria for word selection which Butler used in his experiment remain unclear, and, although there was positive feedback from students (p.34), it remains doubtful whether the test so constructed was a valid and reliable one.

Anyway, Butler's reservations about the use of the current CBELT (computer-based English language testing) software programs, based on random deletion (Butler, 1991, p.33), are perhaps sensibly cast. The use of concordances and a corpus, supported by the expertise of the user, the teacher or the test designer, is obviously superior to just leaving the job to the machine and the extra time they spent could also be well justified.

### Conclusion

As described above, SCC has been looked at with enthusiasm by most who believe in the use of authentic materials in second language teaching. Interestingly enough, even people who believe in having to exercise great control over educational texts may view concordancing positively and believe that concordancing with authentic texts can have a role to play. Foulds (1991), for example, points out the value of concordancers in "monitoring and adjusting linguistic features" in pedagogic texts. (pp.47-53)

As with any application of new technology in the classroom or in research, both the researcher and the students are likely to get excited with it at the beginning. Whether it is going to stay there as a useful pedagogical tool will be subject to serious experimentation in different situations, using students of different backgrounds and levels.

SCC has stirred, and will no doubt continue to stir, a wave of excitement in the field of ESL teaching as more and more teachers try out SCC in their classrooms. SCC is now only in its infancy and it has been enthusiastically promoted by a number of people, especially Johns, Stevens, and Tribble.

However, not many of its applications are in fact revealed in the literature and not much of the learner feedback has been seriously examined. Most work on CC tends to slant towards the speculative rather than the evaluative end. Descriptions about learner responses tend to be observation-based rather than empirically studied. The influence of CC on the teacher and on the place of grammar has hardly been investigated. It remains doubtful whether teachers and learners can cope with the inherent technical problems of concordancing such as hardware operation, search techniques and output procedures so as to make concordancing sessions effective and worthwhile, without the lessons being turned into desperate attempts to get the hardware, software and database in the right place and the machines to work in the right way.

In particular, not many of the dangers of CC are ever cited, though obviously as work associated with a new technological tool, it could not be without any pitfalls. In corpus creation, for example, bias could be one, where owing to the inherent convenience of inputting texts in the written medium, the spoken aspect of the language could be easily neglected and this could result in learners having an unbalanced picture of the language. Overdependence on machine-read type of text input and misuse of corpus creation criteria could well be other potential sources of danger.

So far, applications of CC seem to have been limited to students at the very advanced level and to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. Much has still to be learnt about how it can be employed with students of a level much lower than those cited in the current literature, say with secondary school or primary school students. The value of CC in the teaching of macro aspects of the language, such as discourse level features, also remains unexplored. It should be obvious that CC cannot be the entirety of any ESL course and so the question remains as to how it can be integrated with other areas of a course so that CC can become most fruitful and rewarding. Materials developed from CC are not yet seen marketed for use by ESL population teachers (Johns is preparing to do this; see Johns, 1991a) and there is obviously a long road to drive before CC-conscious researchers will see CC popularized.

Other areas in SCC, like CLPCs, test design and the teaching of segmental or prosodic features in pronunciation are virtually virgin lands open for exploration and what SCC has in store for ESL is still waiting for teachers and researchers alike to put in more effort if the fruits of the technology are to be reaped for yet greater abundance.

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**Appendix A Example of KWIC concordance output**

Concordance for "please"  
Text: S01 (&c)

S01	134	em. Reply now. for more information,	please phone 529 7171.
S02	97	meantime, if you have any questions,	please call the Insurance Company of North
S04	54	er, or settle the balance in full.	Please take a few moments to look through t
S05	78	orry - your statement is on the way.	Please take special note of the total and s
S06	91	dition Picasso! For faster ordering,	please call our Merchandise Services on 885
S08	58	some of our other smart money ideas,	please check the appropriate box(es) on the
S08	76	to use if you have any questions.	Please don't hesitate to use it: 810 882
S09	11	36/F., 88 Queensway, Hong Kong.	Please enrol before February 15, 1991 Gu
S09	106	e Plan supports you and your family.	Please spend a few moments reading it, then
S09	135	ends February 15, 1991. For enquiry,	please call Insurance Company of North Amer
S10	15	----- Dear Preferred Customer,	Please remember to take advantage of your P
S10	103	ion, call our hotline on 886 4234.	Please act now - a tax cheque reserved unde
S11	77	while, if you need more information,	please feel free to call the Carlingford Ho
S12	77	your Shui Hing Card to spend as you	please; or beautiful Estee Lauder lipsticks
S13	40	xecutive" magazine How to apply	Please submit all the information including
S13	40	ai, Hong Kong. In case of enquiries,	please call our 24-hour Customer Services H
S13	40	3. For additional application forms,	please drop by any of our conveniently loca
S15	49	u receive one month's FREE coverage.	Please act today.
S16	75	e, if you have additional questions,	please don't hesitate to call the AIA Hotli
S17	67	made by Cardmembers throughout 1991.	Please see enclosed leaflet for details.
S18	37	s accordingly. For more information,	please call our Customer Service Center at
S20	105	special arrangement. For enquiries,	please contact the Insurance Company of Nor
S21	37	are limited. For general enquiries,	please call our Customer Service Unit at 74
S21	38	49; for product or delivery details,	please call the respective advertisers' hot
S22	66	ing, a portion, or nothing at all.	Please feel free to phone the Diners Club C
S23	24	you a few weeks ago? If you haven't,	please reply today. As it is a convenient a
S23	68	under the HK\$500,000 Key Protector,	please send in your Confirmation Form now.
S23	87	ediately. If you have any questions,	please call the Insurance Company of North
S24	62	Cardholders. For general enquires,	please call our Customer Service Unit at
S24	66	for product and delivery details,	please call Labonda Ltd. at 541 6689.
S26	58	ply for an even higher credit limit.	Please call our Telephone Service Center at
S27	21	you a few weeks ago? If you haven't,	please reply today. It was designed exclusi
S27	126	General Manager P.S. Don't delay.	Please complete and return the enrollment f
S27	127	rm today. If you have any questions,	please call Insurance Company of North Amer
S31	92	nditions apply to the above offer,	please call Club Med for details on 521 1
S33	43	already sent in your payment. If so,	please excuse this letter. We are concern
S34	82	icm is needed. For more information,	please call the Carlingford Hot Line at 827
S35	24	ected for your personal enjoyment.	Please browse through this brochure to sele
S35	44	Cardholders. For general enquiries,	please call our Customer Service Unit at 74
S35	46	9: for enquiries on the gold stamps,	please contact International Collections Lt
S35	47	other product and delivery details,	please contact Labonda Ltd. at 541 6689
S36	65	gation. If you have any questions,	please call the Insurance Company of North
S40	42	Christmas. For general enquiries,	please call our Customer Service Unit at 74
S40	43	49. For product or delivery details,	please call the advertisers' hotline number
S41	32	houkan's most valuable contest ever.	Please check the enclosed brochure for deta
S41	51	Cardholders. For general enquiries,	please call our Customer Service Unit at 74
S41	52	t at 748 4949. For magazine details,	please call Asiaweek Limited at 563 6102. T
S47	42	arch 1992. For general enquiries,	please call our Customer Service Unit at 74
S47	43	49. For product or delivery details,	please call the advertisers' hotlines liste
S49	35	eanwhile, if you have any questions,	please don't hesitate to call our 24-hour C
S50	40	rrencies! If you have any questions,	please call our CitiPlus Hotline at 861 151

(From Ma, 1993)

**Appendix B Example of concordance-based classroom exercise**

Below, you find the result of a "concordance" made on some of these words. In this concordance, a computer looked at all the readings in the first-year biology workbook. Then the computer printed each line containing those words. (The computer doesn't know where words or sentences begin or end; it just prints the line.)

**DIRECTIONS:** Replace each **BLOCK** of blank spaces below with **ONE WORD** from the word list above.

- |                   |   |  |   |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| 1a<br>b<br>c      | make up the taxonomic<br>one progresses down the<br>At the bottom of the                          | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | .<br>, the number of organis<br>the differences within  |
| 2a<br>b<br>c<br>d | s a longitudinal layer<br>to form one cord, which<br>single large taproot<br>which the root hairs | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | ing the length of each segme<br>s along the length of the<br>deep into the soil with oth<br>. Inside the epidermis is |
| 3a<br>b<br>c      | Numerous granules are<br>ividual cells, firmly<br>, by which muscles are                          | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | to the matrix side of the<br>to each other, rest on a<br>to bones, are composed                                       |
| 4a<br>b<br>c      | to capture prey or to<br>airs of chaetae. They<br>ecause roots are the                            | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | the organism in place.<br>each segment in the soil.<br>ing and absorbing organs of t                                  |
| 5a<br>b<br>c      | tractile vacuole removes<br>The epidermis prevents<br>ncreases the chances of                     | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | water from the cytoplasm of<br>ive water loss and yet al<br>ive water-loss but this is pr                             |
| 6a<br>b<br>c<br>d | In<br>ng to the cells. In<br>Organisms which have<br>e, the mouse develops                        | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | parts of the cell the ER i<br>animals, cilia covering th<br>basic features in common ar<br>symptoms and dies. Howe    |
| 7a<br>b           | ilia sweep food into an<br>side of the cell. The  | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | groove on the side of the cel<br>groove leads to the cytophar   |
| 8a<br>b<br>c      | he science of biological<br>is the largest unit of<br>The various units of                        | <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | is known as taxono<br>. It is split into<br>- kingdom, phylum,  |

(From Stevens, 1991b)

### Appendix C Example of concordance-based cloze test

Each of the sentences below has the same word missing.  
Fill in the blank with the correct word.

A.

1. Fortunately we .....have large amounts of exploitable potential on which to capitalize.
2. There is no question, however, that food production will have to be raised .....higher to help feed the world's growing population.
3. This .....does not solve the problem.
4. Here's hoping you're .....in your old flat by the time this letter reaches you.

B.

1. Such an approach is usually the .....of choice for buying the best car.
2. I had to live with this .....for nearly two years.
3. This is not the ideal .....for a student to check his or her progress.
4. This is a common .....even though many people fail to appreciate that such analysis represents an integral part of the process.

C.

1. It is a list of .....connected with everyday work in an English Secondary School.
2. One of the first .....that I did was to settle back into the leather armchair of my study.
3. As you may imagine, I had rather different ideas on how .....should be done.
4. This would have the advantage of making .....much simpler in terms of presentation.

D.

1. In this case, more than 50 years passed between the initiation of the original research and the .....when production was significantly increased.
2. Perhaps we could meet next week, when you have .....
3. I hope that this answers any outstanding questions for the .....being.
4. However, what is less well-known is that over the same .....period the Government has been training more and more teachers.

E.

1. They occur at the same time and .....
2. Brass and copper and other metals are all put into three different boxes, but they all end up in the same .....
3. I'm selling this .....as soon as possible, and moving to London.
4. She is intending to study Chemistry at a British University, but needs an acceptable grade to gain a .....

F.

1. In 1967, my colleagues and I began attempting to .....pictures of individual genes.
2. In spite of the difficulties, attempts to .....such transfers of information are worthwhile.
3. You may .....of this what you want.
4. I should like to .....the following alterations.

G.

1. This discovery created .....excitement among many scientists and nutritionists.
2. The progress towards complete re-cycling has been slow, but has made .....ground over the past 10 years.
3. These students often had .....problems adjusting to life in England.
4. However, statistics indicate that the company is undergoing a .....decline.

H.

1. These varieties .....better characteristics and earlier maturity.
2. We .....not yet determined the minimum lengths of these segments.
3. The post offers work in the three areas in which I .....most experience and interest.
4. CFC's (or chlorofluorocarbons) .....become notorious in recent years.

I.

1. Another example of waste disposal are the heating systems used in .....modern apartment blocks.
2. Thus, all types of refuse, except that which goes through the pulverizer, is in .....way re-graded and then re-cycled.
3. At this stage .....relatively sophisticated task might be expected.
4. Also, with very young children .....techniques are probably not suitable.

J.

1. Insects, when faced with extinction, mutate .....new races capable of attacking other varieties.
2. The change probably took place in a farmer's field somewhere in Western Iran about 5,000 years ago, when cultivated wheat was brought .....the area of a wild one.
3. Why is the waste being sorted .....different types?
4. Special techniques are therefore necessary to introduce desirable material from these wild species ..... the cultivated areas.

K.

1. However, experts have said .....each of these fuel resources will be used up by approximately the year 2020.
2. All the rubbish .....will burn is burnt.
3. Textiles are sent down a second chute, and then undergo a process similar to .....of paper and card.
4. Take the book .....you have obtained from your College, University or local Public Library.

L.

1. While Darwin's book immediately generated a great deal of .....discussion and controversy, Mendel's discovery was largely ignored at first.
2. It stimulated little .....for 25 years.
3. I also enclose a photograph of Liverpool, should this be of .....to you.
4. I have a continued .....in the current range of new products.

M.

1. She has clarified the role she wishes to take .....the work ever be commissioned.
2. It went from bad to worse after she decided that things .....be run her way.
3. Despite her capabilities she never exceeded her responsibilities, and always referred to myself when there was any doubt as to which course of action .....have been taken.
4. I think that the textbook .....have a different subject in each section.

Key

- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| A. STILL        | H. HAVE     |
| B. METHOD       | I. SOME     |
| C. THINGS       | J. INTO     |
| D. TIME         | K. THAT     |
| E. PLACE        | L. INTEREST |
| F. MAKE         | M. SHOULD   |
| G. CONSIDERABLE |             |

(From Butler, 1991)



## Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Debate

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This paper attempts to survey some of the activities that fall under the umbrella of 'debate' at HKU by focusing on a variety of disparate practices across the university, ranging from one-to-one argument to legal moots, from informal classroom discussions to departmental and cross-faculty debating events and participation in international competitions. It compares views from different sources (representing the Departments of Philosophy, Political Science and Law, and the English Centre) on the importance of development and demonstration of argumentative oral skills through the medium of English. It briefly investigates the questions of professional relevance and pedagogic purposes of training in oral argumentation within the different departments with particular reference to cognitive and language skills development, and describes the current approaches and activities supported by these departments as well as the cross-curricular activities of the Debating Society and the English Centre. The paper goes on to consider implications for the university-wide English enhancement programme and to recommend further involvement of the English Centre, both in support of existing faculty and student debate programmes and in furtherance of its own course objectives.

### Introduction

Debating is one of the oldest teaching methods. Examples of pedagogic debate range from Greek philosophy schools and mediaeval law to the enduringly prestigious Oxford and Cambridge Debating Societies, among whose ranks a range of past and present British politicians and statesmen are numbered. In spite of, or indeed because of, its illustrious history, it is often condemned as an unrealistic, archaic skill, perpetuated in academic institutions but totally irrelevant to real life.

It is against this background that we consider departmental and faculty attitudes at HKU towards the teaching of debate, which we have chosen to define in its widest sense of more or less structured oral argumentation. Views were elicited from different sources (representing the Departments of Philosophy, Political Science and Law) in order to compare the faculty perspective of what students are required to do in terms of oral argumentation with that of the English Centre. Although the writers of the 'content

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subject' sections make no claim to be applied linguists, their practically oriented perceptions of language needs and their views on the efficacy of current practices are clearly of interest to the planning and implementation of the English Centre's programme of English for Academic Purposes, not least since it is essentially towards what we understand as their 'academic purposes' that such programmes are focused.

This paper emphasises the English Centre's interdisciplinary role; one which is seen, too, in the involvement of another non-departmental source of debating activity, also represented in this paper, namely the Debating Society. This Society, like the English Centre, has a university-wide brief, but has its origin and support within student organisations - the Students' Union and the Office of Student Affairs.

By addressing the questions of the importance placed on oral argumentation by the different departments and the current approaches and training provided, the paper aims to profile some of the departmental expectations in this area. Departmental perceptions of linguistic problems are also considered, so as to reach some tentative conclusions and recommendations on the role of oral argumentation within the programme for English enhancement.

### **Debate from the Point of View of Philosophy**

#### **Role of debate in Philosophy**

Debate is discussion governed by rules. The degree of rule-governedness can vary. In mass debates, there may be a body of rules determining who can speak, when and for how long, restrictions on the form of address and fixed penalties for various types of transgression. There may even be rules governing how judges are to award marks for performance. At the opposite end of the spectrum, a debate between two people may be fairly unconstrained, but the discussion will be a little more formal, a little less heated, than a verbal brawl.

The quality of a debate may be assessed along several dimensions. An individual contribution, say, a speech, can be judged for both content and delivery. The content itself may be judged internally for sharpness - profundity of reasoning, aptness of analogy, shrewdness of wit, conciseness of expression, and so on - and externally for persuasiveness and relevance to what has gone before. A set of contributions may be judged collectively for coherence, and for the elegance with which a case is constructed or an opposing view demolished.

Philosophy is made for debate. It is frequently said that philosophy is a skill rather than a collection of putative truths. Getting at the truth may be the purpose of philosophical enquiry, but what characterises the subject is the means for pursuing that end, namely cogent and rigorous argumentation. Such argumentation is typically provoked by deep and contentious issues with a strong case to be made for opposing positions. Since, to put matters crudely, opposing positions cannot all be true, the pursuit of truth will involve attempted refutation, or attempted defence of a position against objections. Hence the prevalence of the dialogue form in philosophical writing (even though the dialogue may be with oneself).

Philosophical dialogue is disciplined in the sense that persuasion is to be effected by rational means, by valid arguments and the exposure of invalid ones, by clarification and the exposure of unclarity. So it is not just that philosophy is made for debate; much of philosophy simply is debate. Speakers at philosophical conferences are commonly required to submit their papers in advance; commentators are assigned to write critical replies, and these are sent to the speakers, who may prepare a written response. Thus debate is formally initiated and, with luck, when the paper is presented a fruitful discussion will ensue. Time allocated for discussion quite usually exceeds that permitted for the presentation of the

paper.

### **Pedagogic purpose of debate in Philosophy**

Debate in Philosophy is a vehicle for the rigorous examination of one's own views and those of others. Although a common conception of debate is of a contest in which one competes for the sake of winning, it is important to recognise that competition is not an essential characteristic of debate. The ancient Sophists made a living from teaching techniques for winning arguments, but they were reviled by Plato and Aristotle, who saw quite clearly that engaging in discussion for the sake of winning is contrary to the philosophical enterprise, for truth is the likely victim.

In both the Islamic and the mediaeval Western tradition, debate became institutionalised as part of philosophical training, and codes for the conduct of formal disputation emerged. Disputations in the arts faculties of mediaeval universities were on the following pattern:

First, the master in charge puts a yes-no question, giving some arguments on each side. Next, the respondent (sometimes called the *promovendus*) gives a short solution accompanied by a refutation of the arguments leading to the opposite conclusion. Then the presiding master in his role as *opponens* argues against the respondent's solution and refutations, and the respondent is allowed to reply. Another master could then argue against the respondent's new position. (Kretzmann et al 1982, p.23)

Walter Burley's *Tractatus de Obligationibus* and Roger Swineshead's *Obligationes* (from, respectively, the early and late fourteenth century) provide evidence of an emerging set of elaborate rules for what argumentative moves are enjoined or proscribed ('obliged') at any stage of a debate. The rules seem to be designed not for arbitrating disputes between opponents, but for facilitating clear, logical discussion. This conception is well captured in the title of William Heytesbury's famous *Regulae Solvendi Sophismata*.

Despite the fact that the code of obligations seems to encourage the orderly and unprejudiced examination of disputed claims, it is well known that many of the mediaeval debates were extremely violent. It is also worthy of remark that much modern philosophical intercourse tends to be highly confrontational, even abusive, in tone. Why this should be so is an interesting topic on which to speculate.

One reason could be that, until very recent times, academic philosophy was dominated by men. According to a popular book by Deborah Tannen, the natural mode for dialogue between men is competitive, so debate will degenerate into a battle of wits (Tannen, 1991). This is, no doubt, an oversimplification, but it is true that many of the terms used for describing philosophical argumentation do come direct from the battleground. We talk of 'attacking an opponent's position', of 'destroying' or 'demolishing' his argument. A feminist author, Janice Moulton, has coined the expression 'philosophical duellism' for this, the prevalent mode of dialogue in modern philosophy. She suggests that it is not the most fruitful or productive mode in which to conduct our philosophical business.

It is not clear to me that Moulton is right. Philosophical debates are sometimes dispassionate and impartial examinations of the issues, but frequently the discussion is or becomes volatile and this is to be expected when people are arguing about views deeply entrenched within their belief-systems and to which they are strongly committed. Some useful pedagogical purpose could be served if the passion for passion were inculcated in students of all disciplines, just so long as commitment is distinguished from dogmatism, disagreement from hostility, resolve from rancour.

Historically, the practice of debate has proved a satisfying means of fostering the kind of intellectual skills and concern for clear, accurate expression which are valued in philosophy - and which

ought to be valued in every other investigatory discipline. There is therefore a clear case for its incorporation within the curriculum of all institutions of learning.

### **Practice of debate in HKU Philosophy Department**

Given what has just been said about the centrality of debate in philosophy, it should be expected that debate figures prominently in the activities of the HKU Philosophy Department. And so it does, to the considerable intellectual and linguistic advantage of our students. We hold regular seminars in which a thesis propounded by a speaker is contested, at length, by members of the audience. Students get a sense of the give and take of argument, of discussion which is unimpeded by considerations of the relative eminence of the participants, and of people happily subjecting embryonic ideas to critical scrutiny. Our postgraduate students conduct a seminar series of their own, but it is open to all.

Another form that debate takes in our Department is individual tutorials in the second and third years. Several years ago, like many other Departments, we employed a system of small group tutorials for discussing student papers and matters arising out of lectures. But, even when the groups were very small, students tended to be unforthcoming. One might ascribe this to lack of linguistic confidence or (vaguely) to some kind of cultural inhibition, and there is a temptation simply to leave the matter at that. However, if one feels strongly that participation in debate is a serious aspect of a student's intellectual development and that a student is just not getting the most out of his university education if he fails to engage in it, one will not, as a teacher, be content to endorse lame excuses for inertia.

The Department of Philosophy's response to the problem was to introduce one-to-one tutorials, initially on an experimental basis. They proved so successful that all teachers now tutor this way despite the fact that it is very costly in terms of time. The benefits are enormous. A student knows that, for 50 minutes, he will have to give an oral defence of the views he has set out in an essay, and he comes prepared to speak. The dialogue is both intellectual exchange and intensive practice in oral argumentative English. Students are informed that part of their coursework mark is determined by the quality of the content of their oral performance. Although we have not tried to quantify the extent to which we are now producing students with significantly enhanced linguistic skills, the results literally speak for themselves.

Last year, the Department of Philosophy introduced two new courses on the history of philosophy. In one of them, called 'The Beginnings of Philosophy', the teacher, Tim Moore, made an innovatory attempt to encourage students to recapitulate the ancient form of philosophical debate as recorded in the Socratic dialogues of Plato. Some groups of students wrote dialogues and enacted them in front of the class. Other groups took to the streets and engaged members of the public in debate on philosophical (usually moral) themes. In the less bold version of this activity, students drew up a questionnaire, designed so as to elicit the extent to which respondents thought critically, were alert to contradictions in their views, were aware of difficulties for the positions they maintained and had in mind explanations to back their claims. In the bolder version, students selected groups of people and engaged them in debates (lasting an hour or more) and presented their results to the class, answering questions about their principles of selection, choice of topics and methodology, as well as substantive questions about the arguments emerging in the course of the debates.

One can easily imagine fruitful variations on this kind of activity. It would, for example, be interesting for students to tape-record a public discussion they had incited, to transcribe the dialogue in summary form (some very tricky problems of translation could arise here), and to write a continuation of the dialogue which either refuted a position propounded by one of the participants or put it on a firmer philosophical footing.

Students' perception of the effectiveness of these forms of teaching through debate are gauged from an annual assessment exercise devised by our Staff-Student Consultative Committee. (Reaction to

individual tutorials is very favourable.)

Another form of debate that we have recently instituted but not yet tested uses the electronic media, possible now that students have access to terminals across the campus. The Department of Philosophy has established a user group for staff and students, following a suggestion of Dino Chincotta. The Department of Computer Science was the first to establish such a group, but theirs is used mainly for the distribution of homework assignments and general chat. The function of the Philosophy User Group is primarily to provide a forum for philosophical discussion, and several discussion strings can be running simultaneously. The main advantages of this mode of debate are that contributions can be made at any time, that there is a record of the discussion to date, that it provides useful practice in written English and that it is therefore a useful alternative for those whose oral English is shaky or who simply do not think fast 'on their feet'.

### **Benefits of debate**

It is very difficult to find reliable indices of the linguistic or philosophical benefits of debating. I have indicated some rough measures and to these could be added the intuitive judgements of those in a position to compare Philosophy graduates with other graduates from the Arts Faculty (for example, our graduates are reported as being notably lively participants in the Cert. Ed. courses put on by the Faculty of Education).

But perhaps the most important benefits of debate are less tangible than linguistic proficiency and intellectual sharpness. Debate serves an important socialising function; it fosters a respect for the provisions within a civilized society for free discussion of alternatives versus forced adherence to authority. A colleague of mine identifies one of the main educational problems in Hong Kong as 'overcoming exaggerated respect for the teacher, which inhibits the progress of the debate we wish to promote'. One of the values of the kinds of debate I have been describing is that it helps to soothe unease students may feel at public disagreement, especially (for instance) public disagreement with a 'senior' person.

This end could also be served were students and staff to be on first name terms with each other. Here, I concede, there are difficult cultural barriers to be overcome, partly to do with the 'familiarity value' of Chinese given names. There is also a danger of 'cultural imperialism' in merely seeking to impose what seems right according to one's own cultural norms on to another culture to which those standards seem entirely alien. However, one Saturday night, one of my research students rang me up and said 'Great news, Laurence. I've had a paper accepted by a professional journal.' I take absolutely no credit for this success, but I could not help thinking that, were it not for his exposure in our Department to an atmosphere of debate on equal terms in a spirit of rational enquiry, he might not have summoned the courage even to submit the piece to a learned publication<sup>2</sup>.

### **Debate from the point of view of Political Science**

#### **The role of debate in Political and Social Science**

Debate in any meaningful sense can only take place within a society where free speech is guaranteed. Such a right to debate is guaranteed in Hong Kong by the Human Rights Ordinance. The significant part is Article 16, which specifically states:

Everyone may hold any opinion that he wishes. He has the right to express himself, and

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Mark Fisher, Tim Moore and Christopher New for suggestions relating to this part of the paper.

give and receive ideas and information through any medium. The law may restrict his rights but only when it is necessary to take into account the rights and reputations of others, or for reasons of national security, public order or public health or morals. (Hong Kong Govt., 1990a)

In the last two years political parties have been created in Hong Kong and public debate on political choice has become more popular. The right to free speech is not, however, unchallenged in the region. For arguments against the concept of free speech and debate based on free access to information (with relation to Singapore), see Mahubani (1993).

Public debate is not just a right, however. According to Friedrich (1963, p.455), it has a crucial function within government:

Speech and debating are the key to deliberative rule-making, as they are the basis of all parliamentary work of which rule making is of course only a part, though an important one.

It is significant in this context that the Legislative Council of Hong Kong (Legco) has markedly changed its role since the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1984. For much of its existence, Legco was merely a rubber stamp for decisions made elsewhere, so that debate, in the parliamentary sense of the term, was almost completely lacking. In the last few years that situation has ceased to be the case.

Increasingly, the political parties and groups within Legco have used the adversarial method to put forward their positions on public issues. (For the rules, procedures and form of debates in Legco see Miners, 1991, Davies and Roberts, 1990a.) In the sense that critical discussion of proposals and actual policies are encouraged, this produces nothing but good. Indeed, an important part of democracy relates to the use of debate to educate and inform, in both formal and informal contexts.

The use of adversarial techniques in debate, however, can produce problems for those who are unaccustomed to the medium. For much of the time, political debates are concerned not so much with the presentation of objective truth as with an exercise in political persuasion, which of its essence involves selection of argument and rhetorical skills not necessarily constrained by objective reality. In some presentations truth, or even an approximation to it, is a secondary or even an irrelevant consideration.

In the light of this increasing awareness of the social centrality of political debate in Hong Kong, we might expect our students to involve themselves much more in the process than hitherto. Students in the discipline of political science have, in the past, found it difficult to analyse the role of rhetoric within political communication. This has always been a problem in the general conceptual approach to the teaching of government and politics, but it is clearly now becoming more important with the politicisation of the Territory.

Students need to be aware of how political debate can confuse as well as educate, and how such differences can influence political thought, attitudes and behaviour. This awareness is, in my view, an essential addition to a purely scientific approach to the study of political science. Far too often students of the subject are unaware of the cognitive dimensions of politics and believe that its study is somehow value-free. Indeed, it has been realised that the purely 'scientific' study of politics has major limitations if studied to the exclusion of other criteria.

If undergraduates can be sensitised into a recognition of the role, both positive and negative, of political debate, then much will have been achieved. In addition, the students at this university are actively involved in civic education in secondary schools, and are thus disseminating information on political developments. (For details of civic education see Hong Kong Govt., 1990b.) It is therefore essential that they should be aware of the nature and form that political debate assumes so that the

dangers of unconscious indoctrination are minimised.

While a degree of awareness can be developed by careful reading of legislative debates, relevant documents, party political platforms and the like, debate is an additional way of making students aware of the ways in which information can be biased. As 1997 approaches, the problem of making informed judgements that are free from political manipulation on political issues is becoming more urgent. Any means that helps towards a critical analysis of political debate in both its negative and positive aspects can only do good.

Appreciation and understanding of the debating process, of course, is one thing; active participation, whether as a learner or in real-life situations, is another. The latter depends crucially on the exploitation of oral communication skills, to which I turn next.

### **Oral communication in the Social Science Faculty**

Within the Social Science Faculty and the University at large, there is considerable concern relating to the weaknesses of our students in certain areas of oral communication skills, particularly in the English medium. Whether these problems are rooted in the Cantonese culture, lack of opportunity to practise English, attitudes towards first and second languages or to faults in the secondary school system is not within the parameters of this paper. The fact remains that there are students who are unable or unwilling to use spoken English as a means of communicating.

It is often argued erroneously that, as testing of students is mainly through the written medium, there is no problem per se. This stance, however, ignores the intellectual and practical consequences of such a deficiency. In the first case, a marked reluctance to engage in debate and discussion during tutorials and seminars is not uncommon. Students may be unable or unwilling to pose questions or to pursue points they do not understand - to the detriment of their critical and analytical skills. While such reluctance is to the detriment of students' performance in this university, staff are quite familiar with the problem. When those students go on to study abroad for further degrees, however, they may find themselves at a disadvantage in the cut and thrust of the more oral tradition in British, American and Commonwealth universities.

As for the practical consequences, there is the criticism that many students applying for employment do not do themselves credit at interviews. Lacking spoken English ability, they fall back on prepared answers. When faced with unanticipated questions their inability to argue a point and sustain the argument is woefully evident. It is not just at interview that the standard of oral English may not be sufficient; communication in the employment situation itself may well require fluency and competence in presenting ideas.

Given the degree of concern, however, at English language deficiencies and the general lack of confidence, there are different initiatives for improvement within the Social Science Faculty. First, different approaches to encouraging more open discussion may be taken in seminars and tutorials by individual lecturers. Second, it is hoped that the Academic Communication and Study Skills course provided for the Social Science Faculty by the English Centre will help to improve oral as well as written performance. Third, the voluntary involvement of some students in the activities of the Debating Society is a positive move which is supported by the Political Science Department through substantial involvement in coaching.

Since of the initiatives listed above the first is a matter of individual practice and the second will be dealt with later in this paper under the English Centre section, I will direct further comments to the third initiative - that of the Debating Society, with which I have been involved in the capacity of coach for several years now. Although the Society is not limited to any particular faculty or department, the special association with Political Science is seen in the fact of our university team's competing in the

(inter-varsity) Political Science Debate.

### **Practice of formal debate in HKU**

In the University of Hong Kong, debating in English is well-established. The Debating Society takes part in competitive debating both within the university and between HKU and other tertiary institutions, on both a national and an international scale. These international and 'inter-varsity' events in particular give debating a high profile, attracting patronage from within the community at large, commercial sponsorship and a large following among the student body generally, who support the team and attend the various debating competitions in the Territory.

Debating activities in the University of Hong Kong in general have increased quite dramatically in the last ten years. The main external catalyst for this development has been the number of tertiary institutions in the Territory who have organised sponsored debating competitions. Allied to that has been the marked internationalisation of debating in the Asian Pacific region. In the Association of South East Asian Nations, in particular, the medium of debating, whether as linguistic showcase or democratic forum, has been given increasing attention not only by academic institutions but by government and private bodies as well.

These debates give students the opportunity to compare their skills with those of other tertiary students in Hong Kong, and with those of visiting teams from abroad. They serve as an example to students who otherwise rarely see their peers voluntarily using English. Because the focus is on argumentation and the aim is persuasiveness, native-speaker fluency is not the main criterion for performance. Thus Hong Kong teams compete on an equal basis with native speakers as serious and respected contenders. In recent years the HKU team have won contests not just against other second- or foreign-language contestants but also against British and Australian university teams.

Within HKU, inter-faculty debates take place each year. These competitions should not be underestimated; as extra-curricular events, they are student-motivated and organised and generally well-attended by the student body at large. Faculty honour is a strong motivator of student performance, though competing teams regularly display widely differing degrees of skill. An obvious point here is that students who have had previous instruction in debating or argumentation, or who have taken part in moots, tend on the whole to turn in a more competent performance.

### **The quality of student debating at HKU**

The HKU debating teams represent an elite of student debaters, who may spend up to three years of their university careers participating in regular debates and intensive training sessions. Their regular successes represent a great deal of time and effort, not just of the debaters themselves, but also of graduate ex-members and of individuals from the university staff who, on a voluntary basis, attend training sessions or provide other support.

When they first present themselves for debating training, the most obvious weakness of many of the students is their almost total lack of self-confidence. Their willingness to participate is evidenced by their self-selection for debate training, but it is still the case that they expect to be told what to say and have little faith in their own judgement.

This first major problem is aggravated by the second - their reluctance to use English. In comparison with Singapore, Malaysia or the Philippines, for instance, where students regularly use English to communicate among themselves, the gap is huge.

Further problems at a more detailed level are:



- 1 An inability to grasp the essential question in the debating proposition.
- 2 A lack of understanding of the need for rhetoric in a presentation.
- 3 An inability to grasp the points made by the opposition and hence to deal effectively with those points.
- 4 An over-reliance on a prepared set of notes and a refusal to modify the position in response to an unexpected position taken by the opponents
- 5 In rebuttal, an inability to pinpoint quickly the essence of an argument and a counter-argument.
- 6 A lack of humour, combined with fixed ideas which may be irrelevant.
- 7 Choice of the wrong line of argument.
- 8 An enormous amount of time and effort wasted on checking obscure and irrelevant detail.

These weaknesses are obviously not shared by all the debaters as some have had experience of debating before, but they represent the typical student profile in his or her first few exposures to the medium. Also, to some extent, those who present themselves for debating are self-selecting and generally represent a higher level of oral skill than is the norm. However, it cannot be denied that even the better students show residual traits of the kind described above.

### **Debating in the context of learning**

As to the generality of my observations on students' performance, many, but not all, of the weaknesses in debating are reflected in tutorials. In many cases it is difficult to elicit responses from the participants - which largely undermines the role of the tutorial and seminar itself. That is, of course, unless seminars are seen merely as exercises in prepared written work by the students with oral comments from the tutor and without verbal input from anyone else,

The argument at this stage is that the teaching of debating skills can make a significant contribution to the wider pedagogic process in the educating of undergraduates, whether in the Faculty of Social Science or in the context of tertiary studies at large, especially where English is a second language.

In terms of oral communication, it is argued, exposure to debating provides a means of addressing some of the weaknesses regularly displayed by our students. It can improve the students' ability to communicate more confidently in oral situations such as tutorials and seminars. Beneficial effects are extended to written work where practice in debate preparation helps the student to identify the meaning of an essay question and to write in a balanced form, by weighing the opposing views before reaching a final conclusion. In reading too, debating encourages practical research and efficient and critical condensation of sources. In terms of a liberal education, the use of topics dealing with current issues widens the students' base of knowledge outside the narrow confines of subject field and hence encourages interdisciplinary thinking. In short, debating has a valuable part to play in reducing the inevitable weaknesses displayed by our undergraduate students.

A word of warning, however: detractors of debating regularly fail to grasp both the direct benefits of debating and the indirect rewards of its use. This may be partly explained by the well-intentioned but misguided efforts of some in the educational field. Worthy attempts to increase interest or involvement in their subject may, through lack of experience in teaching debating, fail to maximise the medium's potential. Especially where students are given no preparation, they merely go through the motions, producing superficial arguments. As a result, boredom and disillusion set in and the process is rejected in favour of safer, more familiar approaches.

Debating is not seen as a time-saving device. It requires singular commitment, thorough training and preparation. In order to avoid the aforementioned errors in teaching debating, the situation could be remedied by training courses for staff who wish to familiarise themselves with the ways of approaching

debating. Neither is it argued that debating should replace more traditional methods wholesale. It cannot and should not attempt to place itself on a pedestal. However, debating is a complement to the learning process and should be regarded as such.

In conclusion to this section: it is often mistakenly believed that the innate conservatism of our students is a barrier to improved teaching methods. The acceptance of this assumption itself often proves a barrier to beneficial innovation. It is argued here that if we as educators can bring ourselves to recognise that students are more receptive than conventional wisdom would have it, then attempts can be made to improve the generally weak points in our student body. This paper has, admittedly, dwelt more upon the negative points and has not made reference to our undergraduates' known strengths in many fields. However, if the intention of higher education is to produce students with wider capabilities than those found at present in our institutions, then this article will be seen as a move in the right direction.

### Debate in the context of Legal Studies

#### Debate in the Faculty of Law

While the importance of oral skills and persuasiveness in competitive or adversarial settings in the real world of legal practice is undoubted, there is surprisingly little emphasis placed on orality within the Faculty of Law. There are really only two areas in which students may be obliged to engage in dialogue in English.

The first is in tutorials or small group sessions which are designed to stimulate discussion of legal concepts and their application. The reality, however, is that they are too often little more than mini-lectures punctuated by occasional comments from the stronger students. The 'Socratic method', teaching law largely through a process of rigorous dialogue (whether in lectures or small groups) and favoured by many strong North American law schools, is generally and for a variety of reasons (cultural, educational and linguistic) considered impractical.

The second area of orality relates to formal course requirements of which moots are the chief example, although recently students of advocacy have also been required to participate in a conventional 'debate' involving an issue that is not necessarily law-related. This paper will, however, focus mainly on the traditional LL.B. 'moot'.

Moots, in one form or another, have been a staple of legal education in common law jurisdictions for many decades. They derive, it is said, from the mediaeval *disputatio*, a procedure by which a student was required to prepare himself by advance study and then to sustain or attack a proposition in the face of opposition equally well-prepared (Sutherland, 1967, p.73). In the model most widely used now, the moot simulates a case argued before an appellate court.

Typically, the moot centres round a fixed fact pattern meant to represent the findings of fact of the lower court (trial) judge. The facts normally raise two distinct legal issues and are ideally crafted in such a way that the issues will be arguable or 'borderline', ie truly moot. Students participate in teams, two counsel for the appellant and two for the respondent, so that each issue will be addressed by a student on either side. Counsel for the appellant argue first, each for about twenty minutes. Counsel for the respondent follow. One counsel for the appellant has a right to reply briefly.

The Faculty's compulsory moots are argued in real courtrooms in the Supreme Court building (the Faculty lacks its own moot courtroom) before panels of three 'judges' who may be barristers, solicitors, government lawyers, actual judges or legal academics. At the conclusion of the moot the judges usually decide the case, with reasons, and, more importantly, provide a critique of the students'

performance.

Some moots are more realistic than others, if real appellate advocacy is taken as the model. Most are unrealistic in that the fact patterns tend to be cryptic and sketchy - merely concocted for the exercise - and that the number of issues and the time for argument are artificially limited by considerations of fairness and by administrative constraints. In addition, while moot judges are almost exclusively concerned with testing the students' knowledge and analytical powers, real appellate judges normally focus on achieving the correct result, deriving whatever assistance they can from counsel to reach that goal.

While moots are meant to be adversarial, student mooters tend to be less concerned about (or even conscious of) their opponents than would be the case in a traditional campus debate (or, for that matter, in a real appeal). Moots differ from the traditional debate in that a vital element is interrogation of the participants by third parties - judges are expected to put questions to the student counsel on both sides. In addition, there is virtually no scope to take issue with facts - indeed, the facts are normally regarded as unalterable - so that there is arguably somewhat less room for creativity and invention, though skilled advocates would maintain that novel and creative legal arguments win cases.

Most students in the Faculty of Law have had no comparable experience prior to their compulsory moot. They will have had no formal advocacy training apart from a brief preparatory lecture and what is contained in a short faculty handbook on mooting. The prevailing view seems to be that what is really important in the process is the student's knowledge of the area of law involved, supplemented by thorough research of the issue. The exercise seems to be seen as a test of his legal understanding and ability to reason - simply an extension of his education in the classroom.

While the primary purpose is to enhance the student's legal reasoning and analysis skills, it is argued that 'the appellate litigator must learn the basic principles of public speaking so that the manner of delivery does not detract from what is being said' (ABA Committee, 1985, p.140). This is indubitably more problematic in the case of second-language speakers.

### **The function of moots in legal education**

The pedagogical aims of moots in law school curricula are poorly defined if they are defined at all. This is perhaps not surprising as there tends to be little offered in undergraduate programmes (certainly in English jurisdictions) that could be called formal instruction in appellate advocacy. The focus is usually on how the moot participants' performance should be evaluated, rather than on how moots ought to be used as a teaching device.

It is nonetheless assumed that moots are an important part of the course of study. One observer of the moot court programme at Harvard put it rather grandly:

To suppose that this elaborate procedure is no more than a complicated extracurricular law game or the teaching of a practical trade technique, is to miss the point by a wide margin. This 'disputation' is an academic process as old as universities. When any man, lawyer or not, has learned to perceive the precise point of cleavage between two contentions, has learned to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant considerations bearing on these contentions, has schooled himself to accept reasoned opposition in good grace, he has gone far on the road to becoming a rational being and a useful adjuster of other men's controversies. (Sutherland, 1967, p.344)

If a catalogue of the educational aims of law school mooting were to be made, it would probably include the following:

First, to encourage thoroughness in research, creativity and sound organisation, including putting the argument in a logical manner.

Second, to develop legal reasoning and analytical abilities: specifically, the ability to identify material facts, to apply substantive legal principles to facts, to distinguish authorities on the law or on the facts, to apply authorities by analogy, to develop senses of discrimination and flexibility, to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of opposing arguments, and to consider facts and laws in their historical, social and economic settings. Indeed, it has been argued that as an exercise in application of the law and judicial creativity mooting can be more effective than conventional classroom techniques (Dobson & Fitzpatrick, 1986).

Third, to provide experience in responding to an opponent (or a judge) in an adversarial, if not overtly combative, setting.

Finally, to provide a simulation of appellate advocacy as a preparation for litigation practice. This function of mooting, however, is not without its critics. 'Legal realists' such as Jerome Frank dismiss the relevance of mooting to professional training:

[This] ersatz teaching ...resembles what would be the incompetent training of future navigators if restricted to sailing small boats on freshwater ponds (quoted in Kalman, 1986, p.170; see also ABA Committee, 1985, pp.129,146 and Davis, 1981, pp.683-4).

Nonetheless, the professional advocate must possess an ability to collect, organise and analyse material; an ability to persuade and to think on his feet; an understanding of human nature and the ways of the world; and mental and physical stamina (Wilkinson, 1991, pp.1-6). As a preparation for professional practice, mooting certainly does no harm to those who aspire to become advocates, although it is fair to say this objective is normally regarded as secondary in undergraduate law school moot programmes.

A competent legal argument (whether in a moot or in a real-world legal setting) is characterised by two main elements: on the one hand, content, including organisation; on the other, delivery, including linguistic aspects. It should be appreciated that, historically, the first element has come to assume far more prominence than the second. While the first legal experts were orators or indeed rhetoricians, the role of rhetoric in English law has over time become marginal and subsidiary to the substantive law and the force of logic (Goodrich, 1986, pp.194-5).

In the modern world of appellate litigation, content - in the sense of thorough preparation on the facts and on the law, and anticipation of opponents' arguments - is pre-eminent. Linguistic ability is taken for granted. Arguments are presented in businesslike, rather than oratorical, fashion - at least in American and some Commonwealth jurisdictions. Many would maintain that in English jurisdictions, including Hong Kong, the trappings, niceties and formalities of speech are perhaps more favoured than is the case elsewhere. This may have had an influence on student mooters in the Faculty, who occasionally give the impression that preoccupation with formalities can overcome lack of content.

### **The quality of student mooting at the Faculty of Law**

Obviously it is difficult to generalise as to students' performance. A few students display exceptional mooting skills that belie their lack of experience. However, many Faculty members and moot judges from the profession would maintain that the quality of mooting of the average LL.B. student at the Faculty is somewhat below the standard of law school mooting in other jurisdictions.

The main problem is undoubtedly content. Moots expose the average student's deficient legal

skills: insufficient knowledge of the substantive law, weak powers of analysis, inability to balance and assess the weight of issues, and inflexibility of thought. As Erskine (1819, p.597) remarked, emphasising the primacy of this solid grounding: 'No man can be a great advocate who is no lawyer. The thing is impossible.'

Other difficulties, lying ostensibly in the area of organisation, may actually be symptomatic of the same root cause. Fuzzy arguments, inability or unwillingness to simplify or summarise, unclear conception of purpose, obsession with voluminous case authority to the exclusion of common sense, and fixation with formalities - all are telling signs of an inability to come to grips with the issues or, worse, to understand the case at all. In many instances, a judge's request to 'summarise your argument in two minutes' results in consternation and confusion. The reality (seemingly never grasped by students) is that in moots as in professional advocacy the most effective arguments are often surprisingly simple and uncluttered.

A related problem is one that might be labelled 'set-piece thinking'. Even when a student has thought about the issues, there seems to be a reluctance to stray from the perceived safe haven of one's own prepared case. The symptoms become obvious: script reading, failure to respond or even to pay attention to the opponents' arguments and thus a failure to defuse them, and, worse, failure or inability to respond to the judges' queries. Most students experience immense difficulty when forced to abandon their set-piece arguments to consider, for example, changed facts and hypotheticals ('Would your submission differ in any respect if the trial judge had found instead that...?'), or even to recognise 'lifelines' thrown from the bench ('Isn't it your position that...?').

There are several reasons for the poor mooting performances of Faculty of Law students. In the traditional conservative English LL.B. curriculum, there is little if any emphasis on teaching advocacy skills. Those (relatively few) who do gain experience in voluntary moots have some modest advantage, but generally students cannot visualise the process and have little guidance.

The root cause for the under-performance of students in mooting cannot simply be attributed to the lack of formal advocacy training or experience in the LL B, though such training might of course improve matters to some degree. The main problem, however, - weakness in legal skills - pervades students' legal studies generally. The reasons for this are complex, and may be related to cultural, educational and linguistic circumstances.

Most LL.B. students in Hong Kong come directly from secondary school, and are arguably not ready to cope with professional studies. Many students' English language skills are simply inadequate to allow them to adapt to, absorb and benefit from traditional legal studies to the extent that, or on the level that, more mature, native English-speaking students do. The reality is that many students struggle to pass exams using methods that served them in secondary school, without acquiring a sufficient grip on substantive law or, even more important, on legal analysis and method.

It is perhaps ironic that moot judges at the Faculty are instructed, in assessing students' performances, not to take into account English language facility. It is thought that this would be unfair; very few students possess language skills strong enough to allow them to present an argument of a high standard in moot court. But elegance in the actual presentation or delivery of the argument is no more than cosmetic. The borderline case will be won or lost (and the mooter's performance judged) on the basis of preparation, knowledge of substantive law, quality of analysis, ingenuity, anticipation, perception and the myriad other ingredients that make up the real lawyer. It is in this area that the debilitating effect of inadequate English language skills will be felt most, and will have to be addressed.

## Debate in the context of English Language Studies

### Oral argumentation in the English Centre

The courses run by the English Centre are of a rather different category from those in the Philosophy, Law or Political Science Departments. By 1994/95 the Senate schedule of June, 1991 envisages that all undergraduates in HKU will have an English enhancement component in their curriculum, which will be provided for the different faculties by the English Centre.

As part of the enhancement programme, oral argumentation has been specifically targeted in recent curricula developed by the English Centre for Social Science and for Arts students, particularly in the area of testing. Both courses require an assessment of students' oral performance in tutorial-like discussion before joining and after leaving the course. This assessment aims to measure students' improvement as a result of their first-year studies.

In class, course materials have provided for at least one assessed formal discussion/debating performance per year. Apart from seminars, which are left largely to the discretion of the teacher and may be devoted to a variety of different purposes, students may or may not have further direct practice of oral argumentation.

Since rhetorical organisation is an important focus in the teaching of writing skills, it features strongly in essay-writing classes. Although this aspect is well-addressed in the current materials, the more confrontational aspect of argumentation has been especially problematic. The role of opposing arguments and differing opinions, of personal stance and of refutation especially, has raised problems for teachers and materials developers alike (Pickard, 1993).

As far as oral skills are concerned, the current focus in English for Arts and Social Science courses is on oral presentations, in which the combative element is generally lacking. Questioning of the student presenters or any challenging of their stance from the floor are options rarely exercised on these occasions.

### Student problems in argumentation

Although they may well engage in lively discussion outside class, HK students are often reticent in tutorials. When students are invited to 'discuss' (in test situations and in content subject tutorials), their performance often leaves much to be desired.

In such situations, 'interactivity' is all too often reduced to the superficial acceptance of any stand whatsoever - 'I agree with him/her'. This formula regularly precedes a round of repetitions and reformulations of so-called 'personal' opinion (often a blatant rehash of the recommended source).

On the other hand, teacher encouragement and elicitation tends to create a very predictable pattern of interaction, with few student-initiated 'turns'. In the English Centre's testing procedures, the teacher has, in recent years, been instructed to play a minimal role in eliciting responses and as far as possible to allow students to volunteer their contributions. In practice, a surprising number of students choose to remain silent, or to make a minimal contribution.

A feature of many classroom discussions is that there may be no division or variety of opinion. Instead of polarising participants, opinions tend to converge on what is thought to be a safe, moderately liberal line. While this integrative strategy may well facilitate harmony in a particular social group, it is not always appropriate in the academic context. Such ready consensus gives students little practice in dealing with potential or real disagreement, in challenging or defending a stand - abilities taken for

granted elsewhere as worthwhile educational objectives.

There would seem, therefore, to be potential for development of the teaching of argumentation, and a need in this area which the English Centre could usefully address. One such attempt is the present small-scale piloting in the EAS course of a set of materials concerning 'Controversial Issues'. Another closely associated approach to the teaching of argumentation would be to encourage the inclusion of debating as a regular component of the curriculum.

### **Debate in the ELT context**

In the broad ELT context, the generally-favoured 'communicative approach' appears to under-rate formal debate. When it is found, it is all too often grouped under 'Games and Discussions' as an occasional stand-by or filler for a less-than-serious Friday afternoon slot. In such cases, the aim of the exercise is 'free expression' of whatever intellectual quality, while the nature of the topic under discussion is generally considered to be of minor importance, and real controversy an actual drawback.

Ur (1981) lists among the 'disadvantages' of debate 'the limited scope of its subjects (social, political or philosophical controversies)'. She does concede, however, that "many students (particularly the more adult and intellectual) enjoy this kind of discussion; and the skills of oratory and dialectics are learned and exercised in debate better than anywhere else."(p.105)

Resistance to debate as a classroom activity may in part derive from a common but mistaken identification of 'genuine discourse' with 'real conversation' (Ur, *op cit*, p.6). Conversation is by no means the only 'genuine' discourse type within the academic community, where seminars and tutorials require very different communicative skills.

Indeed, criticism of debate on the grounds of inauthenticity is particularly ill-justified in the case of tertiary studies, where social, political or philosophical controversies are the order of the day (see, for instance, the Philosophy and Social Science sections of this paper). As far as tertiary studies are concerned, one problem faced by students is that their secondary school English skills may not be instantly transferable to tasks which require a more 'academic' approach. Argumentation is a case in point: in the academic sense it is a far more principled procedure than 'argument' in the conversational or lay sense of 'disagreement' or even 'exchange of insults' (cf the 'verbal brawl' mentioned in the Philosophy section of this paper). The confrontation of opposing views in an academic setting seems to require not just a definite stand on a particular topic but also a skilful, systematic defence of it. Some teaching of the appropriate moves is necessary if students are to perform better in academic argument.

Although regularly grouped together, discussion and debate are not synonymous terms. The debate format has different advantages over discussion, for several reasons. Unlike informal discussion, which allows for free opinion, both role-play and debate assign certain positions to the speaker and limitations within which to operate. Participation is on a predetermined pattern which even the most reluctant of speakers will not be able to avoid, or the most forthcoming to monopolise.

Unlike academic essays, which are essentially heavily subject-focused, the topics of debates may legitimately range from more or less specialist areas to issues of general interest. Far from detracting from content studies, awareness of current issues represents an essential, though not always explicitly formulated, component of any tertiary curriculum. In this way, debating appears to offer access to the language of argumentation without the problem of inherent superficiality, or the burden of intensively subject-specific content.

### **Pedagogic aims of debate in English language studies**

The argument proposed here is that, linguistically and pedagogically, debate can be exploited at

the tertiary level for a range of academic skills - skills of analysis, rhetoric, expression and presentation - and for a variety of purposes.

1. **Analytical skills.** These are primarily cognitive and concerned with the in-depth analysis of a particular issue through consideration of the relevant data. Understanding of an issue is encouraged in the case of debate by preparation of both sides and by the arbitrary allocation of stand.

As a team effort, the formal debate structure also encourages full exploration of the issues entailed by a certain stand in allocating different internal argumentative duties and participant roles to each member of the team. It encourages original and independent lines of argument to be taken by each speaker in support of an overall position.

In common with written discourse it necessitates a high degree of preparation and organisation, including the anticipation of opposition points. Unlike written argument, however, the inevitable degree of unpredictability in the opposition's line and the rebuttal opportunities offered by the moment require unplanned deviations and on-the-spot flexibility. Close monitoring of the other team's performance and direct confrontation of points at issue are prerequisites for successful rebuttal and spontaneous improvisation. In this rather limited sense, debating is highly interactive.

2. **Rhetorical skills.** Reference to training in rhetoric is not always well received, owing often enough to the multiple ambiguities of the term itself. But attacks on rhetoric are not new - since Socratic times (explored earlier in this paper), there has been a tradition of resistance to rhetoric as the 'mother of lies', and by extension as devious and unfair use of language.

If we follow Leech (1983), however, a standard definition of rhetoric is in the broad sense of 'public persuasion'. And as a form of persuasion debate is certainly among the most stylised. It is in this very stylisation, however, and in the full procedure of argument and counter-argument that some guarantee of balance and objectivity is to be found. TV advertising or charitable appeals may attempt to persuade, but without any of the carefully counter-balanced weighing-up of the debate structure.

The right to reply is guaranteed in debate. No matter how thorough a debater's preparation, it is unlikely to convince unless it addresses the issues and challenges raised by the opposition. It is probable that a training in the rhetoric of debate thus provides not so much a practice in the art of deception but in the evaluation, perhaps in anticipation and counteraction, of argument that is intended to persuade.

In a more specifically linguistic sense, 'rhetoric' is often used to describe those skills concerned with organisational features of argumentation - the marshalling of facts (assertion, substantiation); their use for a particular purpose (exemplification, generalisation) - and of listener orientation (introducing, summarising, recapping, concluding). The cognitive development and awareness of such features of disputation will relate to written and oral argumentation alike.

3. **Expression skills** Such skills entail the realisation of conceptual intentions through the medium of language. In the case of second language use, it may well be that the language employed for the previous processes is not the target language, although it is clearly desirable that EAP encourage a direct move from thinking to expression in English - cf Professor Harris's 'intellectual fluency' (Harris, 1989). Student informants report that the pressure of time in debating, especially in rebuttal, as opposed to essay-writing discourages the use of translation.

Expression skills include the use of accurate grammar, lexis and pronunciation as well as an appropriate academic formality-level, where a smattering of optional archaisms ('honourable judges' or 'worthy opponents') should not detract from the fact that by far the larger part of language used is a combination of the general 'core' with some features (evidenced in more rigorous citation or



substantiation and careful attention to logical coherence and cohesion) which are particularly associated with the academic register.

An essential part of debate training is the analysis of actual performances and subsequent feedback, for which video recording is particularly useful. Such replay gives an opportunity for focused language improvement, at whatever level, since teaching can directly address student needs and, with the evidence of those needs directly confronting them on video, students will take correction a great deal more seriously.

**4. Presentation skills** This final skill category includes features of 'public speaking': certain aspects of pronunciation, such as features of discourse prosodics (for example stress, tonal variety for emphasis or effect); special language effects, such as strategic redundancy (repetition, parallelism); and para-linguistic skills, such as the proper use of notes, eye contact and the like.

A proficient public performance creates a favourable impression of the speaker as competent, confident and in control of the medium. Along with other displays of verbal virtuosity - sermons, campaign speeches, lectures, story- or joke-telling, or even Labov's Black American 'sounding' contests - debating joins the ranks of speech events where the overriding purpose is to gain recognition and approval for an extended 'floor-turn' (Labov, 1973). In such cases, an aesthetic or emotional response or appreciation is expected, not just a data transfer, and it is to this end too that the communication is focused.

In end-of-course questionnaires on current courses, students regularly cite improved confidence in oral presentation as their major achievement (in spite of the intended priority given in the curriculum to written skills). There is little doubt that demonstrable gain in this area is possible, and indeed regularly achieved. This success could be extended into the area of oral argumentation, which should arguably transfer better to seminar discussion skills and add an extra disputative dimension to the non-combative oral activities at present undertaken.

What, then, is the negative side of debating? The disadvantages of debate as a 'communicative activity' (in the by now traditional language-teaching sense) derive principally from its rigid framework. Such discourse features as turn-taking, agreement and eliciting response are highly distorted by the set format. So too the proposition/opposition structure encourages a polarised, though controlled, confrontation. A pragmatic inauthenticity is encouraged in that, unlike discussion in a normal social context, the preferred outcome is not the negotiated compromise. These limitations mean that in practice debate can never replace discussion as the principal medium for informal exchange of opinion. In training and skills development, however, debating has much to offer students over regular discussion in view of the systematic treatment and active participation it encourages.

## Conclusions

### Perceptions of language competence

The perspective that has been sought in this paper is of staff perceptions of student needs and performance across departments and disciplines, in relation to the purpose and efficiency of a particular teaching device. While the objectivity of any evaluation may be questioned as a consequence of informants' individual roles, a virtue is made of the fact that, in this paper, such judgement is a result of personal experience in specific debate programmes. As far as generality is concerned, the informants present their particular involvement as an integral part of their subject teaching and as such related to departmental policy.

It should be acknowledged that little exists in the way of hard evidence or analysis of student problems in oral English at HKU. Yet it is clear that, in the departments represented here, English skills have a widely recognised role. A popular opinion among both students and teachers seems to be that there is widespread weakness. The impression is, at worst, of marked reluctance to engage in discussion; at best, of superficial fluency disguising contributions that in fact lack accuracy or are off the subject.

These points are all too easily confused: one popular argument seems to be that students are reluctant to speak because their English is weak, and that it is weak because they are reluctant to speak. Interestingly, the departmental contributors to this paper appear to agree, though not always explicitly, that some of the students' apparent problems in English may well be culturally influenced. One sensible explanation offered for apparent passivity is that a cultural tradition of respect for teachers and a reluctance to outshine their peers appear as simple unwillingness to engage in discussion.

Another angle on the apparent clash between students' general socio-cultural norms and those of the academic community is that in our own teaching methods we may well contribute to the confusion. It is suggested that teachers play a role in perpetuating the status differential of informant/informee roles so that students have little exposure to the more equally status-balanced co-discussant roles (see the Philosophy section in particular).

In support of this view of speaker roles, it is interesting that many students when addressing their classmates in English Centre presentations favour a rather patronising approach: "I hope you will pay attention to what I am going to say", followed at the end by "And I hope that the topic is now clear to you". In adopting this tone they are identifying with what they see as the role of the teacher. One consequence of this view is to discourage interaction; any form of questioning by the audience in such circumstances is perceived as highly risky, since it clearly implies lack of attention on the part of the informee, or lack of clarity on the part of the informant.

It is clearly an over-simplification to claim that such class-room roles and patterns of interaction are simply due to some assumed aspect of the students' own culture, ie that 'Chineseness' values passivity. Some attention on our own parts to deliberately changing pedagogic patterns of interaction, to encouraging critical evaluation of ideas, and to reinforcing expectations of challenge and defence, may play a vital role in the remedying of passivity in our students.

### **The practice of debating in HKU**

In what ways is debating used within HKU?

**1. Professional formation** The first function of debating as described in this paper makes a distinction between professional formation and pedagogic aims. In both law and political science there exists a clear professional application of the skills of debate, namely in advocacy and, for the future politician, in various types of political assemblies. In these departments the practice of debate is externally motivated by professional requirements (though clearly to a different degree in the different departments since only a small proportion of political science students will actually take up politics as a career).

It is likely that the future relevance to students of the skills of public speaking, however, can be extended to those in other departments that were not canvassed during the present exercise: it is probable, for instance, that any kind of business studies department would anticipate their graduates being heavily involved in future professional activity that entailed an immediate application of the skills we have associated with debating.

**2. Testing** The pedagogic purpose of debate, however, is not viewed solely as practice for a particular professional application. Another current practice at HKU relates to testing. This function associates

debate with evaluation procedures and formal course requirements (see Law and English Centre sections above). Such uses emphasise performance, and are not concerned to maximise the teaching potential of the medium.

3. **Teaching** As part of an undergraduate programme, however, debating appears to fulfil a more genuinely instructional function - as part of the exploration, by challenge and defence, of the foundations of knowledge. In all subjects, the research aspect in particular involves the testing of new ideas against existing frameworks.

The perceived value of debate as a teaching device relates to the rhetorical organisation of content. It is interesting to note that, from the evidence of the subject sections, organisation may not be readily associated with English language skills. This may in part be due to a limited view of English teaching as preoccupied mainly with sentence-level grammar rather than with textuality or text grammar and extended discourse features.

4. **Extra-curricular activity** A fourth function, most apparent in the cross-faculty, extra-curricular incidence of debating competitions, is the voluntary use of debating by the students for quasi-recreational purposes, to practise their English and to interact with their peers.

In spite of the oft-repeated complaint that students are reluctant to speak English, HKU's Dean of Students, Bill Brandon, confirms the apparent anomaly of widespread student interest in debating in English. It would seem that cultural characteristics seem to favour debating over other forms of English use: Hong Kong students appear to enjoy public competition and team activities where the individual may shine, but with the reassurance of peer-group approval (an avoidance of the 'tall poppy' syndrome). The celebrity status of the Debating Team is evidence of this.

That the initiative for such events should come directly from the students is of particular significance in view of widely assumed attitudes towards English use among students. In this way, student debating competitions appear to encourage similar effects to the Philosophy Department's one-to-one teaching, by providing ways of encouraging students out of their patterns of linguistic reticence and into more dynamic models of student/student and student/teacher communication in English.

What has been demonstrated in this paper, then, is that various types of debate are pervasive throughout HKU at several different levels of academic activity. The current practice of debate extends significantly not just to the teaching of the departments and faculties but also to the voluntary activities of the student body. Culturally, teamwork seems to suit the students' present social orientation and to form a bridge to academically appropriate behaviours.

An interesting feature of current debating activities is that they are not limited to the university campus or to the tertiary institutions. School and university debating competitions act as a focal point and exemplar of students' English language proficiency. Public presentations contribute towards a better image for our students and help prepare them to meet the outside world - an aim which will come more and more to the fore the closer they come to graduation. As one debater recently addressed his audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, honourable sponsors and future employers ...".

Debate programmes appear to provide links to the community at large. Adjudicators and sponsors are drawn from the ranks of HK's prominent figures - judges, politicians, businessmen and academics - while newspaper coverage and RTHK TV shows present student debates to a wider audience. For whatever historical or practical reasons, there is broad-based support for debate as a worthwhile pursuit.

### **Developing debate within the English enhancement programme**

As we have seen, debating activity takes place in various pockets throughout the university. In view of the fact that debating already enjoys widespread support within the university, it provides a valuable opportunity for collaboration among faculties, English Centre and student bodies. It is suggested, therefore, that the English Centre could usefully extend its activities in support of existing debating programmes within faculties and departments.

The potential of debate as a teaching device, though widely recognised outside ELT circles, has for too long been underestimated by the ELT profession at large. This oversight should be remedied in the context of tertiary English language studies, where debating provides useful access to the study of argumentation and fulfils a need that is not so readily met by other teaching techniques. As far as English Centre course objectives are concerned, debating could be further exploited in the enhancement programme where it is consistent with the general aims and objectives of EAP courses.

In line with the objectives of academic communication, we would hope for transfer of oral debate skills to tutorial and seminar performance (given an appropriate climate for student-initiated turn-taking and for more active discussant roles to be taken on). It is interesting that, while student-needs analyses have drawn attention to the need for written skills, student questionnaires over the last few years reflect the student perception of primary weakness in oral fluency. This perception reinforces the subject teacher views expressed earlier in this paper.

Although debating is primarily an oral activity, it is not unreasonable to look for a spin-off effect mentioned in the previous departmental sections - the potential cross-reinforcement of oral and written argumentative skills. Oral argumentation can be directly linked to academic writing - the main aim of EAP classes and the most important skill for academic success. While writing is undoubtedly our main target for academic purposes, however, too much homework or a large proportion of writing in class meets with understandable opposition in a heavily loaded curriculum. Any oral activity which might have beneficial repercussions on writing therefore warrants attention.

In terms of topic selection for enhancement activities, another major advantage of debate is that it provides issues that can ensure student interest and personal involvement, and these, although not subject specific, are generally perceived as part of the students' wider education. It is to be hoped that student motivation and involvement in English enhancement activities might be raised by introducing relevant and interesting issues as the vehicle for language improvement and development of academic communication skills.

For these and no doubt other reasons - to be observed and monitored in practice - focus on oral argumentation through debate training could prove a useful field for exploitation in cross-curricular courses provided by the English Centre in English for academic purposes<sup>3</sup>.

### **A final comment**

The comparisons made in this paper, between different departments and the English Centre, are an attempt to learn from each other and to share experiences from very different standpoints. They also aim to encourage inter-faculty dialogue with colleagues, an initiative which is actively pursued by the English Centre. This paper has merely scratched the surface of one particular area of inter-disciplinary collaboration - oral argumentation. It is to be hoped that further work in this and other areas of

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<sup>3</sup> I am much indebted to Wesley Wong, whose help with both general student views and answers to specific questions has been of great value in the preparation of this paper.

inter-disciplinary concern will promote greater understanding of the interaction of language and subject content in the context of second-language tertiary studies.

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## Can English Enhancement Programmes be Efficient?

Desmond Allison<sup>1</sup>

Talk of efficiency in educational programmes invites controversy. The discussion in this paper assumes that teachers and administrators share a commitment towards the general principle of accountability. The notion of efficiency, on the other hand, is shown to have limited application to complex multidimensional processes, including those of classroom language learning and of language programme evaluation. These points are illustrated by reference to a summary account of an evaluation study at the University of Hong Kong (HKU).

### Introduction

The evaluation of second-language educational programmes and 'projects' has become an important area of activity, not least in a climate where funding bodies and others attach much importance to 'accountability' in education. It is, however, an area in which simple answers are hard to come by and in which notions of objectivity are challenged (Alderson and Beretta, 1992, *passim*, reviewed in this journal). Do such complexity and relativity of viewpoints offer essential insights into the nature of things, or are they, as administrators might fear, merely symptoms of fashionably evasive academic malaise?

Looked at in another way, can we regard the evaluation of programmes as a proper and wholly necessary activity within second-language teaching, and throughout education? Or is programme evaluation in danger of becoming subsumed within what Pennycook (1990, p.557) terms a "conservative call for accountability", imposing a narrow preoccupation with means that precludes enquiry into the legitimacy of educational ends?

I would like to start from the assumption, which I take to be largely uncontroversial, that 'accountability' is in principle a reasonable expectation on the part of those funding, designing, teaching on or studying in a teaching programme. (The general principle of accountability is certainly not contested by Pennycook: spoken communication.) Given this assumption, it appears reasonable to suppose that people who design and teach a course or programme of studies may at times properly be called upon to explain to others what it is that they are doing, why this is being done, what benefits are accruing to learners, what difficulties persist, and so on. In practice, of course, particular calls for accountability can give rise to legitimate concerns over differing value systems, especially in contexts of unequal power relations. It may be worth remarking that any concerns that educators might feel about the specifics of an evaluation process will normally only be effectively communicated to representatives of a funding body within a climate of clearly shared commitment to the general principle of accountability for money spent and work done.

Care over words is important here. To expect people to 'account for' their exercise of responsibility and judgement, not least in a context where public funding needs also to be 'accounted for', is a position that we can usefully distinguish from 'calling people to account'; the latter phrase suggests an exercise of power that could beg questions of the accountability of all concerned groups. While actual practice will need to be rigorously scrutinised, there does not seem to be any reason in principle for

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commitment to accountability to exclude critical appraisals of values and ends as well as means.

The notion of 'efficiency', I shall argue, proves more problematic in this respect. Although efficiency seems self-evidently preferable to inefficiency, any such comparison presupposes that 'efficiency' is an appropriate criterion for the evaluation of some area of activity. This assumption can easily beg prior questions about goals. In contrast to the broader concept of accountability, the notion of efficiency appears to be inherently tied to a cost-benefit and instrumentalist view of the achievement of some agreed, assumed or imposed goal, particularly one that is expressible in terms of 'the market culture'. In this connection, Fraser (1992) cites the "angry, radical critique" that Pat Kane ("singer, Scottish Nationalist and rector of the University of Glasgow") makes of contemporary changes in university education generally:

Efficiency is a weasel word...It's seeing the university as a factory where people are given identifiable, quantifiable market skills which plug into an entrepreneurial vision of society...But higher education should be a more exploratory affair and the university more a community of scholars. (Kane, as cited in Fraser, 1992, p.28.)

Traditional (and perhaps stereotypical) prejudices apart, a community of scholars will not necessarily look askance at an entrepreneurial vision of society, but it can certainly and properly be expected to explore and question such a world view, among other world views and value systems. 'Efficiency', however, is not a notion that readily takes different viewpoints and values into account. As the philosopher E. Gellner (1985) observes: "The notion of efficiency presupposes not merely an external world, it presupposes a single world." (p.69, emphasis in original).

Most people concerned with language programmes in education might be happy to presuppose the reality of an external world. (My review of Alderson and Beretta, 1992, briefly takes up this issue in the light of comments by Davies, 1992.) The notion of a single world, however, is problematic in relation to important preoccupations in education, including matters of immediate import in language teaching circles, such as judgements among different cultural or occupational groups over what may constitute appropriate language use. While we shall discuss prospects and problems for agreement on a single goal, 'to improve the learners' English' - a goal that sounds quite reasonable to many people - the need to recognise a diversity of world views and hence of worlds will first bear further elaboration.

In expressing concerns over "a growing incursion of technical rationality into all domains of human investigation", Pennycook (1990, p.556) points to the danger that any such trend will impose a single way of thinking, especially if this is associated with an imposition of social control. Pennycook continues: "The belief that improvement can be brought about by the correct application of rational organization is what Marcuse (1964) came to criticize as 'one dimensional'. It is a view that disregards all notions of the political in social life."

Part of the difficulty, not least for evaluation studies in education, is that believers in technical rationality and efficiency are liable to presuppose the rightness of the ends they pursue, and may tend to be dismissive or oblivious of other perspectives and concerns.

Before we despair of the benefits of rational organisation - or before we set aside Pennycook's misgivings - let us notice a linguistic point. Pennycook's use of a singular form appears important to the argument about how 'improvement' is liable to be regarded and pursued. A plural form might more readily suggest the possibility of seeing 'improvements' along multiple parameters, each relative to limited perspectives and goals. Rational organisation, including measures of efficiency, might then more easily be judged able to inform enquiry without imposing one single overall perspective.

Even if the last point is allowed, it leads to another question: what are the bearings of various 'improvements' upon an overall evaluative account of 'improvement'? This issue has immediate practical



importance, the more so as 'better in every respect' is rarely a feasible option in practice. It is interesting that Pennington's (1990) rejoinder to Pennycook should have sought both to broaden the perspective being taken on evaluation (p.560) and to dissociate evaluation from efficiency (p.562), suggesting perhaps that advocates of evaluation do perceive a need to take account of a number of goals rather than a single goal. A pursuit of accountability will then have to consider the claims of different 'improvements' that may compete for resources, and to allow for the prospect that what is 'an improvement' from one point of view will not always appear so from another.

The relationship between a broader perspective and multiple perspectives will need further appraisal. While 'improvement' is easily made plural, 'efficiency' as a concept has more global pretensions, and the word does not pluralise so readily. The unidimensionality of 'efficiency' appears to constitute a persistent problem for its role in programme evaluation and its relation to accountability.

### **What can English enhancement programmes achieve?**

The relationship between improvements and 'improvement' brings us to the issue of the overall goal and subgoals of an educational programme, and more specifically of an English enhancement programme. An abstract discussion of the overall goal of such a programme might appear otiose: what is wrong with 'to improve the learners' English'? On the other hand, an evaluation that takes account of practical constraints of time and resources will need to deconstruct this proposed goal, and to point towards difficult choices among possible aspects or sources of such overall improvement.

'Improving the learners' English' could imply in operational terms that the goal of an English enhancement programme should be to bring about gains on some acceptable measure of English language proficiency. This also suggests that such general improvement would be both necessary (or at least highly desirable) and clearly realisable within the timescale and circumstances of the programme. Even if we assume for the moment that improvement in general proficiency is desired, it may not be achievable on a short course for advanced learners. Alderson (1992) observes that proficiency tests "...are relatively inappropriate for use on evaluation studies", adding that: "In those evaluation designs where pre- and post-tests are required, it is typically the case that proficiency tests do not reveal much improvement" (p.284).

Alderson suggests that the reason that evaluators using language test instruments make so little use of "tailor-made achievement tests" is that the measurement of achievement is so difficult; ready-made proficiency tests, even if not appropriate, can be temptingly convenient. A second reason that Alderson's discussion does not directly consider is that specific achievement outcomes may prove to be of only limited interest to influential audiences (such as administrators or business people) that are at a distance from the educational process.

The main reason that proficiency tests may be deemed 'relatively inappropriate' for evaluation studies appears to be practical rather than conceptual. Technically, the unidimensionality of a psychometric measure of proficiency has been shown by Henning (1992) to be compatible with a multidimensional psychological construct of what actually constitutes proficiency. (To indicate this fact about measurement is not to deny that probabilistic methods of analysis need to be used judiciously, as Henning also makes clear.) A proficiency measure could in principle offer a 'line of best fit' to summarise a complex record of language abilities exhibited in test performance. Various refinements of argument notwithstanding, it also seems reasonable to expect that a marked improvement in general proficiency should normally follow from, and contribute to, substantial improvements in achievement recorded over a sufficiently wide range of areas of language use.

But this last expectation really only says that students could do most things much more effectively in English if their English was much better than it is, and vice versa! Practically, the statement only

suggests a proficiency basis for assessing the efficiency of an enhancement programme that is of sufficient intensity and duration for marked gains in overall proficiency to be realisable. (A difficulty in evaluating such programmes may then be to distinguish their contribution from other conditions affecting the development of language proficiency.)

The desirability in principle of an improvement in the English proficiency of second-language learners of English may appear self-evident. In real terms, however, concerns over 'efficiency' serve to remind us that any such benefit will carry a cost. It is consequently worth asking, rather than uncritically assuming, what an appropriate proficiency target would be for any group of learners. In particular, one can challenge the automatic adoption of a 'deficit' view of the command of a language that has been achieved by any group of second-language learners - that is to say, a view that invariably portrays this command as inadequate by comparison with native speaker proficiency. Learners' second language proficiency is, after all, a benefit that is added to their proficiency in at least one other language (see Cook, 1992). The existing proficiency of advanced language learners may be viewed positively, as a considerable resource. An enhancement programme might then properly seek to bring about better returns on that resource by ensuring it is put to the most effective uses.

In programmes of restricted scope, specific forms of achievement will, in any analysis, need to be identified and measured if one wishes to establish that learning has taken place (and if statements about 'gain' are desired or required by others). 'Efficiency' in bringing about improvement in relation to one form of achievement (and also in assessing such improvement) will need to be offset against other potentially worthwhile uses of enhancement time when such programmes are evaluated in accountability terms.

There can be real difficulties in reaching an agreement on teaching priorities, even for example on the importance of spoken versus written English, when teaching time is severely limited. Prioritising different goals in terms of perceived value and achievability will entail negotiation and explanation, leading at best to achievements that still fall short of an ideal of overall improvement in English. Examples of such achievements might involve improvements in making a spoken presentation to an audience; participating in a seminar discussion; organising a written report; editing and proofreading a draft essay. A further difficulty is that, although measurable gains in aspects of language performance may best be attained through teacher-directed activities, emphasis on such work may conflict with long-term goals of encouraging more independent learning behaviour. Given such considerations, arguments for the recognition and 'triangulation' of multiple perspectives in evaluation studies become crucial in pursuing programme accountability.

### **Evaluation criteria for English enhancement programmes: A summary case study**

To illustrate this discussion of how concerns for improvement (and efficiency) on various 'achievement' dimensions might relate to overall programme accountability, a summary account of one evaluation study will now be presented. The potential value of such a 'case study' approach to programme evaluation is discussed in my review in this journal of Alderson and Beretta (1992).

Alderson (1992) has observed that the main concern of programme evaluators must be: "...to obtain results that can be used, and to make recommendations that can be followed." (pp.298-299). He also calls upon evaluators to evaluate evaluations, as this will help to improve the evaluation process.

With these comments in mind, I offer an account of one stage in the evaluation of English enhancement programmes at The University of Hong Kong (HKU), namely the preparation of the evaluation report submitted in June 1992 by HKU to the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). Summary treatment is indicated for reasons of space. The paper then discusses the relationship between efficiency and accountability in the context of these English enhancement

programmes.

### Profile of the evaluation

Several of the subheadings that follow (those shown in inverted commas) are selected from Alderson (1992), whose evaluation guidelines offer a convenient summarising framework for a case study. Brief commentary is included after most sections.

**"Purpose: Why?"** The stated aims of this evaluation (in abridged form) were:

- (a) to outline developments in English enhancement within first-degree curricula at HKU;
- (b) to present a summative evaluation of the English enhancement course taught in the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1991/92;
- (c) to offer recommendations for the continuation and further development of the University's English enhancement programme.

Plans for the HKU English enhancement programme included the phased introduction of first-year courses in English enhancement/ academic communication/ professional and technical communication throughout all undergraduate curricula (with implementation from 1990 to 1995). Accountability was and remains important to the maintenance and later supplementation of funding for the programme, which was introduced in a context of concerns being expressed in Hong Kong educational and business circles over ('falling'?) language standards in tertiary education, and education generally.

**"Audience: Who For?"** The Report was written for the UPGC, and would be studied by a subcommittee of academics (from outside the tertiary sector in Hong Kong) looking into language enhancement programmes in all UPGC funded institutions. The Vice-Chancellor and other senior members of HKU were another audience, representing sponsors for the programme within HKU. A third audience was the group of course designers and teachers directly involved in English enhancement work. Other staff and student representatives might also consult the final Report. The decision to write one report (plus summary overview), rather than separate reports for different purposes and audiences, arose from a combination of time limitations and an optimistic belief in the sharing of professional information.

**"The evaluator: Who?"** The Report was initially drafted for an ad hoc evaluation committee by one writer (myself), and was revised in the light of comments received from committee members. The Report drew upon in-house questionnaire findings and summaries of staff-student consultative meetings prepared by teachers on the course. My own role in the English Centre included responsibilities in English enhancement programme development. I had previously taught on the pilot course in Social Sciences, but was teaching on another course in 1991/92. (Was this 'internal', 'external' or perhaps 'peripheral' evaluation?)

**"Content: What?"** Alderson's question relates both to course content and to the content of an evaluation. An evaluation takes account of stated course objectives, but also considers other observed outcomes.

The aims and objectives of the enhancement course offered to Social Science students at HKU were described in the Report as shown below, the description being derived from the course designers. The objectives are diverse (which does not make them incompatible) and open to finer specification. Given the limited timescale, diversity in student attainments in respect of the different objectives would appear a likely outcome:

The course recognises the work students have done at school and is designed to build upon existing knowledge. It is not designed to remedy problems carried over from

school, but rather to enhance students' academic communication and study skills. More specifically, the course aims to enable students to:

- (a) understand and interpret academic texts, lectures and seminars
- (b) identify and extract relevant information from these inputs
- (c) integrate information from different sources and organise it in a logical manner for a given purpose
- (d) express clearly both in speech and writing a range of academic response types including summary, evaluation and application
- (e) discriminate between alternative learning strategies and apply them as appropriate.

The objectives are those of one enhancement course. The 'content' of the English enhancement programme as a whole will be discussed more fully below. This discussion will propose a contrast between courses (to be evaluated on their own terms) and more comprehensive programmes (providing for English enhancement throughout academic curricula) that could be important for considerations of responsibility and accountability.

**"Method: How?"** The sources consulted in preparing the report comprised course descriptions and materials; previous evaluation reports; student and staff questionnaire responses; notes of staff-student and of teacher group meetings; discussions that committee members held with staff and students; observation of oral presentations and study of written work; staff seminar on the course; student society questionnaire on the course, reported in student magazine; academic papers relating to the course; discussion with staff and students of the draft Report.

The list reveals a major concern with perceptions of value and of student progress, with the acceptability of the enhancement programme to students and staff, and with the impact of the programme on the educational context it was intended to influence (see Alderson, 1992, pp. 281-282). Judgements by staff (English teachers and Faculty members) were based partly on direct observation and in-course assessment of spoken presentations and writing. End-of-course results, which were still awaited when the report was written, would have offered fuller information about what students could or could not do (well) after completing the course, though not in a directly comparable 'pre-test/ post-test' form. (Pre- and post-tests of oral English in a seminar-style setting have since been added to the course.) Despite this omission, the evaluation drew upon a wide range of sources, methods and expressed views.

The draft report was read by committee members, who included Faculty and student representatives, in conjunction with the above written sources. Depending on their roles and experiences, committee members also reported on student work they had observed, read or done. The need for an executive-style summary report was identified at this stage, and this reinforced the need for overall clarity despite the complexities.

**"Timing: When to evaluate?"** The ad hoc committee was formed fairly late in the academic year. The course evaluation was consequently summative, with parameters that could only be established retrospectively and with reference to such information as had been or could still be collected. (This information included in-house questionnaire findings and reports of discussions dating from midway through the course.)

**Reported outcomes.** Outcomes noted in the Report included Social Science student perceptions of benefit from their course. On the mid-course questionnaire, completed by 272 respondents, 93% acknowledged some perceived improvement; however, the frequency of "a little" (68%) rather than "quite a lot" (23%) or "a lot" (2%) gave no grounds for complacency. More specific outcomes suggested that improvement in spoken English was more widely achieved (or perceived) than in written English, and that project work was found comparatively more effective, but self-access work less so than the course in general. Students tended to value spoken English highly, while Faculty tended to express persistent

concerns over essay writing.

Extension of project work for fuller development of oral presentation and report writing in particular was recommended by a majority of students. Comments recorded by subject teachers on their perceptions of student performance at the end of the course were mostly in the categories "much better" or "slightly better than expected" for spoken presentations, discussion and questioning skills, but not for essay writing. Language teachers, perhaps unsurprisingly, had more "as expected" ratings for these dimensions of student performance.

**Recommendations.** These concerned the following areas:

- greater integration of enhancement teaching within first-degree curricula, in terms of formal requirements, incentives for involvement of subject teachers, and efforts towards greater consistency in communicative expectations;
- clearer course outlines and descriptions;
- specification of assessment criteria;
- recommendations to course writers on skills development; projects and practical tasks that challenge learners; student groupings; more explicit structuring of self-access learning opportunities; student motivation; provision for individual needs and difficulties;
- recognition that "academic" curricula also function as preparations for life beyond the university, including professional communication and activity;
- a call for course designers and language testers to "seek to specify further and to demonstrate clearly the achievable gains made during future courses, while maintaining a balance in the design between long-term goals and achievable objectives";
- an emphasis on the importance of student perceptions of and attitudes to the course, and on increasing student responsibility for learning;
- a call for evaluators to become familiar with the course as it takes place.

**"Deadlines, deliverables and dust: What happens to an evaluation report?"** Within the university, the call for efforts to integrate English enhancement teaching more fully within first-degree curricula has been followed by decisions in two Faculties (Social Sciences and Engineering) to establish enhancement courses as normal full or half courses within first-year undergraduate degree programmes. Suggestions for incentives to involve subject teachers more actively, in part to establish greater curricular consistency in communicative expectations, have not elicited much response, perhaps because of wider resourcing preoccupations.

The pedagogic recommendations in the Report have been acted upon, but this is mainly because these recommendations served to focus on insights and perceptions that course designers had already attained.

Despite efforts already being made, more clearly needs to be done in response to the call for course designers and language testers to "seek to specify further and to demonstrate clearly the achievable gains made during future courses...". A practical difficulty has been that, at a time of rapid programme and staffing expansion, considerable efforts have already to be expended on maintaining existing levels of practice, such as assessor training for continuous assessment and for test marking. (See Lewkowicz, 1992 for fuller discussion.) To date, the clearest instance of successful achievement testing on English courses (for Arts and Social Science students) has been the significant predominance of positive gain scores in comparisons of pre- and post-tests of oral English.

The recommendations addressed to future evaluation teams, encouraging course evaluators to become familiar with the course as a process, could not formally be pursued in the subsequent year, in the absence of a decision by the university to identify such a team before the end of teaching. Enhancement course teachers have nonetheless continued to involve subject lecturers in class observation

and joint assessment of student performance, so that some 'outside' observers could become familiar with course processes.

### Discussion

It was earlier argued that pursuit of 'efficiency' presupposes a single goal that is generally agreed to be the right goal, and that must also be attainable. This is problematic for an English enhancement programme, which is likely to pursue several goals that may be more or less effectively attained at varying costs in terms of time, effort and money. The relative importance of these goals is, in turn, a matter on which views are likely to differ. In the HKU case study, for example, perceived progress in spoken English appeared to be achievable at lower cost in time and effort than might be needed for progress in academic essay writing, and was also highly valued by many students; on the other hand, many Faculty members attached great importance to essay writing.

Questions about the setting of goal priorities apply also to an evaluation itself. Evidence of success, in any form, is not obtained without a considerable investment of resources, and evidence for 'improvements' of some kinds will require more sustained investment than others. Typically, questionnaire data about perceived usefulness is relatively easy to obtain, whereas evidence of improved task performance is more costly.

Ultimately, the principle of 'accountability' calls for judgement and interpretation of the value of a programme as a whole, and not a mere listing of various degrees of success by various efficiency measures. The case study has suggested the evaluator's responsibility to take different measures and viewpoints into account, yet also to produce a clear overview and recommendations that can be defended. The evaluator's own perspective must be made clear in the course of a report, and the evaluator will be accountable to the various user groups for the selection, presentation and interpretation of evidence in the report: the credibility of an evaluation itself is a matter for user appraisal.

As Alderson (1992, p.295) makes clear, the obligation on evaluators to be explicit about their stance and its rationale is not always matched in practice by any corresponding requirement on administrators or funders to specify and account for their own reactions to an evaluation, or for subsequent decision-making. Often, however, there are a number of distinct user groups with power and influence of different kinds, so that wider dialogue and a form of mutual accountability is encouraged. For example, the HKU report was carefully read in the UPGC, together with similar reports from other institutions, and formed a basis for correspondence and meetings with university representatives in which future policy directions were discussed and representations were made.

Part of the UPGC response to the set of evaluation reports was to note the diversity of parameters by which different students were being assessed, and different programmes evaluated, and to seek guidance from the universities and polytechnics concerned on the possibility of applying standardised parameters across different language enhancement programmes. This notion raises serious difficulties, but it will be important for accountability purposes that the issues should be faced up to. A combination of explanation and positive action will be necessary (and has begun). These concerns lead us back to questions about the viability and usefulness of proficiency and achievement testing on programmes of this nature.

The need for enough time and intensity to bring about demonstrable gain in a measure of general English proficiency has already been intimated. There are possible riders, such as the rapid effect that test-specific coaching might have on performance on that particular test, but the basic point remains clear. English enhancement courses at HKU last for a maximum of 60 hours, thinly spread over two semesters (September to April), yet a typical student has already had substantial previous experience of English language classrooms over more than a decade. 'General' measures of gain (or 'general' comparisons with control groups, were this practicable) cannot reasonably be expected to show convincing

results in such circumstances - a point that is made in just these terms in the 1992 Report to UPGC.

A diversity of achievement parameters for different courses was recognised as appropriate in discussions with the UPGC subcommittee. Course developers were encouraged to provide evidence of improvement in specific respects. Such evidence, though, will require considerable effort to obtain, and its value will remain a matter of interpretation when other possible achievement parameters are compared. Quantifiable evidence about student numbers, or about student and staff perceptions of progress and of problems, is already welcome for accountability purposes. A trade-off between immediate gain and encouragement of learning in the longer term was also appreciated by all.

Although further work on assessment measures that can establish achievement on English enhancement courses will obviously be helpful, there remains a longer-term need, acknowledged in the HKU Report to UPGC, for measures to establish the presence or absence of gains in proficiency as a function of students' entire experience of English throughout university curricula. It was earlier argued that gains on a general measure of proficiency (as opposed to specific achievement measures) were an unrealistic expectation for a 60-hour course, but it was certainly not suggested that effects upon English proficiency are irrelevant in principle to an enhancement programme. If a course is intended as just one part of a strategy to promote English enhancement throughout English-medium undergraduate curricula that extend over at least a three-year period, then the eventual outcome of that strategy becomes a proper issue in the evaluation of an enhancement programme. This observation has far-reaching implications for the sharing of responsibility between English teaching units and subject teaching departments.

A concern over changes in English proficiency as a function of English-medium university education gives rise to crucial questions about the place of language, and of English in particular, in different curricula, and about the nature of the education being offered through these curricula. While it is clear that, as stated in the Report to UPGC, "intensive use of English throughout a university curriculum ought definitely to lead to demonstrable gain in a measure of general English proficiency", it cannot just be assumed that actual curricula necessarily provide for such intensive use. Indeed, individual staff and students in some Faculties have at times observed that English enhancement courses serve a purpose in preventing English standards from worsening, in cases where the academic curricula are seen to make rather few linguistic demands on students. The success of an enhancement strategy, therefore, must eventually be judged in relation to each situation and the possibilities and constraints that it proves to offer.

There is clearly a need for a programme of research to establish what happens to the English language proficiency of students on different degree programmes. The biggest obstacle to a comprehensive evaluation of the success of English enhancement programmes is that not enough is known about the improvement, stagnation or attrition of proficiency that occurs as students follow their academic studies. Proficiency testing would play a role in such research, but there is also a need for ethnographic work to determine what language abilities, and what uses of English, are required - or avoided - on different academic programmes. At HKU, research proposals have recently been drawn up by members of the English Centre in pursuance of these ends. Research results in this area would be a worthwhile 'product' in their own right, and would lead to better informed discussion of possibilities and limitations.

### Conclusion

Our discussion has suggested, in sum, that the accountability of an English enhancement programme will require:

- (i) a variety of well-motivated statements about course-related improvements;
- (ii) much fuller information about existing levels of proficiency at entry and at exit from

different undergraduate curricula;

- (iii) critically informed discussion about the most effective use of limited resources to pursue strategies for English enhancement on undergraduate degree programmes in their entirety.

Such discussion must extend to the responsibilities of all concerned - the university authorities, subject departments, the English enhancement unit and the student body - in bringing about more effective communication as an integral part of a university education. This conclusion requires the adoption in theory, and the pursuit in practice, of a multi-dimensional view of accountability.

While the notion of efficiency remains relevant to particular aspects of taught courses, full programme accountability eludes any single dimension of measurement of gain. A final reflection is that other conventional academic review practices, notably that of sustained external evaluation by peers, may be worth extending to English enhancement courses and programmes in order to ensure value and quality control at a holistic level.

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## **Academic communities and the need for boundary conversations: towards a metalingua franca?**

**Nigel Bruce<sup>1</sup>**

This is an exploratory paper, motivated by a dissatisfaction with the way higher education is driven by paradigms of knowledge and education - essentially foundationalist and conservative - which seem to crucially miscast the role of language. The impact of these paradigms on language education is seen in the dominance of psycholinguistic theory at a time when many teachers are questioning whether acquisition can be studied in isolation from the learner's wider social and political context. Increasingly, language is being seen as the interpretive medium by which we construct knowledge and communicate within and across disciplines, and which underlies our very social practices, the ways in which power and authority are exercised, renewed, and protected.

In this paper, I explore the prospects of raising awareness of this social and political view of language across the wider educational community, specifically the three communities I suggest should triangulate in this enterprise: subject teachers, their students, and the 'mediating' language teachers. I speculate on the social, educational and political implications for these communities of talking at cross purposes about language and knowledge, and explore the possibilities of their fruitful collaboration. I suggest that the more that the different communities interact and collaborate, and the more they talk about their intersecting interests, the more a shared discourse may emerge. The paper includes a description of interdisciplinary collaboration in developing a classification of micro-skills for offering structured feedback on student writing, as an example of the need to limit initial expectations of such collaboration to incremental rather than transformative change.

### **Introduction**

The teaching of English as a second or foreign language - at whatever level - has always seemed to me to be a somewhat masochistic project, promising the attainment of goals that are rarely reached. In a higher education context, there is the added expectation that teachers are employed to remediate the failures 'lower down' the system. Both of these concepts - the attainment of targets, and the remediation of failure - I attribute to a psycholinguistically-driven paradigm which I suggest continues to provide the foundation stone of the dominant ESL teaching methodologies. Such a paradigm posits a complex psycholinguistic equation between exposure to and uptake of cognitive input; complications in the equation are soluble by research, leading ultimately to completion of the equation and a panorama of the whole 'tapestry' of knowledge. This aspiration to ultimate understanding is analogous to the completion of a giant jigsaw puzzle - a static, foundationalist view of knowledge that Bruner (1986) argues typifies current educational thinking and practice.

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The effectiveness of the paradigm has tended to be measured in terms of gain and successful replication (of text genres, etc.), but increasingly research is questioning the usefulness of the paradigm itself, questioning whether acquisition can be studied in isolation from the wider social and political context which the students inhabit. There is a growing awareness of the significance of the social dimension for the success of any learning that takes place - and for some of the broader reasons for failure, not least the issue of the status of both students and language teachers within educational institutions. While students have been patronised as learning machines, language teachers have been devalued, seen as having a low-level, mechanical and ancillary function within the academy. Quite apart, then, from underpinning a counter-productive curricular view of language and language learning, I argue that this psycholinguistically-driven paradigm is responsible for perpetrating and perpetuating social inequalities within the academic community.

Resistance to this paradigm within the language teaching profession has grown out of an increasing awareness both of how little we know about how people 'learn' to use language, and of the complex role language plays in our lives. The emphasis on 'language' rather than 'English' is not an attempt to avoid the issue of students' having to use a foreign language as their medium of education; rather it indicates recognition that a much greater obstacle to a worthwhile education is the general lack of awareness in the academic community of the fundamental and integral role language plays in the construction of everything we know, and therefore have to say, about the world. Language, in this account, is the interpretive medium by which we construct knowledge and communicate within and across disciplines; it underlies our very social practices, the ways in which power and authority are exercised, renewed, and protected.

In this paper, I explore the prospects of raising awareness, across the wider higher educational community, of how language makes our world, and how our world, our social context, shapes our language. I speculate on the social, educational and political implications for the various disciplinary communities of talking at cross purposes about language and knowledge (and therefore about education), and explore the possibilities of collaboration and communication between these communities. I am only guardedly optimistic about the prospects for a holistic and collaborative interdisciplinary approach to tackling curricular problems in the tertiary learning context, and am certainly wary of what Barron (1993) calls the 'myth of reciprocity' between academic cultures, the idea that exchange (of services, etc.) is based on mutual respect and perceptions of equal worth and status. My optimism has been fuelled, however, by recent reports of experiences of crossing disciplinary borders, and theoretical arguments for such an educational direction, particularly in the 'parent' discipline of education and the American literature on L1 composition (Bruner, 1990; McCarthy & Fishman, 1991; Fox, 1990; Giroux, 1992). I have become aware of the increasing tendency of writers in these fields to address communication problems not in terms of new insights into rhetorical conventions or activity-based syllabi, but in sociopolitical terms such as social control, imperialism, authority, empowerment, and the elitism and paternalism of the academy. In this discourse, students are defined as outsiders and entry to university is admission into a privileged community; 'induction' into the academic community has altogether more sinister resonances.

The very process by which this paper is addressed to language teachers, and argues for a re-distribution of power to privilege our own values and work, is salutary. The admission of students as 'insiders' in a wider academic community may initially be an end-product of teacher-driven change, but we should recognise that this admission involves enfranchisement of students and the sharing of power to shape the means and ends of higher education - and power, dominance and status are rarely yielded without struggle. Said (1993) draws interesting parallels between nations, institutions and disciplines in their preoccupations with territory and borders, leading me to suggest a much wider scope for the mechanism of cultural or linguistic 'imperialism' than the one applied to the English language (e.g. Phillipson, 1992), whether in EFL or ESL contexts. I place the term rather in the generalised context of dominance and subjugation at all levels of social organisation, along the lines of Fairclough (1989), Freire (1973) and Giroux (1983, 1992). They have argued how "one's relationship with language(s) can function as both social empowerment and ideological oppression" (Trend, 1992, p.53), that what

empowers is a critical language awareness. Fairclough argues that critical awareness of the language practices of the speech communities that people inhabit is "coming to be a prerequisite for effective democratic citizenship". Such views have influenced educators in adult literacy and education in multi-cultural communities, and are now making an impact on the ESL/EFL teaching community. They have prompted me to broaden this enquiry to cover the following topics and to be able to pose the accompanying key questions:-

**Higher education: conceptions of knowledge:** What is the relevance for higher education of theories about the nature of knowledge, and how it is constructed and interpreted ?

**Academic disciplines & communities:** How useful are these terms, and can one speak of academic communities as commensurate with academic disciplines, and of their having their own discourses ?

**'Community' perspectives on the roles of language and knowledge in the curriculum:** How central a role should language play in the curriculum, and how prominent a role is it currently seen as having and as being able to assume ?

**Dialogue across academic communities:** Are different communities' discourses 'incommensurate' or is it possible to have boundary conversations (McCarthy and Fishman, 1991), and is it realistic to aspire to a discourse for a united academic community - a 'metalingua franca' ?

**Implications for the tertiary curriculum and teaching academic communication:** If language is central to understanding and the construction of knowledge, how far should language teachers become involved in working to transform the curriculum to reflect that centrality ?

A principal aim in pursuing these questions in this paper is to explore the possible effects on educational policy and practice of the differing conceptions of knowledge, education and authority held by the diverse 'communities' that make up the academic college: 1) the subject teachers in a particular faculty, 2) the first-year students who have entered that faculty, and 3) language teachers, the linguistic and study skill 'mediators' between the other two communities. A longer-term aspiration is that inter-communal collaboration will raise awareness of some of the factors that diminish learning and perpetuate inequalities between these three communities. The main pedagogical motive behind the study is to seek some way of bringing together the discourses of those communities, such that the avowed 'higher' goals of tertiary education - not least the development of independent and critical thought - can be brought closer to realisation.

### **Higher education: conceptions of knowledge**

Students in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup> are, for the most part, experiencing a conservative version of western-style education, which features characteristics criticised since the time of John Dewey: the imperative to conserve knowledge (e.g. Dewey, 1956; Freire, 1973, 1990; Giroux, 1992) and to define that knowledge in terms of representations of reality (e.g. Bruner, 1986, 1990, Taylor, 1987). The problem of how one defines knowledge has exercised philosophers for centuries, but it has become a 'growth industry' in the last 50 years, spawning a confusing plethora of schools of thought. Currently the debate hinges around the question of the 'determinacy' of knowledge, (roughly) lining interpretivism, social constructionism and relativism against positivism, empiricism and representationalism. Rorty parodies this debate as deriving from the long-standing polarity between the literary and scientific cultures, as being between "those who think of themselves as caught in time, as an evanescent moment in a continuing conversation, and those who hope to add a pebble from Newton's beach to an enduring structure" (Rorty, 1982, p.xlvii). Martin would argue that the latter "school" actually comprises much of the arts and humanities; his comparison of history and science suggests history too constructs itself "as truth, or at best as hypothesis about what is and what happened that can be proved or disproved" (1991, p.334). Rorty does, however, capture the adversarial flavour of the debate, and conveys the prejudices of relativists and empiricists about each other's positions. Bruner, for example, is quite blunt in attacking the scientific tradition of pursuing a set of static, objective truths, towards whose discovery "man" (sic) was perpetually

striving. Gadamer is no less severe in rejecting scientific/positivist belief in "a linear progression from mythology to enlightenment" (1983, p.103). Taylor charges the whole philosophical tradition of epistemology<sup>2</sup> with defining a popular view of knowledge as the "correct representation of an independent reality" (1987, p.466).

Bruner sees this representationalism<sup>3</sup> as rooted, ironically, in "man's (sic) being infinitely capable of belief" (1986, p.51), but also being quite unable to accept that our whole world is constructed out of belief. "There is no end to (our) belief in meaning and reality. We thirst after them." (1986, p.155) Bruner is particularly critical of his own discipline of Psychology for continuing to deal only in objective truths and eschewing cultural criticism, arguing that it needs to recognise that "its truths, like all truths about the human condition, are relative to the point of view it takes towards that condition" (1990, p.32). The accusation, widespread among empiricists, that relativism, by its nature, cannot claim to be "true" - it can only "seem true" to other relativists - is an effective refutation as long as one accepts the premise that anything can be intrinsically "true" - or any theory "definitive" (Gadamer, 1983, p.98). As MacIntyre points out, relativism has "been refuted a number of times too often...Genuinely refutable doctrines only need to be refuted once" (1984, p.265).

### Implications for language teaching

Composition teachers and second-language educators have inferred a range of educational implications from relativist/social constructionist theory. Perdue (1990, p.282) argues for a balance between notions of a "top-down" reinforcement of the dominant social order - one that does not allow the individual an active enough role in constructing meaning - and a 'bottom-up' resistance to that social order. She argues that "students and teachers alike negotiate ideological interpretations of the world, accommodating, resisting and filtering them through a complex network of attitudes, practices and beliefs" (1990, p.282). Kent finds support for a similar view in the philosophy of Donald Davidson. Davidson (e.g. 1986a,b) suggests that we are constantly, through interaction, renewing and reconstructing the social norms which underpin our evolving interpretive theories about the world. This view echoes Halliday's argument that "text affects context even as choices determined by context are realised in text" (Hasan & Martin, 1989, p.8). Davidson, while no relativist, denies that there can be a shared repertoire or register even between individuals, and rejects the notion of discourse communities. There are, he argues, only individuals' ephemeral and ad hoc "passing theories" of meaning, interpretations made in response to the needs of the communicative moment. What interpreter and speaker/writer share is a "passing theory", and "there are no rules for arriving at passing theories" (Davidson, 1986b, p.445).

Davidson's ideas seem to lead us logically in the direction of the kind of hermeneutic or interpretive approach to the construction of meaning proposed by Gadamer - a "practical philosophy" that is "not just a theory"; "its *reflection* upon the possibilities, rules, and means of interpretation is immediately useful for the *practice* of interpretation" (Gadamer, 1983, p.98; my italics). The great attraction this philosophy has for language educators is how it echoes recent socio-cultural challenges to formalist and cognitive theories of the composition process, of discourse and of language learning and teaching. Interpretation, Gadamer suggests, needs to encompass the full context of situation<sup>4</sup> in which the text is both produced and encountered. "Every statement has to be seen as a response to a question and ...the only way to understand the statement is to get hold of the question to which the statement is an answer... Philosophical hermeneutics is more interested in the questions than the answers" (Gadamer, 1983, p.106). It is in a hermeneutic approach that we can conceive of forging a dialogue in our academic Babel: "Hermeneutics sees the relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts" (Rorty, 1979, p.318).

These interpretivist views all share the basic premise that meaning is constructed, and that since individuals are not social isolates, the social environment impinges on that construction. In the language teaching field today, at least judging from the L1 composition literature, there seems to be broad

agreement that knowledge is socially constructed, but divergence over how far an individual's beliefs are determined by an anterior framework of social norms, and whether "texts change meaning whenever they change context" (Myers, 1990, pp.6-7). Interestingly, social constructionists' interpretations of each others' positions come in for as vigorous challenge, complete with accusations of misreadings and distortions, as in any empiricist debate. We can see this in Kent's (1991, p.430) attraction to Davidson's theory, which seems partly motivated by resistance to the influence of a deterministic version of social constructionism, which, he argues, holds that "people in different communities think differently about the world", that "communication is convention-bound" and that "knowledge is relative to discourse communities" (1992, p.524). This is in response to Sciappa (1992 response to Kent 1991), who rejects the "ephemeral interpersonal" account of communication Kent seems to derive from Davidson, and argues that a social constructionist account of language and knowledge transcend(s) such an account, emphasising "the significance of shared interpretation, habitual discourse practices, and the power of socialisation" (1992, p.524). The fact that there are a plethora of competing constructivist theories would seem to testify to the vitality of social constructionism, as a loose movement uniting disparate voices of resistance in an "oppositional language" (Giroux, 1992, p.21). One problem with entertaining an "oppositional" language as a potential common language is that it might prompt resistance from those subscribing to the dominant paradigms, making the goal of rapprochement the more difficult to reach.

Translating these observations to the context of my ESL-medium academic communication teaching context, the message seems clear. In designing a curriculum for our first-year Social Science students, we should be motivated by a teaching philosophy which rejects a view of knowledge as the pursuit and conservation of knowledge, of education as the transmission of that knowledge to the next generation, and of preoccupations with answers that stifle the ability or desire to ask questions. If academics were to view themselves more as cultural critics than guardians, as Bruner suggests (1990, p.32), the implications for the university curriculum and tertiary education could be dramatic. Emphasising the interpretive character of both knowledge and intellectual development is a necessary, but admittedly not sufficient, development if we are to hope to place students, the communication specialist and the subject teacher as equal participants within a dialogue - or polylogue - in a more fruitful educational relationship among intersecting and overlapping communities.

### **Academic disciplines and communities**

Before looking more closely at these purported 'intersecting' communities, we should perhaps consider the value of concepts like 'academic' or 'discourse' community. Categorising and naming groups as 'communities' is itself an act of interpretation, grounded in some theory of common interest or practice. Bizzell (1982), Russell (1990) and Chiseri-Strater (1991) are all drawn to the notion of 'academic discourse communities', but more as an aspiration than a reality. Chiseri-Strater cites Raymond Williams' caution about the "warmly persuasive" quality of the word "community", noting that "our understanding of the concept is limited by having no opposing or negative term" (1991, p.xx). Russell suggests that the university as a single academic discourse community disappeared with the advent of the 'modern' university in the 19th Century. Until then, the language-rich 'liberal arts' of recitation, disputation and debate - the art of rhetoric - formed the core of the curriculum and guaranteed the 'linguistic homogeneity' of the university as a single elite intellectual and social community. The modern university has brought a plurality of specialisms, many of them oriented either to professional careers or to the new urban-industrial economy (1990, p.55). The result is that "today academia is a discourse community only in a context so broad as to have little meaning in terms of shared linguistic forms, either for the advancement of knowledge...or for the initiation of new members (who are initiated into a specific professional community's discourse" (Russell 1990, p.54). Academic disciplines, then, can be said to reflect the compartmentalisation of knowledge, the institutionalisation of subjects, and the separate development of ways 'ingroups' have of talking about the world to each other - the growth of mutually incomprehensible jargons and theoretical frameworks.

These 'communities' have been successful in marking out and preserving intellectual/academic territory, in much the same way that, for centuries, the medical and legal professions have done. This development would seem to fit Porter's definition of a 'discourse community' as "a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated" (1986, p.38). He cites, as an example, the *Journal of Applied Psychology* as a forum for a particular academic discourse community to communicate, where participants are expected to adhere to a professional 'ethos' as well as formatting conventions (1986, p.39-40). This would, however, seem to present too static and compartmentalised a model of discourse communities; it suggests for one thing that there is actually unison within academic cultures on, for example, the role of language in the making of knowledge. One suspects, for example, that not all academic psychologists would share the 'ethos' established by a particular editorial board. New journals and disciplinary sub-divisions become established as new intracommunal boundaries emerge around questions of closely-held beliefs. Academic cultures are constantly spawning new disciplines out of their own internal ideological schisms, a trend which points at once both to the inherent mutability of knowledge and to the transience of such communities. This pattern of growth accords less with Porter's unified and 'regulated' community and more with Harris' (1989) depiction of a community as a "chorus of polyphonous voices", where "one is always simultaneously a part of several discourses, several communities, and always already committed to a number of conflicting beliefs and practices" (cited in Kent, 1991, p.425). Perhaps communities are no more than "domains of use" (Fishman, 1971), defined along lines of mutual interest and practice; just as individuals can operate within several language domains of use, so they may belong to several professional, public or personal discourse communities.

In the ESL-medium tertiary context, the problem ESL teachers are increasingly confronting is resistance to recognising the linguistic dimension to the shared domain of higher education. Russell, while acknowledging that disparate academic disciplines may be united through "common missions - teaching, the advancement of knowledge, and social service", believes that they "require no common language or even shared values and methods" to pursue those missions (1990, p.54). There is, he argues, "no single academic discourse community to talk a common language" (1990, p.54).

### **'Community' perspectives on the roles of language and knowledge in the curriculum**

In spite of Russell's pessimism, I have identified three communities which I feel could - or at least need to - enter into constructive triangular communication, so that education can move forward into a more language-sensitive era. Before proceeding to the exploration of options for policy and action, I shall look at the communities in turn, to see how they 'situate' themselves and each other as intersecting communities, and how they see the role of language in their 'schemes' of knowledge and education.

#### **The student community**

In both the secondary and higher education sector in Hong Kong - and perhaps beyond - the curriculum seems to give pride of place to the transmission of factual knowledge, and the most effective strategy students seem to have found for coping with this is memorisation. It is speculated that the use of English textbooks and the testing of what they convey in formal, fact-oriented questions, to be answered in English, encourages students to short-circuit the interpretive process and simply rote learn to pass the exams (see Fu, 1987, p.31). Said reports observing a similar pattern during a consultancy to an Arabian Gulf state in 1985: "an anachronistic and odd confluence of rote learning, uncritical teaching, and ...haphazard results" (1993, p.369).

Bruner warns of the results of an educational approach which fails to develop in students a sense of "reflective intervention" in the knowledge they encounter; such students will be "operating continually from the outside in"; "knowledge will control and guide (them)" (Bruner, 1986, p.132). A representationalist approach to knowledge and learning tends to invest teachers with the power of arbiter

and rewarder, judging student responses in terms of their correspondence to a set answer, to an objective reality. Such an approach is inimical to the development of student confidence in their own opinions and interpretations, in their own beliefs. There is abundant support nowadays within the ESL profession for empowering students to be insiders and members of the culture-creating community (e.g. Bartholomae, 1985; Bizzell, 1990; Dillon, 1991; Fox, 1990, McCarthy & Fishman, 1991).

I suggest that the main problem students have, as they enter the much more intensely English-medium tertiary environment, relates to their set of beliefs - about themselves, their context of situation and their own communicative competence. After 14 years of largely passive exposure to English, Hong Kong students seem to have developed attitudinal and motivational resistance to the language<sup>5</sup>; the medium of education has obfuscated, to varying degrees, the educational substance of the curriculum, and seems to have resulted in the retarded development of the students' academic personalities. Given the problems academics have in reconciling the roles of language and content, it is hardly surprising that the students, too, should have a confused idea of the role of language, the nature of knowledge, and of where these fit into the educational process. The programme we have developed for Social Science first-year students aims to clarify those roles and relationships, but aims also at placing value on the students' own experiences and opinions. The approach can be said to be 'interpretivist' in attempting to discourage students from accepting that there are values "to the authority of which anyone else should bow" (Bizzell, 1990). It is interpretivist also in suggesting that all texts are motivated by a writer's ideological perspective, or stance, and set of values and priorities regarding the subject under discussion; that a reader should consequently be sensitive to the "persuasive force" of a text. Bruner, ending a response to a critical review of his most recent book (*Acts of Meaning*, 1990), nicely evokes a reader's need to discern the "ideological identity" of the writer:

As I read the piece, I could not quite figure out, as the saying goes, "where it was coming from". When a body of work is being judged, it should be clear what criteria are being used in judging its sufficiency and insufficiency (1992, p.77).

Translating these values into pedagogy, a critically-oriented English for academic communication approach would encourage students, for example, to speculate on the stance of writers, on the values reflected in their argumentation and in the language in which that interpretation is framed. Teachers, at the same time, should be encouraged to exploit any rhetorical and linguistic clues to that stance, and to sensitise students to the subtleties of attributing ideas to their authors, and modulating their own stance through command of rhetorical-linguistic devices for making relative and tentative assertions.

### **The subject teacher community**

Becher suggests that other more well-established disciplinary cultures are becoming more, not less entrenched in separate identities (Becher, 1987). As an educationist, he talks of the need to bring different disciplines to a greater understanding of each other - of their "disciplinary differences and transdisciplinary similarities". More radical voices, particularly in Cultural Studies, argue that an anti-disciplinary discourse is necessary to achieve genuine change away from a perspective which divides knowledge up like terrain, and whose research behaviour is often reminiscent of the gold prospector repeatedly sifting through the same narrow patch of soil, hoping for nuggets while slowly accruing dust. Clearly, in searching for a common language in the face of so much scepticism (e.g. Russell, Becher), I am just as likely to be seen as organising a quest for 'fool's gold'. Becher's findings are not encouraging for a change of attitude through interdisciplinary collaboration; he reports the disciplinary identity as a way in which academics "order their experience of belonging to a disciplinary group". He found that:

Physicists, like historians, seemed to have a somewhat mystical notion of oneness, in that they asserted it strongly while acknowledging a high degree of internal specialisation accompanied by a substantial breakdown in internal communication. Partly, their notion of common identity sprang from a shared sense of style and a shared, 'almost religious',

belief in the unity of nature, partly from more mundane considerations such as the mutual use of apparatus and the ability to teach across the first-year undergraduate syllabus (Becher, 1981, p.115).

Certainly, Becher (1987) reports how the development of philosophical boundaries and the imperative to protect them is typical of academic disciplines, and is what motivates much of the academic communication within those disciplines - though less between them.

Even if formally unified, many disciplines are far from homogeneous communities. It is the internal boundaries marking rival schools of thought within a subject area which seem to generate the most deep-seated divisions within disciplines. Dillon suggests that this diversity "does not present a picture of happy pluralism, but of competition and contention" (1991, p.13). In Becher's 1987 study, sociologists voted themselves into an armchair vs. investigative researcher dichotomy: "those who think things out vs. those who find things out". Becher speculates as to whether the contentiousness within disciplines is indicative of "an important source of intellectual vigour" - or merely the incurable tendency of academics to quarrel with each other. He found little collaborative research even within departments, except where "hired hands" were being used, and attributed this to the thin spread of specialisms within any but the largest departments. Departments have to cover the 'canon', so quantity and choice win out over strength in depth in fewer areas. In an ESL-medium system, this works against a quality education for the students, and very much in favour of a superficial approach to learning as the clearing of hurdles - assignments with the aid of plagiarism, and exams with the aid of intensive memorisation. As long as the curricula mimic the broad curricula found in the U.K. and U.S.A., in L1-medium systems, ESL-medium institutions will be guilty of making unrealistically high expectations of their students, in terms of both reading and writing assignments; their exhaustive reading lists will be seen as window-dressing, necessary to maintain the international currency of their degrees.

Subject teachers' conceptions of the role of language - even as a crucial learning medium, like English - seem to place it as simultaneously a 'conduit' for the rest of the curriculum, and a subject to be 'mastered' like any other - both a medium and a message. In my experience, subject teachers in ESL-medium institutions tend to have opinions about how English should be taught, and these tend to revolve around the teaching of grammar and vocabulary, and 'how to write good/correct English'. A caricature of a 'lay' opinion about language learning would have it as a largely behaviouristic process, high on practice and relatively low on cognitive input. When linguists attempt to fend off demands for demonstrable gain in academic communication programmes by citing evidence that it takes hundreds of hours to make significant progress, the lay academic response is to ask why language teaching should then get a much higher proportion of the budget. There is evidence in many countries with ESL systems of tertiary institutions paying proportionately less for more intensive tuition. Pennington & Young (1989) discuss ways of responding to such discrimination by professionalising in terms acceptable to the wider academic community.

### **The language teaching community**

With a new territory-wide concern for English standards across the curriculum, language teachers in Hong Kong are coming to see their role more as the rather delicate one of linguistic and study skill 'mediator' between the student and subject teacher communities. This trend is reflected at the University of Hong Kong in the English Centre's English for Academic Communication (EAC) course for first-year students in the Faculty of Social Sciences. In this programme, we are trying to enhance student learning by extending study support to a triangular framework, a collaboration between students, subject teachers and ESL teachers. This scheme envisages language and subject teachers communicating with students in a language featuring the glimmerings of shared values, concepts and, perhaps, overlapping boundaries between our discourses (see Leung & Hui, this volume, for a fuller description). This programme fits into the sub-community of ESL-in-Higher-Education committed to ILC programmes (Integrating Language and Content), but which is caught between identities, what Purves calls "co-extensive"



communities: the "rhetorical community" and the "interpretive community" (1986, p.39). It seems crucial whether one sees these as complementary dimensions of communication or competing paradigms.

Turning again to Porter's (1986) and Harris' (1989) divergent definitions of discourse communities, we can speculate that the creation of such a binary classification inevitably engenders antagonism. In ESL, this can revolve around the trade-off between the ideal and the pragmatic, a way of resisting insurgent ideologies (see Horowitz, 1986, for a classic example). There are echoes of a pragmatic-ideal dichotomy in the Hong Kong context, with the perceived generality of the 'interpretive' skills required by undergraduates - critical thinking, reasoning and argumentation - set against the specificity of the disciplinary genres and the organisational and rhetorical conventions and patterns required for textual production. In political terms, we can perhaps picture the interpretive approach as empowering students on terms relative to the historical moment or cultural context, with the rhetorical approach empowering students on terms established by a dominant academic or target professional community. Whether your knowledge is subjugated or dominant, or your interests lie in its extension and transformation or its conservation, may determine which orientation you accommodate to or resist<sup>6</sup>. Social change in the direction of equality can only proceed through awareness of inequality, and I argue that such awareness is both the basis for, and the result of, communication. In one sense, then, a language must already be there, and in another a new language must develop; for that to happen it must be strongly motivated.

### **The pivotal role of language: a basis for dialogue**

Widdowson has drawn on Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1977) to paint a persuasive picture of languages and the people who speak them as being held in a tension between opposing forces: the cooperative imperative of accommodation and the territorial imperative promoting resistance. He does, however, hold out hope of a degree of accommodation between disciplines:

Engagement in communicative activity...entails encroachment on the one hand and exposure on the other. It is a risky business (but) where the domains of the interlocutors are already in close convergence as a consequence of shared knowledge and experience, the risk is reduced (1982, p.9)<sup>7</sup>.

One community that subject and language teachers could be said to share membership of is a teaching community, in the sense that they share the same students within the same broad curriculum. It is possible that by increasing our common exposure, by sharing more experience and knowledge, we might be able to develop a shared discourse to enhance our cooperation in that collaborative enterprise. Russell, however, cautions that the history of cross-curricular writing instruction in the USA shows that "interdisciplinary efforts to *shift* responsibility are much easier to organise and maintain than efforts to *share* responsibility" (1990, p.67; my italics), emphasising the need to build a solid case with which to enter into dialogue.

I put forward the following case for language teachers to enter into dialogue both with subject teachers and students. I argue, in short, that if we can present a coherent rationale for placing language at the centre of the curriculum, then this justifies placing it at the centre of the academic communication syllabus. If a language teaching community is convinced, through adopting a critical 'whole language' educational philosophy<sup>8</sup>, that the focus of their dialogue with subject teachers needs to be on the centrality of the role of language in the making and interpretation of meaning, and consequently of knowledge, then, in educational, operational terms, this must entail its centrality to the Social Science curriculum. Similarly, if language is central to the making and interpretation of meaning, of knowledge, then in educational terms this must involve the centrality of language to the *academic communication syllabus*. By 'central', I mean forming the substance of the syllabus, and not simply at a rhetorico-grammatical or superficially genre-based level, but at a pragmatic, socio-political level, emphasising the pervasiveness of language. Again, there is the danger of the teacher imposing an

authoritative viewpoint, and the students acquiescing all too readily. The kind of dialogue we are seeking needs to allow students space to discover the relationship between their own experience and their investigations and interpretations.

Success in persuading both subject teachers and students of the credibility of the idea of the centrality of language depends, I argue, partly on accommodation to the existing values and interests of those communities, and partly on engaging in 'boundary conversations', to generate shifts in perspective, perhaps through generating new boundary, but overlapping, discourses. Disciplinary teachers need to be allowed space for creative participation in the dialogue, and in the discovery of the value of the whole language, whole curriculum thesis. It cannot be over-emphasised that how subject teachers 'construct' their language teaching colleagues - how they define their goals, their institutional value, etc. - must influence their evaluation of the status of any language-based course in the curriculum. Subject teacher attitudes to language, I would argue, also have a significant effect on student attitude and motivation; if faculty fail, for example, to offer any structured feedback on language or rhetorical problems, students are less likely to take ESL for academic communication courses seriously.

### Dialogue across academic communities

Fruitful dialogue requires a basis of mutual understanding and, I would argue, the evolution of a discourse which can address shared problems and interests. Dillon argues that language teachers have concentrated excessively on the static forms and conventions of disciplinary discourse and not enough on the academic cultures, on seeing their discourses as "situated practices" (1991, p.11). Clifford Geertz (1976, cited in Becher, 1981) argues for developing such an understanding through an ethnography of the disciplines. He contends that the integration of cultural life depends on making it possible for people inhabiting different sorts of worlds to have a genuine and reciprocal impact on one another<sup>9</sup>. Looking more closely at individual disciplines and their relationship with one another might improve the chances of mutual appreciation and respect, and hence restore some sense of intellectual cohesion within the divided tribes of academe. Another imperative is to promote a better understanding of higher education in the larger community outside. For any of this to be realised, he says:

- the first step is surely to accept the depth of the differences
- the second to understand just what they are, and
- the third to construct some sort of vocabulary in which they can be publicly formulated.

What are the chances of translating these differences, of constructing this vocabulary? Bruner (1986) writes of individuals, at a very early age, being egocentric - not because they lack the capacity to take another's perspective, but because they cannot do so without understanding the situation in which that person is operating. If we extend this to the adult scenario of tertiary education, and accept the critical role language plays in constructing our world, what we are seeking is a common language by which we can converge on a definition and understanding of a shared 'context of situation'.

The tentative concept of a 'metalingua franca' is intended to bring together the notions of the centrality of language in constructing meaning, and the need to share an understanding of how we use language to give meaning to our world. As I have suggested, there is a clear need to recognise the tension between language's role in defining and differentiating communities, and its potential role in bringing them together - cooperating in a common enterprise. It is perhaps necessary to distinguish two competing communities, the discipline-based 'academic research' community, whose language is regulated from within the disciplinary community, perhaps related to a particular knowledge paradigm, and the institution-based 'teaching' community, whose language is much more loosely regulated. A choice lies between the metaphor of the overlapping domains of use, and that of 'separate lives'. Booth (1989, p.328) pines for a "true" university, instead of the current model he sees us afflicted with "an archipelago of mutually incomprehensible, self-congratulating isolates", what he calls a multiversity. Here I interpret

Booth as arguing for a degree of mutual comprehensibility between the disciplinary communities, not out of any intolerance at disciplinary differences but out of exasperation at mutual exclusion and ignorance caused by the inability to communicate.

### **Interdisciplinary dialogue for academic purposes**

Everyday practice requires that we begin with more humble aspirations, and attempt to address problems strategically, in order of perceived importance and surmountability. At the University of Hong Kong, the EAC programme for the Social Sciences was recently integrated into the first-year curriculum (see Leung & Hui this volume, for a fuller description of the course aims and rationale). This development has perhaps placed a greater onus on subject and language teachers to acknowledge that they share the same students and that they may be sending them conflicting signals about the way in which they communicate their ideas, whether at the level of grammar and layout, or argumentation and interpretation. The EAC course, offering students a programme which is relevant to and integrated into their curriculum, balances a respect for actual writing and reading requirements of the various social science disciplines - particularly the genres of undergraduate assignment and presentation - with an attempt to give students a critical insight into the academic culture and the values and conventions of its disciplines, and insights into the ways language pervades not only communication, but every aspect of knowing and doing.

The EAC course emphasises the importance of involving students in academic enquiry as an investigative, discovery-based process. Students begin by experiencing the difficulties of actually defining an academic problem, and are encouraged to take a critical look at the hypotheses and writings of others to help situate themselves in relation to those problem(s). Activities for students include problem-posing, reconciling different viewpoints and discerning where they fit in terms of underlying ideologies and value systems - a relevant area of skill development in the faculty of Social Sciences. As Leung & Hui (this volume) recount, a first-semester language-related project is followed by a shift to a choice of discipline-related projects in the second semester, as a means of demonstrating the closer, practical applications of academic study and communication skills to the Social Science disciplines; it is here that we have sought the fruits of collaborative dialogue between language and subject teachers. An immediate aim of this collaboration was to give greater relevance and academic 'authenticity' to the second semester projects; this subsequently grew into an effort to encourage departments to participate in establishing a set of criteria by which language and subject teachers could jointly evaluate students' written reports of their discipline-related projects.

### **A collaborative exercise**

Six language teachers and two subject teachers from each of five Social Science departments (Management Studies, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology and Social Work and Social Administration) were each asked to grade, rank order and offer critical comments on two sets of student assignments, one common set of texts on study habits, and the second on their own discipline, selected by their first-year course coordinator. Predictably, there was significant variation in grades and rank order between the language and subject teachers; there was no evaluation scheme to follow, as the object of the exercise was to establish what kind of criteria the subject and language teachers would apply, and also the kind of language they would use to account for their judgements. . Perhaps less predictably, there was also considerable variation between the two subject colleagues from each department, and among the six language teachers' grades and rank orders. Brown, in his Hawaiian study (1989), notes similar "relatively low" inter-rater correlations<sup>10</sup>, even with the use of a rating scale under "reasonably controlled conditions" What was most useful in the HKU exercise was also the main object of the exercise - the judgement comments we asked for. These covered content, coverage, depth of analytical approach, plagiarism, grammar, sourcing material, understanding of the arguments or theory, ability to synthesise, to be concise, and anything that smacked of original, independent thought. In fact, the range was similar to those language teachers tend to apply to academic writing - except for the emphasis on

substantive criteria, which language teachers tend to be reticent about scrutinising.

These findings did, on the whole, tend to confirm hopes for the triangulation we were trying to achieve between subject teacher, language teacher and student. The project yielded a set of writing micro-skills and strategies which were initially framed as a set of criteria to be used by both language and subject teachers for the assessment of student assignments - whether jointly or separately. At a recent meeting (July, 1993) it became apparent that faculty were happy to use the framework to offer structured feedback, but less happy to pretend that they were actually applying this set of criteria to the evaluation of assignments; they, too, favoured a holistic impression-marking strategy, and were sceptical of any procrustean template for judging students' work. The matrix is now cast more positively as a *'framework for structured feedback on student writing'* rather than as *'criteria for evaluating student writing'*, which tended to emphasise the teacher as judge and jury. In the coming academic year, the departments are to encourage all tutors of first-year students to make use of the 'structured feedback' forms. The set of micro-skills is likely to continue to evolve as subject teachers become more conversant with the discourse of analytical judgement of student communication. It is likely that individual departments will evolve their own discipline-specific description of communicative skills and strategies, notably to reflect perceived disciplinary differences in text genres and investigative processes. The framework as it stood in July, 1993 was as shown in Appendix A. The use of the terms 'Content' and 'Language' and the labelling of micro-skills do not imply a belief in their discreteness, in their having neat 'borders' around them. The skills are all seen as overlapping with each other, and in many cases, as inter-dependent. The terms used to describe them are chosen for their transparency, both to language and subject teachers, and to students. It is important at this stage to gain agreement from subject teachers that they can help students by taking a more analytical approach to identifying their communicative problems; the reason for 'structuring' the feedback is to increase students' options for following up their own problems at their own pace. A self-access manual has been developed around the skill framework; the codes in brackets (Appendix A) correspond to units in the manual, which is example and exercise-based.

In terms of the larger project of uniting these communities by a common discourse arising from shared interests, this project can be seen as an attempt, in Geertz's terms, to accept differences, understand them and then to construct some sort of vocabulary - not in this case to formulate differences, but to agree on cognate terms which both communities can accept as lying comfortably within the intersecting zones of their non-technical vocabularies. I hope that as the project is extended, language teachers will come to have greater confidence in the idea of appropriating a major role for language in the curriculum, authenticating the role of the language tutor as having a greater understanding of the issues under study, and making the study of language issues our main substantive vehicle for study.

If a picture of constructive reciprocity seems to be emerging, it needs to be put into perspective. At the University's Faculty of Social Sciences, there remains a general inclination to shift rather than share responsibility for developing communication skills. It remains to be seen how successful the pilot use of the feedback scheme proves to be with faculty. The collaborative exercise just described, on evaluating student scripts, revealed significant differences between teachers even within a single department regarding the needs and problems of their students, what contribution language teachers could or should make to those problems, and how the subject teachers themselves might play a constructive role in a proposed triangular cooperation. However, the Faculty's exposure to a full-scale academic communication programme only dates from 1990, so evolution and acceptance has actually been quite rapid, with the recent integration of the EAC course into the first-year curriculum. One of the casualties of this speed has been consultation with the English Centre on the substance (and title) of the course the faculty was accepting into its curriculum. The course was originally called 'Academic Communication and Study Skills'; the calendar entry now reads 'English for Academic Communication'. The ejection of 'study skills' from the course title in favour of greater emphasis on 'English' was not negotiated, although the change itself aroused no strong feelings. If 'study skills' are conceived by faculty in terms of general educational and library skills, and quite peripheral to academic communication, then it would be counter-productive to feature them as a main aim of our programme. The voices heard in

this exercise were those of the dominant 'faculty' arm of the academy; the language teachers were uninvited and therefore mute. In political terms, this episode can be seen as faculty re-marking curricular territory, and re-emphasising the 'service' function of ESL and the ancillary role of language in the curriculum. One senses a wariness that language might receive attention out of proportion to its status, that it would be 'mad idolatry to make the service greater than the God'. Worth noting is Becher's (1987) observation that, whether between or within disciplines, tolerance for alternative views or beliefs is high - *except* where academics perceive a threat to their own beliefs, and their own role in, or vision of, the academic curriculum. Clearly, language specialists' tolerance of the beliefs and values of other disciplines also falls subject to the same pressures, as shown by some of my remarks in this paper.

### Implications for the tertiary curriculum and teaching academic communication

I have argued for a revised view of knowledge and education, and consequently a more central role for language in the curriculum - particularly the tertiary curriculum. Questions remain as to how far language teachers should become involved in transforming the curriculum to reflect that centrality. Should language itself become the substantive focus of ESL academic communication courses? We may need to frame the issue in terms of stance and authority, in a way that evokes the debate between empiricists and relativists: how can *you* take a position of authority ('my theory's the right one!') when you argue for *everyone's* right to authority (the equal authority of our own interpretations)? This seems a healthy basis for agreeing to disagree, for living with conflict, and for tolerating a diversity of views and ideologies (McCarthy & Fishman, 1991). I suggest that this spirit of pluralism and tolerance should inform any political agenda in education.

Writers on critical pedagogy insist on the translation of critical theory into critical practice, into forms of political action in the classroom (Fox, 1990; Giroux, 1992; Hickey and Becher, 1990). Such action need not be dramatic or disruptive; critical change can result from stepping down from the pedestal of authority, of controller, and acknowledging the students' right to challenge the teacher, to question the system. Fox (1990) argues, for example, that since political action requires taking a stance, teachers should be open about the stances they take and should encourage students to accept such bias as normal and to challenge their teachers on their positions or ideology. Fox cites Simon & Dippo's position: "we view all modes of knowing and all particular knowledge forms as ideological, hence the issue is not whether one is "biased", but whose interests are served by one's work" (1986, p.196). The same question can be applied to the issue of authority in the classroom; Bizzell's 1991 paper, 'Power, authority and critical pedagogy', was written to address the problem "of left-liberal educators who want to promote their own values through their teaching but fear that doing so would contradict these values" (1991, p.54). Bizzell argues for a critical pedagogy which rejects "oppressive pedagogical power" and any generation of unjust social power relations (1991, p.55), and which pursues what Freire calls "education for critical consciousness". Giroux calls for educators and "cultural workers" to become "border crossers engaged in an effort to create alternative public spheres" which themselves create the conditions "for the formation of social identities ... forged in a politics of difference", and "in which social equality and cultural diversity coexist with participatory democracy" (1992, p.21-22, quoting Fraser, 1990, p.9). He states the critical pedagogical position that "without a political project, there can be no ground on which to engage questions of human power (and) domination", and 'to challenge knowledge and social relations structured in dominance' (1992, p.22). So while our students at the University of Hong Kong will clearly not be socially or materially disadvantaged by their tertiary experience - their very presence at the university places them among the elite - their assimilation to the privileged academic and professional cultures may have been purchased at the expense of a more profound understanding of how knowledge is created, of the value of conflict in learning (McCarthy and Fishman, 1991, p.423), and the importance of developing a tolerant understanding of socially diverse people (Fox, 1990, p.5). The argument for a more critical pedagogy rests on this vision of the function of an education, and especially of a higher education - to create responsible, tolerant and caring citizens for a more critical and participatory democracy.

Where does language fit into this critical enterprise? Giroux makes the strongest of statements for the centrality of the role of language in this critical enterprise, arguing for "the need to take up the relationship between language and the issues of knowledge and power on the one hand, and to retheorize language within a broader politics of democracy, culture and pedagogy on the other"; significantly, he adds: "every new paradigm has to create its own language because the old paradigms, through their use of particular language forms, produce knowledge and social relations that often serve to legitimate specific relations of power" (1992, p.21). There is, of course, no guarantee that a greater and more widespread understanding of how language works will bring about positive rather than negative social change; greater insight can equally empower those motivated to further subjugate the 'bidoun' (the 'without').

In proposing the exploration towards a 'metalingua franca', I am aware of the caveats regarding the idea of equality between cultures and languages. Any such wider 'metalanguage' might need to be developed through dialogue in a kind of evolving 'interlanguage', using our diverse existing discourses, and negotiating 'terms of entry'. We should be aware of the unequal forces at play when cultures and their languages come into contact - into 'conflict'. The history of language spread marks the unequal contest between cultures, as languages were imposed, resisted, accommodated to, adapted and ultimately either rejected or appropriated. A lingua franca is a language which allows people divided by ethnic and national frontiers access to what other groups mean and, at the overriding material level, to what they have to trade. In talking in terms of a 'metalingua franca', I am addressing the crucial difference between understanding what people mean and understanding how people mean, with its implication of understanding how knowledge is constructed. It is in this light that I regard such an enterprise as ultimately requiring a commitment to a critical pedagogy<sup>11</sup>, aimed at transforming the curriculum through the only way it can be transformed, through communication between the educational communities involved, and through the development of metacommunication, which requires to some extent conversion to a particular paradigm of education, learning and knowledge which places language centrally and which respects the idea of the social construction and interpretation of knowledge.

### Concluding remarks

I have argued for the centrality of language, both in broad disciplinary curricula and in academic communication syllabi. I have also argued that this can only come about through the use of language to engage in an accommodation of positions and to establish boundary conversations which, in turn, might generate new, overlapping discourses. To the extent that the domain of use of such a discourse would be characterised by discussion about *language*, and would have the potential to facilitate communication in educational institutions worldwide, I have ventured the concept of a 'metalingua franca'.

I have proposed that tertiary English teachers need to evolve a clear and confident role for themselves in the curriculum as full members of the academic community. We need to reject any kind of obsequious and ancillary 'service' role, as the academic community's 'hermit crabs', parasitically borrowing the shells of other disciplines. Extending the metaphor many tertiary language teachers pursuing ILC programmes seem, to judge from the literature, resigned to the profession's inability to construct its own substantive 'shell' with which to engage fully in the curricular forum. Against the metaphor one can ask what is truly substantive about these 'shells', these models, these genres and these 'facts' about the world. I am not suggesting we cast our 'shell' out of the same empirical subject matter, but that we attempt to break the mould, break with the paradigm that entices us into a parasitic posture. Such a policy would require strategy, both in accommodation - the recognition of the rights and interests of the other communities - as well as in assertion, defining one's pedagogical and ethical beliefs<sup>12</sup>, and ensuring they inform professional practice in the form of social action.

Language teachers need, I suggest, to adopt an 'authentic' academic role in their interaction with students. By this I mean the role of a practising academic, as researcher, critic *and* teacher - negotiating

and challenging at the level of substance as well as style, questioning the analyses and interpretations of both students and experts. To encourage students to learn, and to make learning enjoyable, educationists need also to create an 'authentic' learning environment, an authenticity determined by whether it genuinely promotes learning, and not by the degree to which it replicates the students' study experience, since this can only be a parody, a pale imitation. We must doubt the value of an educational enterprise which uncritically prepares students for the culture they are being 'inducted' into; apart from suggesting a static target community, this suggests an acceptance that students will be changed by the university but that the university will emerge unscathed from the perennial encounter with students. We need, as Geertz suggests, to find out more about the evolving cultures of both academics and students, but to be conscious in our study of the ethnocentric interpretive trap. The ethnographic exploration of disciplinary cultures in higher education is in its infancy, though Ramsden's recent book (1992) offers rich ideas for future research on teaching and learning in higher education.

Insofar as the educational changes argued for in this paper require major shifts in perception and behaviour of the different academic communities discussed, I have been talking about *social change*, with the language teacher as a possible catalyst of that change. At the heart of this social change must lie fundamental changes in our conceptions of knowledge, language and learning. I suggest that, in our second-language educational context, change is needed in how the three communities we have discussed talk to each other, and in the ideas and language they bring to their interpretations. I believe that the more that the different communities interact and collaborate, and the more they talk about their intersecting interests, the more a shared discourse may emerge, as what Allison calls "a suitable climate" is established (1990, p.19). It is moot as to whether a shift in attitudes and values is prerequisite or consequent to the evolution of a new common discourse; more likely, such an evolution would be reciprocal and simultaneous. Even with the rudiments of a common vocabulary - beginning with our consensus on communicative micro-skills - we can begin to triangulate to remove some of the inequalities between our communities, and some of the obstacles to the crossing of cultural borders.

### Notes

1. These are almost wholly Cantonese-L1 students, coming from a predominantly English-medium secondary school system (@90%); a similar ratio operates in higher education, with only Chinese University (most faculties) teaching in Chinese.
2. The branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge (OED: 'theory of the method or grounds of knowledge'). The earlier, more ambitious epistemologists (logical empiricists, or positivists) were foundationalist, in seeking a theory, a science, against which to check the credentials of all truth claims. Taylor suggests epistemologists are still in search of the same grail, having progressed from Descartes' obsession with mathematics to the current vogues of physics, and now biochemistry. Taylor argues that it is the representationalist conception of knowledge that underpins the epistemological tradition. The debate might be put thus: is knowledge defined by what we believe to exist, or - in the epistemological tradition - simply by what we have discovered about what actually exists - i.e. about the truth ?
3. It is difficult to avoid the use of such '-isms' [the kind of sweeping labelling Said (1993: 371) calls 'gigantic caricatural essentialisations'] in discussing philosophical positions in this kind of literature review.. The very exercise of attempting to determine 'where someone is coming from' (see p. 7 above) seems to press one into labelling stances or positions with heavy abstract nominalisations, perhaps reflecting the adversarial nature of academic debate, and the need to draw borders around ideas to render them more 'insular' possessions - or adversaries. Darcie Bowden's 1992 AAAL paper offers an interesting (and relevant) exploration of the 'container' metaphor.
4. Malinowski (1923) coined this expression to describe the fullest context in which knowledge, identity, relationships, even words should be constructed or interpreted.
5. The question of whether they also suffer educational deficit from an ESL-medium education is debated. Cummins, an authoritative voice in bilingual education research, weighs in with a positive 'additive' verdict: 'Language planners (in Hong Kong) can...be confident that the promotion of bilingualism will not disrupt children's cognitive or academic development; in fact children's linguistic and cognitive skills may be subtly enhanced as a result of having access to two linguistic systems' (1988:272). This judgment may have been more convincing in a multi-lingual setting suggested by his paper's title. Certainly, recent H.K. Education Department projections (HK Government, 1990) were for only 30% of children to be admitted to English-medium classes under a separate bilingual 'streaming' policy, since 70% were felt unlikely to benefit.

6. There are a range of theories of the dynamics of human relations positing a 'yin and yang'-like complementarity of opposing forces; Giles' accommodation theory is just one of these. Ethnographers seem influenced by materialist constructions of identity in terms of possessions. Human transactions are marked by the exchange of these possessions (not only tangible), contributing to the pursuit of desires and ambitions, but through a recognition that reciprocal or mutual benefit must be perceived for economic transactions to proceed voluntarily.

7. Clearly, the conflict of first and second languages where the latter has assumed a position of greater prestige must complicate the educational picture. Pierson suggests that ethnolinguistic attitudes to languages in such competition 'determine to a great extent the quality of the language learning that goes on in the schools' (1987: 81). Giles & Johnson (1987) argue that Hong Kong people have a very 'positive' ethnolinguistic identity (i.e. regarding their L1, Cantonese), and that this disposes them to - resist acquiring fluency in English, the "outgroup" language.

8. The Whole Language movement: this grew from an L1 focus on reading pedagogy to encompass a major sociopolitical agenda for both L1 and second-language education (see e.g. Rigg, 1990).

9. Herndl (1991) warns of a Catch 22 risk in such an enterprise, whereby the findings of ethnographic research 'become displaced from their sources and become part of a disciplinary discourse whose production of authorised knowledge resists the theoretical self-consciousness of the original research ethos' (320). Ethnographers' disciplinary discourse needs to be seen as 'both a communally maintained rhetoric and as an institutional practice shaped by the material conditions in which researchers and teachers work' (320).

10. Strangely, the 1991 TESOL Quarterly report of the same study reports the correlation to be 'only moderately high'.

11. A fuller exploration of the implications of pursuing a critical pedagogy must be left to another paper. In the context of a project working towards inter-disciplinary dialogue, I decided not to focus, for example, on the anti-disciplinary position of cultural studies. There are, however, many features of some versions of critical pedagogy in this paper - such as claiming the role for teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1992), combatting pedagogies that foster and maintain social inequality, which I fully endorse and which are consistent with the role I propose for the language teaching profession in this paper.

12. Again, there appear to be crucial differences between the L1 and ESL cultures. Santos doubts that the ESL Writing community will follow L1 composition in articulating the kind of sociopolitical ideology (1992: 12) subscribed to by the American L1 Composition community's 'Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition & Communication' in 1972, when it passed a resolution supporting students' right to their own language, arguing that it was unfair to impose standards of academic writing on them. As a typical ESL view, Santos cites Kutz (1986), who, like Horowitz (1986), questions the compatibility of 'validating students as people' with teaching them to use language 'in ways that support academic success' (1992: 11), arguing that the latter is the more attainable, pragmatic goal.



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Please attach the revised appendix (figure 1) to page 83.

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and Language Teaching

Figure 1: Academic Communication for the Social Sciences 1993/94

FRAMEWORK for STRUCTURED FEEDBACK on STUDENT WRITING

SKILLS & STRATEGIES	COMMENTS [AS NEEDED]	GRADE [OPTIONAL]
<b>A. CONTENT</b>		
<p><b>Answer the question (A1)</b>                      Respond relevantly to task                      Keep to the topic</p> <p><b>Exploit source materials (A2)</b>                      Analyse texts/data                      Interpret arguments                      Integrate material                      Apply to context or problem                      Draw implications</p> <p><b>Think independently &amp; critically (A3)</b></p>		
<b>B. ARGUMENTATION &amp; ORGANISATION</b>		
<p><b>Introduce (B1)</b>                      State problem/position clearly (B2)                      Define key terms (B3)</p> <p><b>Develop an argument (B4)</b>                      Structure ideas clearly &amp; logically (B5)                      Justify or support assertions (B6)                      Attribute ideas to their authors (B7)                      [avoiding plagiarism]                      Cite sources &amp; compile a bibliography</p> <p><b>Conclude (B8)</b></p>		
<b>C. LANGUAGE</b> :[breakdown available]		
<p><b>Paragraph Development</b>                      Connection, coherence &amp; focus</p> <p><b>Grammar</b>                      Use of logical connectors, tenses, articles, etc.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary</b>                      Accurate, varied &amp; appropriate use</p>		
<b>Other Comments:</b>	<b>Overall Grade :</b>	

**EAC for Social Sciences: REVISED CRITERIA for the Evaluation of ACADEMIC WRITING**

**Purpose:** Assessing students' scripts for evidence of the ability to:

{OPTIONAL}

A. CONTENT (SUBJECT)	COMMENTS	GRADE
<b>CONTENT &amp; RELEVANCE</b>		
<b>A.1. Interpret demands of question/task</b>		
Sustain relevance to task		
<b>A.2. Theory/Arguments/Viewpoints/Data</b>		
a) Analyse		
b) Interpret		
c) Apply (to specific context/problem)		
d) Extend (Implications/speculation)		
e) Integrate/synthesise		
<b>A.3. Think independently &amp; critically</b>		
<b>B. ARGUMENTATION &amp; ORGANISATION</b>		<b>I. Essays; II Investigative Reports</b>
<b>B.1. Introduce</b>		
B.2. State problem/position clearly		
B.3. Define key terms		
<b>B.4. Develop an argument</b>		
B.5. Structure ideas clearly & logically		
B.6. Support or justify positions/assertions		
B.7. Attribute ideas to their authors [avoiding plagiarism] Cite sources & compile a bibliography		
<b>B.8. Conclude</b>		
<i>App. Conventions of organisation &amp; 'layout': Essays &amp; Reports</i>		
<b>C. LANGUAGE: [breakdown overleaf]</b>		<b>Evidence of:</b>
Text & Paragraph level C1-2		
Grammar of Connected Discourse C3-7		
Vocabulary C8-10		
<b>Other Comments:</b>		<b>Overall Grade:</b>





## Linking Language and Content Instruction in the Social Sciences

Max Hui and Lily Leung<sup>1</sup>

This paper begins with a brief review of some of the controversies about linking language and content instruction in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. It then describes an attempt at fostering such a link through collaboration between the language teachers and the content teachers in an Academic Communication and Study Skills (ACSS) course at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). While the collaboration has resulted in the production of six discipline-specific language modules, it has given rise to a number of issues in course administration, staff development and student assessment. We will discuss these issues and their practical implications, drawing upon our experiences of designing two of the modules. We believe that these issues need to be adequately addressed in order to enhance the effectiveness of the link between language and content instruction.

### Should language and content instruction be linked?

In the ELT literature, there has been a growing body of work advocating a greater link between language and content instruction (Mohan, 1979, 1986; Cantoni-Harvey, 1987; Crandall, 1987; Shih, 1986; Thaiss, 1987; Benesch, 1988). One of the more extensively reported approaches to establishing such a link has been the 'adjunct model' (Snow and Brinton, 1988, Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 1989, Snow and Brinton, 1990). In an adjunct program, a language course and a content course (e.g. introductory courses to Sociology and Psychology) are linked by the shared content base and mutually coordinated assignments. Through the close coordination among staff of the linked courses, the language syllabus is dovetailed with that of the content course. Although the format of adjunct programmes may vary among institutions, a common requirement is that students attend the language and content courses concurrently.

The foremost justification for link courses such as the adjunct programme is their high face validity in addressing the academic needs of ESL students. Because the language course shares the substantive content and assignments with the content course, it not only takes into account the eventual uses the students will make of the target language, but also integrates into its curriculum the actual language and cognitive skills required of the content course. There are other pedagogical advantages for a language course to share the informational content of a content course. Students would, for instance, perceive the relevance of such a course more readily than that of a general language course. This tends to enhance their motivation to learn and hence the effectiveness of the course. A further advantage is that students' shared knowledge and learning experience in a discipline could facilitate and substantiate their discussions. Language learning becomes more likely to succeed as it takes place in a meaningful and contextualized form, with the focus on acquiring and sharing information.

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In spite of these advantages, there are notable objections to linking language and content instruction. When discussing the feasibility of link writing programs, Spack (1988) contends that the teaching of writing in the disciplines is best left to the teachers of those disciplines. Her first and foremost reason is the inadequacy of English teachers in dealing with content at two levels. At one level, they may be deficient in the knowledge of the subject matter itself, and "therefore find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being less knowledgeable than their students" (p.37). At another level, they may lack the expertise of writing in the disciplines, which "requires a complete, active, struggling engagement with the facts and principles of a discipline, an encounter with the discipline's texts and the incorporation of them into one's own work, the framing of one's knowledge within the myriad conventions that help define a discipline, the persuading of other investigators that one's knowledge is legitimate." (Rose, 1985, p.359 quoted in Spack, 1988). According to Spack, a literature review on programmes which do succeed in teaching students to write in other disciplines reveals that the teachers are themselves immersed in the discipline. They are either teachers within the discipline or those who possess a strong background in the disciplinary discourse (p.40). The importance for the adjunct language teachers to be familiar with the material of the content course is also emphasized by Snow and Brinton (1990, P.178).

Another often mentioned limitation of link courses is their administrative cost (e.g. Snow and Brinton 1990). Since the success of the programme depends to a large extent on the success of the collaboration between two departments, a high level of goodwill and commitment is required. This crucial feature, however, is not easily attainable in many tertiary institutions. Subject teachers may perceive language learning to be entirely outside their brief and thus reject the proposed involvement in this kind of collaborative exercise. Collaboration also means extra time and workload which may not be adequately recognized or provided for by the administration.

#### **Linking language and content instruction on the ACSS course**

The ACSS course, which aims to enhance HKU students' intellectual fluency in English, was first piloted with the students pursuing the degree of Bachelor of Business and Administration (BBA) in 1990-91. When we first developed the course, we were faced with at least two options in the selection of content. The first option was to stay within the traditional ESL boundaries and adopt content from 'general' topic areas ranging from language to pollution to AIDS. The second option was to move into the confines of students' disciplines and use the disciplinary content. We decided that we would attempt the latter as much as possible in the hope of enhancing the relevance of the course to the academic interest of the students. The course content was therefore oriented towards the social science subjects studied by the BBA students, though some materials based on current affairs were also included. Reading passages were largely taken from introductory texts on Sociology, Economics, Psychology and Management, and some class time was actually devoted to the discussion of an assignment on Management. The latter activity was very positively rated by students in the post-course evaluation questionnaire, where they indicated a strong demand for more of this type of discipline-related activity on the ACSS course.

This led the course designers to build in a more discipline-related component in the course in 1991-92 when it was extended to students pursuing the degrees of Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Sciences. Twelve 'liaison persons', six from the Language department and six from the Faculty of Social Science, were identified and paired to produce six discipline-related modules, each of which consisted of a disciplinary project and a set of related materials. The modules included Management Studies, Social Work, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science and Statistics. Students were required to study one of these modules in addition to the common core materials.

The two-semester 60-hour course was divided into two distinct but related phases, the first practising academic communication skills in the context of a language-related project; the second consolidating and extending these skills in the context of a Social Science disciplinary project (Figure 1).

The principal aim of the project work was to replicate an investigative cycle, similar to that expected of students when tackling a major academic assignment. This required students to define the problem; to locate, select, analyse, evaluate and synthesise relevant information; and to articulate an intellectual position or point of view. Each project culminated in an oral presentation and a written assignment.

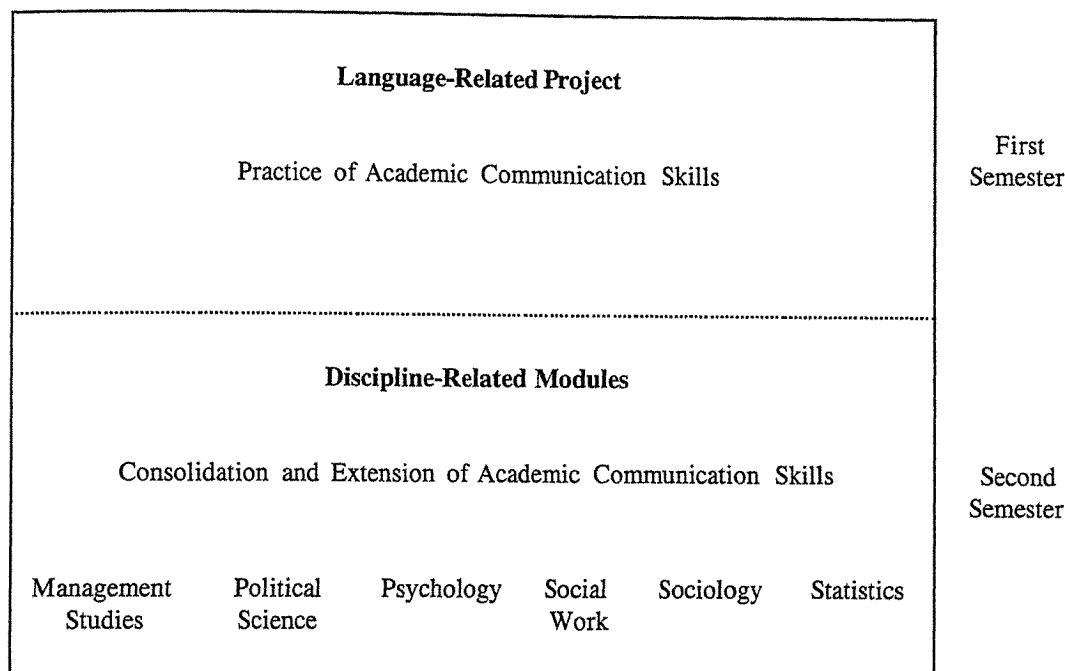


Figure 1: The ACSS syllabus

In the language-related project, the course material dealt primarily with the medium of instruction in Hong Kong, but the eventual project topic choices could be related to any language issues of interest to the students and teachers. Potential topics included: "Should Putonghua be made a compulsory subject for all secondary students in Hong Kong?", "Are women better at learning languages than men?", "What are the differences between good and poor language learners?", "Is rap a legitimate form of language?" and many others. On the other hand, the disciplinary project was primarily based on materials and topics negotiated by language teachers and subject teachers. The topics and formats were wide ranging both within and across the six disciplinary projects. To give a few examples, they included Sociology essays on 'Sexism in advertising', 'The hidden curriculum', Social Work reports on 'Housing Services', 'The decline of volunteerism', and Statistics research proposals on 'The adequacy of the Hong Kong system of water reservoirs'.

The rationale for this two-part syllabus was that while we reckoned that it was desirable to introduce discipline-related content into the course, we understood that time and resources available would not allow a full conversion of the course into adjunct programmes. We were also aware of our potential deficiencies in teaching disciplinary content as described by Spack (1988). We therefore opted for a combination of content from both our own discipline (Language) and the students' disciplines (Social Sciences). In the former, we could comfortably and fully use our disciplinary expertise to guide the students on both linguistic and substantive issues. In the latter, we moved away from our own disciplinary territory into the students', playing mainly the role of an 'intelligent' lay audience to be informed about substantive issues. At the same time we continued to offer linguistic help to students when they attempted to explain, summarise, clarify and evaluate these substantive issues. We understood that the demarcation between language and content was not particularly helpful because we believed that

language and content often could not be satisfactorily compartmentalized and addressed separately in teaching. The role of an 'intelligent audience' also raised concern about the credibility of the language teachers in producing and teaching disciplinary materials. We, therefore, perceive a need for reviewing and perhaps improving this situation. We will return to this point later in our discussion.

In the next part, we will describe our experiences of collaborating with the content teachers in producing two of the modules - Management Studies and Social Work.

### **The Management Studies module**

In the first meeting between the liaison persons responsible for the Management Studies module, a number of issues were discussed:

- 1) What area of Management Studies should the module focus on?
- 2) How long should the final written product be?
- 3) Should students work individually or in small groups?
- 4) In what format should the final product be written -- as a report or an essay?
- 5) Should empirical data be collected and included?

After some discussion, negotiation and compromising, three conclusions were reached:

- 1) the topic could be anything, as long as it was within the area of "Business Studies";
- 2) the final product, which would be in the form of a report, should be around 1,500 words;
- 3) students would work in small groups.

While the meeting was useful and much work was accomplished, the language liaison teacher left the meeting feeling slightly disconcerted. His colleague in the Management Studies Department was polite, co-operative, and at times obliging, but was not particularly enthusiastic about the project. There was little doubt that he would like his students to learn something from this project. Yet, he was also very explicit in stating that he would not like his students to be burdened with too much work. He emphasized that his students already carried a full load and that the English Centre should not overwork them. To him (and probably to many students), the ACSS course was only a marginal course with no credit-bearing status<sup>1</sup> in the Social Science curriculum, so the expectation of students on this course should be reduced to the minimum.

Bearing the agreed conclusions as well as this explicit message in mind, the language teacher decided to adopt the 'case method' of Marketing as the topic of the module. It was felt that when compared to Accounting or Finance, Marketing was less technical and more accessible to language teachers. The discussion of marketing issues also involved more use of language as opposed to statistics and figures. The module required students to produce a report and to give an oral presentation.

At the end of the semester, lecturers from the Management Studies Department were invited to come and evaluate the oral presentation. A portion of the students' reports were also sent to the department for co-assessment. Overall, the whole operation went rather smoothly.

### **The Social Work module**

When compared with the Management Studies module, the Social Work module was in a slightly more advantageous position in that it was not necessary to design a new project, as the Social Work Department had already set up one for their students. It was agreed that this project would be done by students for both departments. Overloading the students, therefore, did not present itself as a

problem. However, some adjustments in the two departments were still necessary. For instance, the Social Work Department had to change the language of project presentations from Cantonese to English because of the nature of the ACSS course. The English Centre, when developing associated module materials on report writing, had to use as much Social Work content as possible.

Although collaboration was smooth at the beginning, problems arose when there was a change of liaison person in the Social Work Department in the middle of the term. As this new liaison person was also new to the Department, communication about the requirements of the Social Work project was not always successful. One example was that in spite of our initial agreement on requiring individual reports from students, some Social Work tutors did not adhere to the requirement. The consequence was that some teachers were faced with disconcerted students querying the inconsistent requirements among groups.

Another example was related to the co-assessment of the written project reports. Although the language liaison teacher made an effort to initiate a discussion of the results of co-assessment, she was eventually informed that the subject teachers' grades were irretrievable in the process of conflating scores of all subjects into one grade for students. An additional difficulty arose in the second year of implementation (1992/93) when the Social Work liaison teacher attempted to consolidate the link between the disciplinary and language courses by proposing the same tutorial topics for both courses. The fact that his proposal was turned down by his colleagues revealed that perhaps not all subject teachers appreciated the link between their discipline and language instruction.

In spite of these problems, the second year of implementation witnessed some informative dialogue between the language and subject teachers. At the beginning of the academic year, five of the Social Work teachers accepted the liaison teachers' invitation to a meeting to discuss the English needs of their students. The language liaison teacher was supplied with some useful information on the students' needs and difficulties in using English in the disciplinary studies.

### Reflections on the collaborative experiences

After developing and teaching the modules for two years, three issues have become apparent to us.

#### 1) *Collaboration between departments*

Our experiences have shown that collaboration between departments is not easy at all. One main difficulty is that administrative practicalities have placed a very high demand on time and effort from both departments. Finding time to meet, trivial as the problem may sound, is often difficult, and can sometimes hamper the progress of work. In some cases, a failure to meet to discuss things thoroughly can lead to communication breakdown and undesirable consequences.

Another difficulty is that the two departments may have divergent beliefs concerning how 'demanding' the modules should be. For instance, in the case of Management Studies, while language teachers would like to feature the discipline-specific project as a major component of the course, some subject teachers may worry that students are over-burdened.

A third difficulty is that language and subject teachers are not equally enthusiastic and convinced about collaboration. Although most of the subject teachers comply with requests from the English Centre, they are generally less keen on playing an active role in the development and evaluation of these modules. Some of them may even perceive the collaborative work to be completely outside their brief. In this academic year (1992/93), some difficulties were reported by language liaison teachers other than us in inviting subject teachers to co-assess students' oral presentations of their projects. There were also

difficulties in persuading some teachers (both language and subject) to become actively involved in liaison work.

We believe that unless there is more communication between the departments, and unless there is a greater conviction among teachers that this kind of collaborative work will benefit the students, the development of the modules will become stagnant and the rejection of collaboration will increase. Continual support and constructive feedback from their counterparts are especially crucial to the material writers of these modules, because they need to be fully aware of the new developments in the subjects, and the ways in which these new developments may alter the needs of the students. In order to encourage teaching staff from both departments to continue collaborating, the University will also need to demonstrate its full support by providing time and recognition for such work.

## 2) *Staff development*

A central question arising from the link between content and language instruction is related to the amount of disciplinary knowledge which needs to be possessed by the language teachers. How much do they need to know about the discipline in order to produce and teach a module which will not just skate over the surface of the content but engage learners in a deeper level of analysis of the subject?

It seems to us that there are three possible answers to this question. First, although the material writer and the language teachers can never claim to be experts in the subject, they can still act as an 'intelligent audience' and provide guidance to students as language experts. The second answer is that the material writers can receive some formal training in the subject they are writing about. For example, the Management Studies module writer can take a course in 'Introduction to Marketing'. When writing the module, he can then provide his colleagues with a more informative and instructive teachers' guide. The third possibility is to encourage both the material writer and the teachers to be immersed in the subject. As suggested by Snow and Brinton (1990:178), because English language development is done:

"through the medium of the content material, the language instructor must also be familiar with this material. Thus for the English/ESL instructor to be maximally effective, a substantial amount of time must be devoted to:

- (1) learning the material of the content course,
- (2) developing language teaching materials based on the content, and
- (3) providing feedback both on the linguistic aspects of the students' work and (to a lesser degree) on the quality of content."

In the long run, immersion such as that proposed by Snow and Brinton appears to be the best option as it will improve the language teachers' disciplinary knowledge and hence their credibility in producing and teaching the disciplinary materials. But in order to implement this option, departmental support in terms of time, finance, and official recognition is essential. Staff continuity is also extremely important. It is highly desirable for both departments to assign the same staff to teaching and liaising the same modules for at least a few years. Such an arrangement will not only ensure a better continual development and renewal of the modules, but will also enhance the mutual understanding and trust among the liaison teachers from both departments, which is crucial to successful collaboration.

## 3) *Co-Assessment*

In evaluating students' success in completing these discipline-related modules, subject teachers are invited to assess the oral presentations and written reports of the disciplinary projects. This co-assessment exercise proves to be instructive in that it enables teachers in both departments to be more openly articulate about their assessment criteria. We become more informed about the resemblances and discrepancies in the major concerns of both departments in assessing students' communicative

performance. This greater awareness is beneficial to our teaching as it helps us reorientate our expectations of students and at the same time make these expectations explicit to our students, who can then have a clear goal to work towards. Moreover, the knowledge that their work will be assessed by their subject teachers appears to have improved the motivation of students.

### Conclusion

Student feedback regarding the discipline-related projects has been in general more positive than the language-related project. This in a way has confirmed the value of instituting a disciplinary component on the ACSS course. Our experiences of collaborating with subject teachers have also demonstrated the importance and usefulness of maintaining a dialogue between the two departments to ensure the adequacy of this disciplinary component in meeting the needs of the students. However, the difficulties in its implementation, as described earlier, will need to be addressed if the link between language and content instruction is to be maximally effective.

### Note

1 The ACSS course (to be retitled as "English for Academic Communication") will become credit-bearing from 1993/94 onwards. Whether this change of status will lead to a change of perception about the English course among students and subject teachers is still a question to be answered

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## Reports

### Using Study Guides: An Approach To Self-Access

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#### Introduction

When I arrived in Hong Kong University (HKU) in September 1991, I had but a handful of days to prepare for teaching. I was presented with my timetable, which informed me that one of my courses, English for Arts Students (EAS), would include a one hour Self-Access period. I was not, at first, quite certain what this involved, but on perusal of the Teachers' Notes, I discovered that this entailed the students working in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) on material that would cater for individually identified needs within English language learning. This discovery initially quelled my fears of finding myself in a blind-leading-the-blind-situation for I was very familiar with individualised learning schemes. The fears returned, however, when I looked around the SAC and realised that I could never become familiar with all its material in just two days and that, being new to the Hong Kong education system and Hong Kong students, I was unclear as to how much guidance my students would need in order to make optimum use of the self-access facilities. This report describes my initial approach to self-access work with first year Arts students at HKU, explains my rejection of that approach and outlines my current development of Study Guides for students in line with the adoption of an approach which seeks to provide a guided independence for students.

#### Criterion for initial approach

In the light of my uncertainty as to the amount of guidance to give, and not wishing to make the students feel, now that they had entered a university, that they were being dictated to and treated as children, I toyed with the idea of discussing with each student their needs, as suggested by the EAS materials, and then leaving them to make their own choice of materials to fulfil these needs from what was available in the SAC. This would make them feel that they had entered the adult world of independence, I argued. But then I considered how little experience these students would have had at making choices of educational materials and decided that this in-at-the-deep-end approach would be likely to lead to a great deal of confusion and frustration and might even leave some students with a sense of being abandoned by their teacher.

Thus I opted, initially, for maximum guidance of self-access work, feeling, along with Barnett and Jordan (1991, p.308) that to let students choose freely, in the supposed interests of independence, would be "the height of folly".

#### Initial approach

As Trim (1976; in Sheerin 1991, p.144) noted, "It is possible to pursue individualization in a

thoroughly authoritarian framework", and this is precisely what my students did. I assigned each student two or three activities from those listed in the EAS file of self-access materials (1991 version) on the basis of their declared needs on the EAS contract. The students then reported back to their tutorial groups at two week intervals on the activities they had completed. They gave a brief outline of the content of each activity, evaluated its usefulness in fulfilling their declared needs and stated how interesting they had found it and whether or not they would recommend it to other students. They were then assigned further work. It certainly was prescriptive.

The advantages of this approach were threefold (in fact, fourfold if you include ensuring my peace of mind that my students were not awash in a sea of choice):

- a) It acquainted me fairly quickly with the contents of a wide variety of self-access materials, above and beyond the ones I investigated myself.
- b) It made me aware of the students' opinions of the usefulness and interest level of the materials.
- c) It ensured that the students completed a large cross-section of activities in the SAC.

The students themselves seemed quite happy with this arrangement and were, in general, eager to discuss what they had done in self-access, however I found I was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the approach. As I reflected on the possibilities inherent in self-access work, it seemed that the opportunities it offered were not being fully exploited. While self-access work need not be equated with student autonomy (it can, as in my approach, be individualised but totally other-directed) it could well act as "a means of promoting learner autonomy and self-directed learning" (Sheerin, 1991, p.144) - an educational goal in itself. However, it was not acting in this way for my students; the only decision my students had to make was when to study. There was no call for students to take responsibility for the other "major decisions, such as why, what, where ... and how they are going to study" (Benson, 1992, p.31). Quite clearly, my approach in no way fostered learner autonomy.

Taking into account that at HKU English courses are offered only to first year undergraduates and students must thereafter work on English enhancement without teacher support, student autonomy in language learning is highly desirable. It would clearly be advantageous for students to be able to make productive use of self-access facilities independently. As Benson notes "self-access represents an opportunity to continue study in subsequent years" (ibid, p.31).

With all this in mind, I decided that a new approach had to be adopted. My initial approach had been quite expedient at the outset of my encounter with self-access, but I felt that the time had come to investigate possibilities which would engender more autonomy for those students who wished to be self-directing. (The very question of 'choosing' self-direction is one I intend to explore at greater length in a later paper).

#### **A revised approach to self-access**

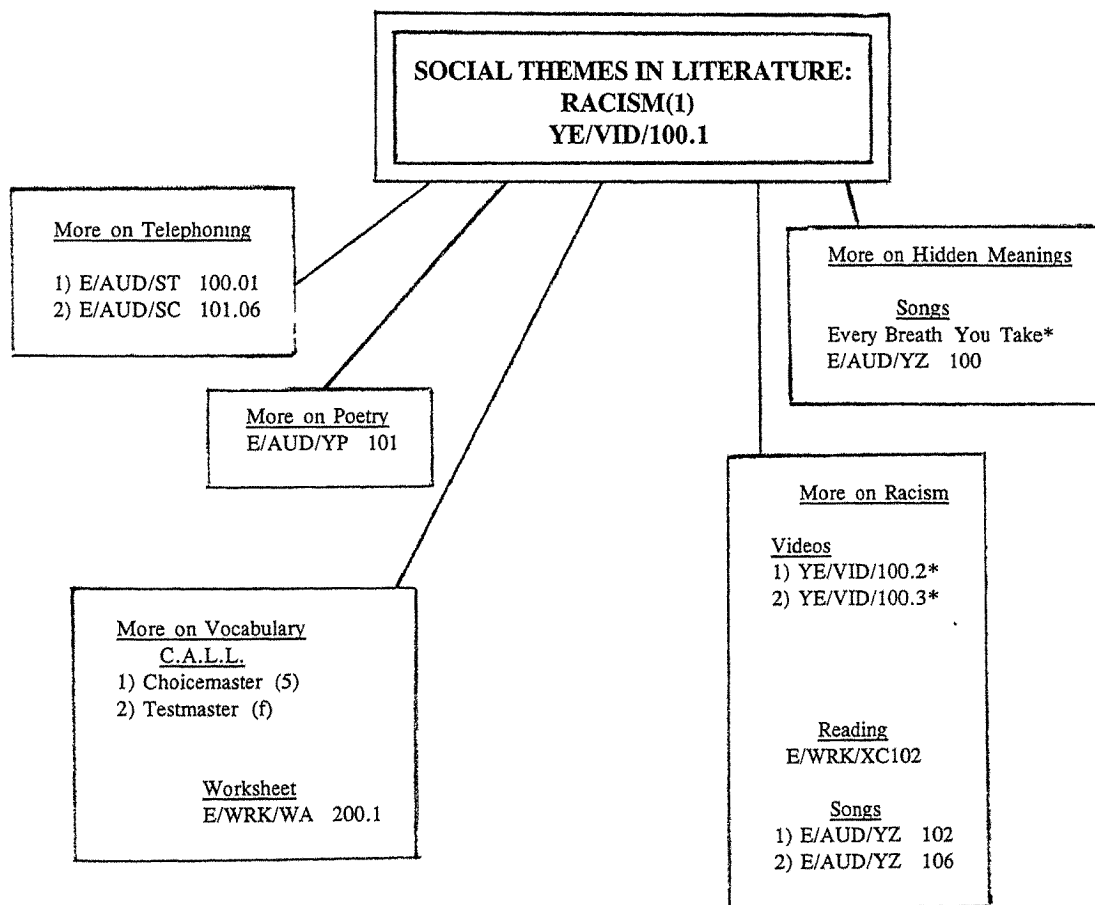
As students who use the SAC will, naturally, vary in the degree of self-direction they are able, or wish, to adopt, it is desirable that a centre should cater for a variety of approaches to learning. It was with this in mind that I decided to devise what I have called Study Guides for my students in my revised approach to self-access work. These guides take the form of diagrammatic representations of inter-related activities to be undertaken and skills to be practised within a guided framework. The first of these guides is shown below.

- In devising the guides I have attempted to make provision for two broad categories of students:
- a) those who are other-directed,
  - b) those who wish to move towards self-direction.

Perhaps I should explain before I proceed further why I have chosen the term 'study guide' rather than the more widely used 'pathway'. This is largely because the image that is generated in my mind by the term 'pathway' does not seem to fit with how I picture these schemes of work being used. I see a pathway as a scheme of work "carefully sequenced to guide learners through presentation and graded practice" (Sheerin, 1991, p.152) of one skill or one grammar point. I picture learners starting with a prescribed activity and then moving along one of a variety of paths depending upon their level of attainment in the skill practised in the first activity. Thus, a low level of attainment would lead to a path offering remedial work, a higher level to a path offering consolidation, and so on. Each path could consist of several activities or exercises leading students through the material in a SAC. The paths could be totally prescribed or could offer choices at certain points along the way. The creation of such pathways may well be worth pursuing at some future date, but it would be quite difficult to create these in the SAC at HKU given the material that is available at present.

What I have in mind for a study guide is not highly sequenced and does not lead the way along a route of graded practice. The guides rather suggest a variety of unsequenced activities which could arise, depending upon interest or need, from one central activity. The guides are meant to act as an initiation both to the variety of material available in self-access and to the idea of constructing a study programme; they do not create paths but rather they lead learners to the beginning of several paths which the learners may, or may not, choose to explore further, and they act as models for student-constructed schemes of work.

Naturally, the term 'pathways' may not generate for others the image it generates for me and they may, therefore, have no trouble in equating what I have called 'study guides' with the term 'pathways'. If this is so, let it be; a guide by any other name would show the way.



\* Other study guide available

### Study guides to self-direction

Most students entering a university could probably be categorised as other-directed, where 'other' usually implies a teacher, or a person of similar status viewed by the student as a figure of authority. Given the schooling experienced by the vast majority of students this is only to be expected. Those students who are self-directed are certainly a minority group. Such students will have little need of study guides for they are able to establish their own programmes of study and, with perhaps no more than an occasional consultation, work independently. It was not for those students that the study guides I constructed were intended. My main objective was to introduce those other-directed students who wish to become independent to the idea of self-directed study. The study guides are intended to serve as paradigms to explain to students one way of creating a personal learning programme based on individual interests and continuous self-assessment of needs.

Perhaps the easiest way to explain how the guides can be used would be to give a step by step description of how I proceeded with the sample guide shown above. The first activity was used in a classroom session as an introduction to self-access work. This activity involved watching a videoed reading of a poem by Wole Soyinka on the theme of racism. The poem for the most part takes the form of a telephone conversation. This led to a general discussion on the theme of racism and then, for homework, the class completed the worksheet accompanying the video which had gap-filling, comprehension and vocabulary exercises and questions on hidden meanings.

In their next tutorial we discussed the advisability of approaching self-access work systematically rather than randomly choosing material with the vague aim of "improving my English" - a course of action which could well lead to "a sense of not having accomplished anything" (Barnett and Jordan, 1991, p.308). We discussed several possible ways of planning work and selecting material, based on:

- a) interest in a certain subject,
- b) a perceived weakness, either self-assessed or teacher-directed, and a consequent need to improve in a certain area,
- c) a wish to consolidate a particular language strength.

After this I asked the students to think about the worksheet they had done on the Wole Soyinka poem and to decide, bearing in mind the bases for selection that we had discussed, what kind of self-access work they would do next. Fifty percent of the students chose to work on vocabulary building, citing difficulties with understanding the vocabulary of the video or with completing the vocabulary exercise on the worksheet. Another six (out of a total of twenty eight) chose to study more about racism, as they were interested in the theme and did not feel that any of the exercises on the worksheet had posed enough difficulties to indicate a weakness in those areas. All the students had found the exercise on hidden meanings very difficult, but only one thought it was interesting or important enough to follow up. Two more students wanted to look at some more poetry.

Four students said they could not decide what to do because they had found everything difficult, particularly listening to the video. I suggested that it might be a good idea for those students to watch other videos or listen to audio cassettes on the same theme as the original activity, as familiarity with the subject matter might make the task of listening somewhat easier.

This left only one student who claimed to have had no difficulty with any of the work and was not interested in the theme. Although I suggested other work for this student, based on her declared interest in Business English, she did not complete the activity and, in fact, rarely attended tutorials. As this student admitted, when pressed, that she considered self-access "a waste of time", I did not pursue the use of study guides with her, but asked her to complete the course-related self-access. She claimed to consider these "more relevant" to her studies.

When the students had decided what kind of work to do, I presented them with the study guide

and asked them to complete one or two activities from their chosen branch before the next tutorial. They could also complete activities from another branch if motivated to do so.

In this way, following further consultations with students, both in person and via comments in their self-access record books, on what had proved useful and/or interesting, the first semester was completed. By the end of that semester all but two students had completed at least five activities from the guide, apart from the original class-based activity.

It may at first sight seem that such a study guide contributes little towards the declared aim of encouraging self-direction. There appears to have been very little that was not directed by the teacher. This is to some extent true, but the progress towards self-direction should, in my opinion, be very gradual. The 'how' (depending upon your interpretation of 'how') and 'where' of studying were still teacher-directed, but the students did, in fact, choose not only when to study, but why (not in absolute terms, of course, but in terms of why 'vocabulary' rather than 'hidden meanings') and, within defined limits, what to study. Some would claim, I suppose, that there was, in reality, complete teacher control as the original choice of activity was the teacher's. For this intervention I make no apology. With students en route for self-direction, I feel that intervention is necessary and this view seems to have become widely accepted. Sheerin (1991) has noted that:

the rather severe early view of learner responsibility and the non-interventionist approach to learner autonomy have in recent years given way to a more pragmatic and realistic acceptance of and respect for learners as they really are (p.151).

Intervention, in the form of choice of initial activity, is crucial. It is from this root that all the follow-up work stems. In order for students to practise making choices, the first activity must lead to a range of choices to be made; it must have several facets that could be exploited. For this reason, the ideal activity is one accompanied by a purpose-designed worksheet which guides students' attention in several directions.

The advantage of such an activity is that the worksheet exercises enable students to assess their performance in several areas (or enable teachers to do so) and this assessment can form the basis for their follow-on activity. My contention is, though there have been numerous contradictory studies on this issue (see Sheerin, 1991, p.153 for details on this), that students are often rather unreliable, perhaps through inexperience, at assessing their own needs, in terms of language improvement, without being faced with the concrete results of an exercise that they could not do well. In the case of HKU students, for example, "Learners themselves do not often rate reading as one of their major areas of difficulty" (Allison and Ip, 1991, p.33). However, in my experience, the students tend to over-estimate their abilities in this area and this impression seems to be supported by the results of Allison and Ip's studies which "suggest that students' reading problems are more serious and persistent than might have been anticipated" (op. cit. p.44). Perhaps if students were faced with a poor performance on a reading comprehension exercise alongside a good performance on a listening task on the same worksheet they would begin to question their original impression of their priorities. It is in order to encourage students to consider their priorities that a range of possible outcomes from the initial activity is essential. And, thus, teacher intervention in the choice of this activity is advisable.

Intervention is also necessary to explain the construction of the study guides so that students can use them as models to devise their own learning programmes where each activity is related to something that has gone before and is chosen on the basis of a need or interest which has arisen from an earlier activity. In this way the students can begin to learn what can be exploited from any activity and how their own interests or strengths and weaknesses can be used to decide upon where to go next.

There are some teachers who will perhaps question how choosing the interest direction on a study guide can be justified pedagogically. I consider that the motivational factor is ample justification

for following interest in a particular theme. Some students will assimilate far more vocabulary for instance, from watching a video on a subject which interests them than from completing an exercise designed specifically to build up vocabulary. This is especially the case where the 'motivation' of success in examinations is absent from the picture.

### Student-generated guides

The idea behind study guides is that students can use them as models of how to plan their own schemes of work. They are meant primarily to be an initiation to self-direction. This being the case, at the end of the first semester, I asked my students to try to produce their own study guides. This met with varying degrees of success.

There were only two pairs of students who had grasped the idea of how to construct guides really well and they created multi-faceted schemes of work, with three or four branches each. These guides, with only slight modifications, could easily be used by others in the SAC and I intend to make them available for future students with acknowledgements to their authors. Using student-generated work could possibly encourage other students to create personal learning schemes, by example, and might foster a greater sense of involvement in the creation of work schemes if it was felt that they could be useful to other learners. These students had been able to select an activity which gave rise to a variety of follow-up work and had, for the most part, chosen suitable material to begin branches which might later be continued, if interest and/or need were apparent.

One of these guides started with an audio tape on youth culture which gave rise to branches on youth culture (the theme), note-taking (the main skill practised) and listening (the main activity). The second guide had a video on gifted children as a starting point, which led to branches on psychology and education (the main themes), vocabulary (following on a worksheet exercise) and note-taking (identified as useful for completing the tasks although not highlighted on the worksheet as the main skill).

Eight other students produced topic-based guides where video and audio activities built around one theme were suggested. These guides could also be used by future students, but I feel that they might not prove quite so useful once a database is installed in the SAC as this will make it relatively simple for all students to locate material on any theme in which they are interested. A ready-made study guide will, of course, save the students the time required to make the search and it could be argued that this is spoon-feeding and will only encourage laziness rather than independence. However, it could, conversely, be argued that any means of making materials easily accessible will encourage SAC use and, therefore, be a potential activator of further study.

The remainder of the students did not produce anything resembling the original study guide. Several decided to continue working on courses, eg. Situational Dialogues, to which they had been introduced on the 'telephoning branch' of the guide. Others decided to follow up work on the study guide built up around the two other videos suggested on the 'racism branch'. Only a handful of students chose material totally at random. (At least, it seemed random to me as I found it quite difficult to ascertain what the connections between the activities could possibly be.) Insofar as very few usable study guides were produced, this experiment could not be described as a success. However, in terms of what I learnt from it, the exercise was extremely worthwhile.

It was quite clear from the results that the students varied considerably (which, of course, is not a surprise) as to the degree of self-direction they were able or willing to adopt. Those who produced their own guides were clearly much further down the road to autonomy than their classmates. Upon discussion with those students who did not produce guides, it transpired that those who had chosen material seemingly at random had not really understood the idea of being systematic in producing a scheme of work, which tends to indicate that not only was my explanation unsatisfactory, but also that

far more practice with established guides is necessary for some students before they can be expected to attempt to devise personal learning programmes.

Those students who had followed established courses stated that they had understood what they were supposed to do but had chosen to follow courses, accepting the need for a systematic approach, either because planning a study guide was too time-consuming or because they had found it too difficult, without guidance, both to choose an initial activity that could generate several branches and to choose material to fit the branches. Many of this group said that they would have preferred to have been given a ready-made guide from which they could have chosen which activities to complete and they would have preferred more frequent discussions with the teacher on their self-access activities rather than to be left for four or five weeks (this was the time they were given to produce a guide) to work on self-access on their own.

Perhaps the most important lesson that I learnt, or maybe it was more a suspicion that I had confirmed, was that some of the first year students at HKU are unwilling or are not yet ready (and this could be the most crucial point of all) to adopt a completely self-directed approach to language learning. Perhaps they lack the necessary maturity, or the necessary self-discipline, or the necessary motivation, or the necessary time commitment to become self-directing. Whatever the reason, these students choose not to be autonomous in their language learning and it is, therefore, necessary for guidance of some kind to be made available to them.

#### Study guides for other-directed students

For those students who do not choose autonomy but prefer to remain other-directed, study guides cannot act as models for constructing their own learning programmes as it is not their desire for them to do so, but this does not mean that the guides cannot be useful to them. For those students a guide can act as "an attractive and immediately accessible way of enabling students to experience in a tangible way the possibilities available to them" (Sheerin, 1991, p.152). In other words, it provides them with a ready-made programme of activities which, when completed, can give them a sense of achievement and, hopefully, along the way will lead to some improvement in at least one aspect of English Language learning. A guide such as the example shown could provide a student with eight hours or so of self-access work if the whole guide was completed, during which time the student would have been exposed to a wide variety of English and would have practised a range of skills. The work could give students some sense of freedom (even a student who does not wish to be self-directing in terms of choosing materials most probably appreciates this) in that after the first activity they can choose in what order to complete the remaining activities. This freedom allows them to plan their self-access work according to the time they have available on different occasions: a small, but perhaps valuable, opportunity to practise some time-management.

The guide could quite successfully be used by a student who does not have access to any kind of teacher-input or advice, as an explanatory sheet accompanies the guides and all those activities with worksheets have answer keys. The guides then become rather like programmed learning materials where "many of the management tasks undertaken by the teacher are built into the materials" (Dickinson, 1981. Cited in Sheerin, 1991, p.150). This is, in fact, how Dickinson believes that self-access materials need to be designed when self-access is undertaken by learners who are not self-directed. The guides can basically replace a taught programme (the teacher being indirectly present through suggestions and answer key); they offer a measure of security to students working alone who do not have the confidence, or maybe desire, to create their own schemes of work.

One great advantage of students using a study guide is that they may be encouraged to try activities which they would not have tried without the suggestion being made and this prevents the students getting into the rut of using only one of the many facilities available. A guide may also introduce

them to an activity which is part of a series or to another study guide (by cross-referencing) and this could lead to a decision to veer off from the guide to complete more of that series or to move to another guide. This might be one step, however small, towards a more self-directed approach.

### Study guides and teachers

Study Guides are intended primarily to be used by students. They can profitably be used by those who wish to move towards self-direction as jumping off blocks from which they can practise making choices and become aware of how making connections can allow purposeful study, and by other-directed learners as easily accessible, ready-made schemes of work. And perhaps they can also profitably be used by teachers.

Those teachers who are sceptical about the possibility of student self-direction may find themselves using the self-access section of their courses as a time for classroom-assigned projects or course-related homework based on material in the SAC. This is, of course, a perfectly legitimate use of self-access time, but, if it is the only use made of the SAC, it may perhaps prevent the development of self-direction in those students who are willing and able to progress towards autonomy. After all, although we say 'you can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink', it is equally true that if you don't take the horse to water, it doesn't have the opportunity to drink. And it may take it a long time to find the water by itself. Possibly teachers may find study guides useful in providing for the needs of those students who wish to become self-directed, whilst at the same time accommodating those students who wish to remain other-directed and satisfying the teacher's desire to ensure that all of them do undertake self-access work and are, therefore, exposed to a wide variety of learning opportunities.

Teachers can use the guides in various ways. It would be possible to assign the same guide to a whole class allowing students to work through it at her own pace, checking the worksheets when completed. It would also be possible to allow students, individually, in pairs or in small groups, to choose different guides and to choose how many of the activities on each guide to complete. Another possibility would be to begin by assigning guides and then, gradually, to encourage students to veer off along one of the branches, following consultation with the teacher. All teachers, except, naturally, those who find study guides too controlling of student choice behaviour, would probably be able to find a way of utilising these guides that suits their own views on guidance and choice.

### Conclusion

Devising study guides involves a considerable investment of time, perhaps as much in the creation and organising of the materials upon which the guides are based as in the drawing up of the guides themselves, and for this investment to be worthwhile the guides should be able to be profitably used by as large a number of people as possible. This aim can only be achieved if the guides can allow a variety of approaches to suit individual learners.

The same could, in fact, be said of a SAC itself. There is no 'best' way to approach self-access. Users must decide for themselves how to make optimum use of the facilities available. And by 'users' here I refer to teachers as well as students. Amongst the facilities on offer are study guides. They can be used in a variety of ways to suit a variety of approaches to learning. As such, hopefully, they can make self-access a valuable experience for all who choose to use them.

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## Teachers' Attitudes to Self-Access Learning

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Though no research has proven that teachers-their attitudes, values, expectations, relationship with students, and confidence in self-access learning-make a difference to the success of this type of learning, these factors are often raised as significant (Littlejohn, 1985; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; O'Dell, 1992; Nakhoul, 1993). For example, based on an experiment with 150 Bachelor of Education students, Littlejohn (1985) found two factors that appeared to influence students' success in self-access learning most: the maturity and previous experience of learners, and the attitude of the teacher. O'Dell (1992) placed a similar focus on the teacher in the process of self-access language learning. She summarised her view as follows:

Our experience ...has shown very clearly that most of the students who make full use of the learning centre's resources are in classes where the teacher is confident and well-informed as far as learning centre use is concerned. ...Thus, the teacher has a key role to play in the exploitation of the study centre (p. 153).

In this paper we will detail the results of two surveys of teacher attitudes to self-access which took place at the English Centre at the University of Hong Kong during the 1992-93 academic year and relate these back to an earlier survey of teacher attitudes conducted in the previous year.

The original survey conducted by members of the Self-Access Action Research (SAAR) group was intended to identify teachers' views of self-access in the context of its introduction into two major first year English courses in the academic year 1991-2, particularly since one-third (20 hours) of these courses had been allocated to self-access study. As noted in the original report on the project (Martyn and Chan, 1992):

We believed that the success of self-access hinged as much on learner training as on materials, so were convinced that to make the whole SA [self-access] concept work, we would need to work on human resources and implementation strategies (p.59).

The survey confirmed that although most teachers had a fairly positive view of self-access learning, they were concerned about its implementation and effectiveness as a required course component. The results also pointed to the need to develop more effective teaching/learning strategies to maximize the potential benefits of self-access. Thus the members tested various approaches to self-access during the second semester focusing on learner training and motivation. At the end of the school year, the group made several recommendations to the English Centre. Most influential were those dealing with orientation to self-access.

As a result orientation materials and activities for both students and staff were developed. These consisted of: a video that introduced self-access learning and the Practice Lab facilities; a Practice Lab orientation map; a crossword puzzle that required students to use Practice Lab resources and facilities in order to complete it; an orientation game in which students had to try out self-access materials to answer questions on cards; a Practice Lab tour in which a teacher or consultant would briefly introduce self-access materials and facilities; a unit introducing self-access learning in the course materials; a self-access log book that both helped students to plan their self-access learning and provided a record of their self-access work over the year; and tutorials in which teachers and students could discuss their progress in self-access study.

There was also a half-day workshop for teachers which included brief statements by a number of staff members on the new cataloguing system, new materials, and the role of self-access in various courses. After this teachers went to the Practice Lab for an experience of students' orientation to self-access. Some were given cards containing the kind of advice that had often been given to students in the past, for example, "You say you want to improve your pronunciation. Try using *Ship or Sheep*." Other teachers tried out some of the new activities listed above. During this period in the Lab, three staff members who had been assigned as consultants (i.e., self-access facilitators or helpers) for students also acted in this role for teachers. The workshop ended with small group discussions of how teachers felt when they tried to follow the advice or do the activities they were assigned.

#### Self-Access/Practice Lab Orientation Questionnaire

Towards the end of the first semester, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire on self-access/Practice Lab orientation for themselves and their students. They identified the activities they had used, rated their effectiveness, and gave comments in support of their ratings.

Teachers identified the activities they had selected for self-orientation; in rank order they were: the *Workshop for Teachers*, the *Self-Access Video* and *Lab Tour*, and *Orientation Game Cards*. The *Workshop* was rated very highly with 'excellent' and 'useful' as common descriptors. One extended comment offers a good summary: 'Excellent overview and update for both new and old staff. Good range of presenters and variety of activities'. One respondent focused on the *hands-on* approach of the second part of the workshop: 'This was a good way to get direct experience plus feedback/teacher opinion.' Only one negative comment was offered: 'not particularly productive'.

1/2	Video/Game Cards
3	Lab Tour
4	Crossword Puzzle
5	Map
6	Tutorials
7/8	SA Unit/Log

FIGURE 1: TEACHER RANKING OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

The most illuminating result was the teachers' ratings of the effectiveness of orientation activities for students which showed that the orientation to facilities was effective (the top five out of eight items), while initiatives aimed at self-access learning were clearly less so (the lowest three items). *Figure 1* presents the ratings in rank order. The *Introduction to Self-Access* video was available late, yet received the highest rating. It was used to consolidate the experience of other activities by some teachers; one teacher wrote 'Very effective, concise and to-the-point. I used it a few weeks after the lab tour, as a reminder, to revive any flagging spirits there might be'. In terms of her own preparation, another wrote, 'OK, I think it helped orientate *me* better for the Lab tour. Another identified the need to use it in conjunction with more *hands-on* activities: 'effective in giving an overview, but so fast that it needs immediate follow-up in the Practice Lab'. Equally highly ranked were the *Orientation Game Cards*: 'useful, interesting, and effective', though concerns were voiced in terms of time and the lack of a 'defined outcome' which, however, the *Crossword Puzzle* offered. The class feedback stage was for some useful, but for others difficult or simply not done. The *Lab Tour*, which has been commonly used in the past, was seen as quick and effective particularly for classes without assigned self-access hours. The *Crossword Puzzle* was time-consuming but also challenging. One teacher commented, 'The idea is excellent and was very motivating for students. I used it to develop group cohesion (through a sense of competition, i.e., which group could finish first).' The *Practice Lab Map* activity was found to be quick and enjoyable, but a few teachers would have preferred to simply distribute a correct one.

Only two teachers raised real issue with these activities. One was concerned with the *seriousness* of the tasks which took a gaming approach: '[The game cards, puzzle and map] all seemed a bit trivializing to me and I was reluctant to use them.' Time, a notable cause for concern among several teachers was elaborated in this way: 'Whatever approach we took to orientation proved very time consuming. Could this be done by consultants maybe? Or would that exclude class teachers from the SA process?'

The three items which were rated lowest by teachers, *Tutorials*, *Self-Access Unit*, and *Log* were different from the above in two respects. Firstly they were more directly aimed at promoting self-access learning, which required a significant change in teachers' and learners' roles and relationships. Secondly, they had both introductory and on-going functions, as they were used throughout the school year. Thus in their ratings it is likely, and in their comments, it is clear that many teachers did not distinguish between these two aspects, perhaps realistically. For example, one teacher wrote, "The first tutorial was really a discussion of goals ...It does not seem to have been very helpful, because most students do not want to do more than they have to!" Another commented that *tutorials* were the "key to success of self-access work - evidence of teachers' interest and [of the] follow-through necessary for effective self-access".

Concerns regarding *tutorials* focused on time, the teacher's role, and students' roles. One teacher complained, "Much more time is needed to do it properly (ie., one at a time in the Practice Lab)". Another was concerned with how to judge students' self-access work: "It is a bit difficult to give comments on their self-access work especially on quality. It is very easy to measure their quantity of work but not quality." A third commented, "inadequate in terms of student contribution". Thus it appears teachers were uncertain as to how to use tutorials effectively in support of self-access.

Though the *log* appears at the bottom of the ratings list, it received positive as well as negative comments. Positive comments included, "a lot of built-in guidance" and "Useful ...it focuses students on tasks and provides opportunities for practical feedback". Several of the negative comments focused on wording and level of detail in specific sections; broadly summarised these concerns were: "Too long, too unclear, repetitive". One teacher's lack of awareness of the difficulties faced by students was highlighted: "Surprisingly many students didn't seem to understand how they were supposed to use [the log]." This shows the same naivety as that of the designers who failed to clarify usage; yet it is really so surprising that many teachers and learners were ill-equipped to deal with the rather drastic change in roles and relationships which the *log* required? Next an unexpected comment: "I didn't use this as I'm not too keen on this type of approach. I find the layout of the log rather prescriptive (why can't students keep a record in their own way?)" Yet the designers had realized that the approach would clearly not be the most acceptable or effective for all teachers or learners, and thus had intended to convey that use of the *log* was a choice for teachers and perhaps learners--depending on the teacher's view. The most valuable summary statement, which will be taken into consideration in materials revision, was: "Needs simplification/clarification for teachers and students".

Difficulties with the *self-access unit* materials related to their length, function and overlap with the *log*. Student materials were considered to be too long ("wordy" and "detailed"), and their value vis-à-vis the *log* or alternative modes of conveying basic information to students was questioned. In fact, the designers intended the unit to be more general than the *log* to allow the teacher maximum flexibility in selection of materials and processes.

Two problems (and potential solutions) are evident in relation to the last two items, the *log* and the *unit*. First, the intentions of designers needed to be effectively transmitted to teachers, so (1) teachers would have felt freer to make their choices--which had been recognised as significant in the materials planning stage and (2) teachers should have been made aware that these items were to be seen as secondary, though guiding, tools for negotiations and relations between the teacher and learners. A preliminary analysis of 140 *self-access logs* and the Survey of Teacher Attitudes (presented in the next

section) point to a great variation in teachers' awareness of self-directed learning and the theories and practices which accompany it. Clearly, teachers need not only information and materials to make an effective shift in teacher/learner roles and relationships. They need to understand the ideas behind any innovation such as this, which they can then measure or consider vis-a-vis their own educational beliefs and values. And if they choose to implement this new approach they may need to be inducted into the process of negotiating with students.

Overall the questionnaire results indicate a successful orientation to facilities and initial presentation of self-access in courses, but suggest that teachers still feel uncertain about how to effectively maintain momentum and student motivation throughout the year.

**Survey of teacher attitudes to self-access**

In order to investigate this finding further, and also to determine whether teacher attitudes to self-access had changed significantly since the SAAR survey, a second survey of teacher attitudes to self-access learning was carried out in March 1993. (See Appendix for questions and results.) Some questions and many of the descriptors in this follow-up questionnaire were based on items and responses made in the SAAR survey. The following discussion will focus on some key issues raised by analysis of the data.

The first point of interest was that teacher attitudes to self-access had polarised somewhat compared to the previous year (see figure 2). A comparison of each teacher's answers to questions three and five of the survey showed that individuals who had had a negative or non-committal attitude to self-access in September 1992 had not changed their opinions, or had even become more negative by March 1993, whereas very few who had started with a positive attitude in September had become less so, and some even became more positive. This is the opposite tendency to that evidenced in the previous year's SAAR survey where all those teachers who had started the year with positive attitudes became less happy with self-access as the year progressed. These results suggest that teachers in 1991 may have had unrealistically high expectations of self-access learning, but that they started 1992 in a more realistic frame of mind, perhaps due to the orientation activities and the previous year's experience. This would also explain a significant difference evidenced by question six about the allocation of class hours to self-access: fewer teachers now see this allocation as a waste of time, down from 40% in the SAAR survey to 9% this year.

1993 Survey:	less positive	no change	more positive
4 teachers initially negative	2	2	
6 teachers initially neutral	3	2	1
17 teachers initially positive	2	11	4
<b>SAAR (1992) Survey:</b>			
2 teachers initially negative			2
2 teachers initially neutral		2	2
17 teachers initially positive	10	7	

FIGURE 2: TEACHERS' CHANGING ATTITUDES TO SELF-ACCESS OVER THE COURSE OF THE ACADEMIC YEARS 1991-2 & 1992-3

The attitude change indicated by responses to questions 5 and 6, and the generally positive feelings towards self-access recorded in question 3 (63% positive and only 15% negative) have to be set against the results for question 4, where only 15% of respondents felt that self-access had been effective at Hong Kong University, and a large minority (41%) felt it had been ineffective. The rest (44%) adopted a non-committal position. This perceived lack of effectiveness seems to confirm the results of the orientation questionnaire, that teachers are unhappy about how to sustain momentum for self-access learning through the year. What factors, then, do teachers see as inhibiting the effectiveness of self-access?

This is a question that cannot be fully answered from the survey, though a number of conjectures can be made. The first relates to teachers' understanding of the term 'self-access', the second, teachers' perception of student attitudes to self-access and the third, the nature of facilities and materials available for self-access learning.

As regards the first point, a number of respondents had difficulty in answering question 1, about years of experience with self-access, precisely because of the ambiguity of the term<sup>1</sup>. Replies to question 6 were likewise restricted where, although 45% of respondents considered self-access a good way to lead students to independent learning, some qualified their answer with comments like 'in theory' or 'only for some students'. 27% said it was a good way to individualise student instruction. The spread of responses, the number of alternatives, and the fact that four respondents ticked more than one category indicate that teachers still hold a wide variety of views of what self-access is. The issue is also complicated by the fact that self-access is a course component, and there may therefore be some conflict between an individual's idea of what self-access learning *should* be and what it is *required* to be by the course designers.

Question 8 dealt directly with the second issue: teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes to self-access. Respondents rated almost 25% of students as unwilling to do any self-access learning, and only 16% as enthusiastic. Teachers felt that a majority (60%) of students were appreciative but lacked the time or skills for self-access learning. There were, however, a number of objections to the descriptors, for instance that it was not lack of time but lack of motivation and study habits, or that students did not do self-access because stimulating materials were lacking. Nevertheless, the generally negative perception evidenced by this question may partly explain the perceived lack of effectiveness of self-access: teachers do not expect much of students, so students do not do much. This again suggests that teachers need greater preparation for the shift in teacher/learner roles and relationships that effective self-access learning entails. However, the large minority (41%) who felt that students have no time for self-access study is perhaps responding to another issue, that of the *status* of self-access within the course workload. If course requirements mean that students already have a lot of set work to do outside class, and if it is clear that self-access study will not be rigorously assessed either by the teacher or in end-of-course tests, then it would be no surprise to find it given low priority in student work schedules. Further investigation, of student attitudes to self-access study in courses, is required.

The third issue, the nature of materials and facilities available for self-access learning, was not directly addressed by the survey. However, two questions, 7 and 9, do attempt to find out how widely used and helpful certain instruments were in supporting self-access learning. The lack of appeal of the *Self-Access Log* noted in the orientation questionnaire above is also found in this survey. Although 85% of respondents distributed logs, and 58% checked their students' progress in them, 32% of those who used them did not find them useful in promoting self-access learning and 27% were non-committal. Of greater perceived use were the Practice Lab consultants, with a 67% approval rating, followed by tutorials and individual consultations, with 52% and 53% respectively. Tutorials seem to have been the preferred forum for providing feedback on self-access, with 62% of teachers listening to quick progress reports in them. However, it should also be noted that nearly as many teachers reported providing individualised feedback to students, either written or spoken. Overall, these results show that teachers are providing a significant amount of feedback to students, yet still perceive self-access as largely ineffective, suggesting

again the need for further investigation of *student* attitudes to self-access course work, and of how to effectively implement changes in teacher/learner roles.

The final question of the survey, question 10, asked for suggestions for training teachers in self-access in the next academic year, and provides some indications of how the effectiveness of self-access could be improved. There was a lot of support for another workshop, both for orientation/familiarisation and to discuss ways of setting goals and helping students to achieve them. A number of teachers mentioned the need for *pathways* both through materials for the students and to demonstrate to teachers how to move from self-access towards independent learning. There was also a fair amount of interest in promoting periodic exchanges of ideas, with regular information sessions and seminars or workshops on specific areas, for example on how individual teachers follow through self-access, throughout the year. There were also some reservations, namely that training teachers will only work if they are positive about self-access, or that self-access needs to be made much more structured, with much clearer demarcation of the work that students are supposed to do so that teachers can monitor their work more effectively. A few respondents also commented on resources, suggesting that students needed more course-related material, while others commented that project work was self-access learning too. Again, lack of consensus over what constitutes self-access learning, especially when it is part of a course, and suitable materials for such learning is evident.

Broadly speaking, the survey results suggest that teachers do see self-access as a useful way to individualise learning and lead into independent learning, but are uncertain how to make self-access effective. The survey could not provide definite reasons for this perceived lack of effectiveness, beyond a general concern about student attitudes. What is really needed, therefore, at this stage is to find out how *students* view the self-access component of their courses. The results of the 1993 EAS course evaluation showed that 63% of students did not feel that self-access had benefitted their academic work, but a much more detailed investigation needs to be done if we are to pinpoint the reasons for the perceived lack of effectiveness of self-access. In the shorter term, it would be useful to clarify what we mean by self-access when it is part of a course, and to define more clearly how self-access learning can best be implemented to the satisfaction of both students and teachers.

### Notes

1. The questionnaire designers were aware that the term 'self-access' would be interpreted differently by different people. One purpose of the survey was to highlight these differences so as to inform future discussion among English Centre teachers.

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**APPENDIX:  
SURVEY OF TEACHER ATTITUDES TO SELF-ACCESS LEARNING**

*The total number of respondents was 28.*

1. How many years of experience do you have with self-access? *ave. 4.3 years*
  
2. Have you been involved with any of the following? *Please tick:*  

[ 9 ] SAAR	[ 11 ] SA Committee	[ 13 ] AV Committee
	[ 5 ] SA Consultation	
  
3. How do you feel about self-access? *Circle a number:*  

	very positive					very negative
	5	4	3	2	1	
<i>n=28, mean=3.89, blank=1</i>		11	6	6	4	0
		{ 63% }	22%	15%		
  
4. How effective do you feel self-access has been at HKU? *Circle a number:*  

	very effective					not effective at all
	5	4	3	2	1	
<i>n=28, mean=2.70, blank=1</i>		0	4	12	10	1
		15%	44%	{ 41% }		
  
5. How would you compare your attitude to self-access now with your attitude early in the first semester? *Circle a number:*  

	more positive					less positive
	5	4	3	2	1	
<i>n=28, mean=2.75</i>		1	3	15	6	3
  
6. How do you feel about the allocation of one-third of course hours to self-access in the EAS and ACSS courses? *Tick one of the following:*  

9% [ 2 (+2) ] an unnecessary reduction of class time		
27% [ 6 (+3) ] a useful way to individualise student instruction		
45% [ 10 (+3) ] a good way to lead students into independent learning ( <i>in theory=2</i> )		
18% [ 4 ] other		
  
7. What strategies/feedback did you use to support student self-access learning? *Tick the ones you used:*  

85%	[ 22 ]	distributed self-access logs
58%	[ 15 ]	followed students' progress by checking SA logs
35%	[ 9 ]	provided detailed written feedback in their SA logs
62%	[ 16 ]	listened to quick progress reports in tutorials
23%	[ 6 ]	held individual consultations
	[ 0 ]	did nothing
35%	[ 9 ]	other
  
8. What are your perceptions of students' attitudes to self-access learning? *Estimate the percentage who would fit each of the following categories:*  

[24.35 %] unwilling to do any SA study		
[41.61 %] can appreciate the idea, but have no time to study		
[18.52 %] like the idea, but do not really know how to proceed		
[15.78 %] enthusiastic about and regularly doing SA		
[100%]		

9. How useful have the following been in promoting self-access learning? *Circle a number for each item you have used:*

	very useful				useless	
	5	4	3	2	1	
the self-access log book	3	6	6	9	0	
	<i>n</i> =24, <i>blank</i> =2		{ 38% }	25%	32%	
	<i>mean</i> =3.13					
tutorials with your students	7	5	4	3	2	1
	<i>n</i> =25, <i>blank</i> =3		{ 52% }	30%	{ 17% }	
	<i>mean</i> =3.48					
the Practice Lab consultants	8	6	4	3	2	1
	<i>n</i> =21, <i>blank</i> =5		{ 67% }	14%	{ 19% }	
	<i>mean</i> =3.76					
individual consultations with students	5	4	3	2	1	
	<i>n</i> =15, <i>blank</i> =11		{ 53% }	20%	{ 27% }	2
	<i>mean</i> =3.2					

## Copyright, Publishers and Self-Access Centres in Hong Kong

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### Introduction

Copyright laws in Hong Kong are getting in the way of being able to do a good job in running a self-access centre. At least, that's the way it seems at times. Despite the claims made in many publishers' catalogues, most published material is not suitable for genuine self-access learning without at least some adaptation. Such adaptations often seem to involve photocopying parts of a book or sometimes the whole thing. In addition, it is often felt that it is unsafe to put original audio and video tapes in the hands of users, consequently safety copies (or backups) are commonly used.

As soon as we start to copy materials we are getting into the area of infringement of copyright. This is a serious legal issue which those of us involved with self-access centres (and indeed all colleagues) should be wary of. It is interesting to note that not everyone is of this opinion. Frequently we hear teachers claiming "It's OK because it's for educational purposes." or "Surely it's OK to keep copies of videos for a certain period of time." or "No problem, you're allowed to copy x% of a book." (Insert your own figure for 'x' because different would-be-experts put it at anywhere between 1% and 25%.) Hazy statements like these indicate the biggest problem, namely that the situation is unclear but somehow we feel it ought to be all right for us to copy materials for educational purposes.

As self-access learning takes on an increasingly important role in Hong Kong, the profile of self-access centres is being raised. The self-access facilities of Hong Kong University receive a constant stream of visitors, both local and international. As other self-access centres are established and mature they will be subjected to the same public interest. If these centres are to become part of the public image of the institutions to which they belong, it is important, for the institutions as well as the operators, that they are seen to be operating legally. It is significant in this context to note that educational libraries throughout Hong Kong are meticulously careful to remain within the constraints of the copyright law. Levels of funding are a major criterion in achieving a clean image. If institutions are committed to this new approach to learning they must fund it adequately. Teachers involved in self-access should not allow themselves, through lack of institutional commitment, to be pushed into high profile unprofessional and illegal behaviour.

Copyright law in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup> is quite clear on most issues and with a few minor exceptions does not offer any privileges to educational establishments. As far as the needs of a self-access centre are concerned it does not appear to allow any photocopying at all, nor does it allow copying of audio or video cassettes, not even for backup purposes, although some publishers make special agreements which relax the restrictions on making safety copies of audio tapes. Copyright concerning off-air recording of broadcasts is a little less clear. This is perhaps because when the current Hong Kong law was made neither audio cassette recorders nor video recorders were commonly available. As such recordings are not of general concern to publishers we will not deal with them here.

We will see that while specific agreements have had some success they are very time-consuming to arrive at. A more useful goal would be to create a general agreement applicable to all self-access operators in Hong Kong.

### **Signs of improvement**

The picture painted so far seems rather gloomy but in fact the situation is slowly improving and there are definite signs of hope for a more rosy future. The Publishers' Association of the UK has made a statement allowing certain kinds of safety copying. This only refers to materials published by the signatories of that statement and is probably only applicable in Hong Kong if a publisher's local representative specifically extends the agreement to include us. Most typically, publishers will agree to anything that has been covered by the UK Publishers' Association agreement. Areas that fall outside the agreement are much more difficult to deal with. The concessions currently on offer may be somewhat limited but they are a step in the right direction. There are also a few brave exceptions to the conservative band of publishers who have gone further to accommodate the needs of self-access.

### **Developers' concerns**

The areas currently of most concern to operators of self-access centres in Hong Kong are the cutting up, reassembly and adaptation of print material; the making of safety copies of audio and video tapes; and the splitting of audio and video tapes into user-manageable chunks, for example by unit or by exercise. Audio and video splits are achieved by copying each chunk onto a separate tape. The original tape becomes the safety copy and the splits are given to the users.

The first of these concerns arises from the need to turn good teaching text into effective independent learning material. There is a wealth of good published material but little of it is ideal for self-access. Chopping it into chunks is a good first move; adding suggestions for use and answer sheets is even better. Both Dickinson (1987) and Sheerin (1989; 1991) advocate this method. They also claim that cutting up a publication does not infringe its copyright. While this may be true for the UK (from where they both write), it appears less certain for Hong Kong, which is still operating under an earlier copyright law<sup>2</sup>. However, publishers seem happy enough to grant permission for cutting and pasting (but not photocopying) their printed materials. Securing an agreement to do this seems the obvious and safe thing to do.

The second concern, that of making safety copies of tapes, is a difficult issue. The law does not allow for any copying. The UK Publishers' Association accepts the making of one safety copy of audio tapes but expressly forbids any copying of videos. It is still unclear whether this acceptance extends automatically to Hong Kong. What is clear is that it only covers tapes from the publishers who are signatories to that agreement.

The third area of concern is similar to the second. Splitting audio tapes into user-manageable chunks is permitted by some publishers but splitting of video is not, unless special agreements are reached.

### **Specific agreements**

Although there are clear signs of improvement in the relationship between publishers and developers it is difficult to know exactly where Hong Kong self-access centres stand. What seems to be happening at the moment is that individuals who wish to develop or adapt particular materials are making agreements with publishers which are specific to those materials. These agreements allow existing published material to be quite extensively adapted for use in a specific self-access setting. A brief description of two good local examples of this will show how it is worth pursuing the thorny issue of copyright agreements.

An agreement was secured with Barbara Clarke (representing BBC English) during a project

to adapt 'Television English' for self-access use. The agreement allowed us to cut up the books and rearrange them as worksheets (adding comments, suggestions and instructions as necessary) and to make video splits. It was also agreed that further copies of each split tape (but not the worksheets) could be made on payment of a fee proportionate to the cost of the package.

We started with a useful supplementary classroom package comprising six books and two video tapes. We finished with thirty-four individual worksheets with accompanying video tapes, each adapted for individual study by one or more learners. In addition, we have since identified one unit which is heavily used and we will be able to make extra copies at only minimal cost to the English Centre.

Another example of benefiting from specific adaptation agreements comes from the English Language Unit at Chinese University where Emma Poon is working with Annette Abbott (representing Cambridge University Press). In this case agreement has been made for audio tape splits, the cutting up and rearrangement of text into worksheets and the addition of rubrics. Interestingly, this agreement draws the line at rewriting of text without further consultation.

One of the problems with such specific agreements is that they can take a dishearteningly long time to finalise. However, a greater problem is that these agreements are so specific. They cannot necessarily be generalised to other publications from the same publisher and certainly not to works from other publishers. They cannot even be read as a green light for all institutions to make the same adaptation, although once an agreement has been reached it could be used by another institution as a basis for discussion with the publisher. The essential nature of these agreements is that of an understanding between two specific groups of people regarding a specific task.

#### **A general agreement**

It seems that the way forward in this area is to construct a general agreement that meets the needs of both publishers and self-access developers. Such a move would prevent the distressingly slow process of arriving at agreements for each development project. It would also enable all signatory institutions to develop materials published by the signatory publishers within the agreed constraints. Of course, the option of making special agreements for special occasions would still be open to all developers. It is also important to point out the advantages for publishers. They would know what developers are doing with their material, which is certainly not always the case now. They may also discover that new items for publication arise from the adaptations (to be published in agreement with the adaptors). Most importantly, signing an agreement and thereby showing trust in educators would help allay much of the suspicion and distrust with which publishers are regarded locally.

The idea of producing a general agreement was first suggested to the Hong Kong Association for Self-access Learning Development<sup>3</sup> at a meeting (Feb. 1993) held to explore the copyright situation as it affects self-access operators in Hong Kong. This meeting lent its support to the idea and as a result an agreement is currently going through a series of redrafts (see Appendix). Comments on the proposed agreement have been received from a number of educators and publishers' representatives. Although many comments have been positive it would seem that there are two possible stumbling blocks. From the publishers' side indications are that not all publishing houses will be ready to agree to the making of backup copies of video tapes or to allowing video splits. From the educators' side there may be some concern about undertaking to remain within the agreement for all materials.

It is hard to see why publishers are worried about backup or splits for video when they are mostly willing to allow this for audio tapes. Indeed, the UK Publishers' agreement specifically allows safety copies of audio tapes to be made. It is difficult to understand where the difference lies between making backups for audio tapes and doing the same for video tapes. It is hoped that further discussion on this issue may prove fruitful.

The educators' concerns are less justified (in a legal sense) but more difficult to deal with. Once representatives of self-access centres have signed this agreement they will be committing that centre to behaving legally, that is, within the constraints of the agreement, with regard to all materials belonging to any of the signatory publishers. At first glance this may seem to be a non-issue; surely we are all obliged to behave legally, with or without an agreement, towards any published material? However, it will come as no surprise to many educators to hear that there are many instances throughout Hong Kong of illegal photocopying and tape copying. One of the purposes of the proposed agreement is to allow self-access educators to get the best deal for their centres; however, we have to be realistic and realise that there will never be an agreement which allows large scale copying. That would deprive publishers of revenue and would hold no attraction for them.

### Conclusion

There are still a number of hurdles in the way of a final agreement; however, the benefits to be gained are worth the struggle. It is hoped that the final outcome will be an agreement acceptable to all self-access educators in Hong Kong and as wide a range of publishers as possible<sup>4</sup>. The result will be to allow easier development and adaptation of published material for genuine self-access use including the splitting of audio/visual media into more easily accessible chunks. It will also allow the making of safety copies of all audio and video materials which are to be placed in users' hands.

### Notes

1. The copyright situation in Hong Kong is governed by The United Kingdom Copyright Act 1953 (introduced in Hong Kong in 1972) and The Hong Kong Copyright Ordinance 1973. As a dependent territory of the United Kingdom Hong Kong is also subject to The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, The Berne Copyright Union and The Universal Copyright Convention.

2. The United Kingdom operates under The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 which is substantially different from the 1953 Act current in Hong Kong, particularly in the provisions it makes for educational users.

3. HASALD has a membership representing self-access interests in secondary and tertiary education, training in the commercial sectors and publishing.

4. Comments on the proposed agreement from anyone falling within either of these categories would be welcomed by the author, c/o the editors.

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## Appendix

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### Proposal for a Copyright Agreement

The following items all seek agreement for use of published materials for self-access learning within Hong Kong. They do not relate to classroom use of materials.

#### Print Materials:

Works published by the signatories of this agreement may be physically cut-up and re-assembled in any way that seems appropriate providing that the works or parts of them are not then re-sold and providing that this process does not involve photocopying of the original material.

Each item that is separated from the original work, and thence the copyright page, must carry a copyright line which acknowledges author, title, publisher and date of publication. This line can be as small as is readable.

It is permissible to add rubrics and commentaries to the reassembled original work.

Any changes to the original text or other printed items must be agreed by the publisher concerned.

Worksheets produced using any or all of the above methods may be laminated.

Worksheets containing items from disassembled published material may NOT be photocopied.

#### Audio and Video Material:

It is permissible to make a copy of an audio or video tape, keeping the original as a back-up. Only one copy may exist at any one time.

In making the one permissible copy it is permissible to copy different parts of the original tape onto different cassettes, providing that no part of the original exists in more than one copy at any one time.

Where a tape is divided into clearly identifiable units, up to three further copies of a unit may be made for a fee which is to be negotiated with the publisher. The fee will be based on the proportionate cost of one unit.

In the case of any copying each cassette should be clearly marked with the original copyright message, in audio/video form on the tape and in print form on the container.

#### Prohibitions:

Neither the whole nor any part of a published work shall be photocopied as a means of providing self-access materials without express permission from the publisher.





## Hong Kong Texts on Hong Kong: Developing Computer Text Corpora at Hong Kong University

Philip Benson

### Introduction

This paper reports on a project to develop two computer text corpora, called *Hong Kong Texts on Hong Kong*, at the University of Hong Kong English Centre. These corpora are intended to serve as a resource for teachers and researchers who need information on English usage in published text in Hong Kong. The aim of this report is to disseminate information on the project, and also to initiate discussion on how the corpora might be used and developed.

The paper is in three sections. Section 1 gives some background information on corpus development and text analysis in language research. Section 2 introduces the two corpora under development in the English Centre. Section 3 raises some issues concerning the use of the corpora and their future development.

### Computer text corpora and corpus linguistics

A computer text corpus for language research (a 'linguistic corpus') is a collection of machine-readable texts which have been combined and formatted so that linguistic features can easily be analysed using text analysis software.

The history of large-scale linguistic corpora goes back 30 years to the 1 million word Brown Corpus of American English (Kucera and Francis, 1967). A comparable corpus of British English, the LOB corpus (Hofland & Johansson, 1982) was produced in the early 1970s at the Universities of Lancaster, Oslo and Bergen, to be followed by the 0.5 million word London-Lund corpus of spoken English (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980). The 1 million word Kolhapur corpus of Indian English (Shastri 1985) was the first of its kind in Asia, and the International Corpus of English currently has teams working on corpora in various parts of the world including Hong Kong, India, Philippines, and Singapore (Greenbaum, 1991).

Corpora which aim to provide evidence on the state of a language variety at a particular moment in time have tended to follow strict guidelines. The LOB corpus, for example, was divided into 15 'genres', and within each genre titles were selected randomly from library catalogues. Fixed length (2,000 word) samples were then chosen at random from the titles selected. How far such techniques can ensure genuine 'representativeness' is open to question, however (Sampson, 1991, Sinclair, 1991), and there is currently a trend towards much larger, and possibly looser corpora. The projected size of the British National Corpus (Leech, 1991) is 100 million words, and the *COBUILD* 'Bank of English' is comparable. Clear (1987) and Sinclair (1991) have also raised the idea of a 'monitor' corpus, which would effectively be unlimited in size since it would consist of a continuous flow of text passing through 'filters' designed to capture changes in the language.

The ideal size of a corpus designed to represent the state of a language variety at a particular moment in time probably cannot be specified because of the difficulty of quantifying the object to be represented (a language variety). It is clear, however, that perceptions of what constitutes an acceptable sample are determined mainly by the technical limits of the time. Nowadays, corpora of 1 million words

or more can be developed, stored and handled on an average desktop PC, and Sinclair's (1991, p.18) maxim, which states that "a corpus should be as large as possible, and should keep on growing" seems to be reasonable at a time when revolutionary changes in the storage and handling capacities of computers are upon us.

The analysis of text corpora is carried out using text analysis software, which typically produces word lists, frequency counts, concordances, and statistical information of various kinds. *Microconcord*, *Micro-OCP (Oxford Concordance Program)* and *TACT* are examples of commercially-available text analysis packages which are capable of handling large text corpora on a desktop PC<sup>1</sup>. Computer corpora will generally support any kind of inquiry in which information can be inferred from the graphic forms of words, phrases and structures, and their relationships with each other. More complex inquiries (into syntax, semantics and discourse analysis) may be supported by tagged corpora, in which tags have been inserted to represent features of text which cannot be inferred from the graphic forms of words alone. Tags are sometimes used, for example, to discriminate between homographs, to indicate parts of speech, or to link semantically related items.

Corpora must normally be formatted and marked up in order to ensure that ambiguously represented features such as titles, paragraph breaks, page breaks, and so on are explicitly and consistently represented. Unfortunately, different types of software tend to support different types of formatting, markup and tagging. Corpus preparation and 'housekeeping' can therefore account for a large proportion of development time. The *Text Encoding Initiative (TEI)*, based on *Standard General Markup Language (SGML)*, represents a step in the direction of standardisation based on the philosophy that electronic texts should be interchangeable and support research aims other than those of the designer (Burnard, 1991).

Leech (1991, p.10) has listed fields of study in which corpus-based studies have been recorded: linguistic theory, computational linguistics, grammar, dictionaries, the study of meaning, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, language variation, speech technology, speech science, historical studies of language, child language acquisition, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics and orthography. The exhaustiveness of this list suggests that corpus linguistics is less a specialised field in its own right than a method of inquiry which has implications for a wide range of studies. The systematic and objective character of corpus-based evidence constitutes a challenge to traditional methodologies in fields which have relied heavily on introspection or random observation, and corpus linguistics has already had a decisive influence on lexicography (Sinclair, 1991) and computational linguistics (Sampson, 1991), where possession of a corpus is rapidly becoming a *sine qua non*. It remains to be seen whether the influence of corpus linguistics will be as strong in other fields.

### The Hong Kong Texts on Hong Kong Corpora

*Hong Kong Texts on Hong Kong* is the name used for two computer text corpora under development in the English Centre at the University of Hong Kong. Both corpora are designed with the same aim in mind, to furnish textual evidence for the description of English in Hong Kong. The first (the 'academic' corpus) contains extracts from books and papers published in Hong Kong on Hong Kong topics, while the second (the 'newspaper' corpus) contains Hong Kong news reports from the *South China Morning Post*. Because the texts included in these corpora come from publishing houses which are known to maintain a high standard of English in their publications, the corpora can be seen from two points of view. On the one hand, they can be seen as corpora of standard English usage illustrated by Hong Kong contexts. On the other hand, they should also provide evidence on distinctive local features of usage which will be of interest to anyone concerned with the accurate description of English in Hong Kong.

The development of the corpora described here began in January 1993 and it is anticipated that the first stage of development will be completed by December 1993. At that stage, the academic corpus

will consist of around 1 million running words of text, and the newspaper corpus around 1.5 million. At the time of writing, some 800,000 words of the newspaper corpus have been prepared, and are being used in trial runs. (Some initial results are mentioned in Section 3 of this paper.)

The academic corpus has been developed with the assistance of four major publishers of Hong Kong texts in English: the Centre of Asian Studies (University of Hong Kong), Chinese University Press, Hong Kong University Press and Oxford University Press. These publishers have given permission to store substantial extracts from a variety of sources in a database used for research within the English Centre. In some cases publishers have been able to provide text in machine-readable form, but a great deal of text has to be scanned electronically. The availability of text in electronic form has not been considered a valid criterion for text selection since the aim is to cover as wide a range of texts as possible. The time required for scanning text and correcting scanned files is therefore a major factor determining the timing of the project.

In the academic corpus three main criteria apply in the selection of a text:

1. It must be published in Hong Kong for Hong Kong readers.
2. It must be available from Hong Kong bookshops.
3. It should deal with current social issues in Hong Kong.

The cut-off dates for selection are 1980 and 1993 (date of publication). To ensure a range of texts, it was decided to limit the contribution of each author to around 10,000 words. This limit has been applied flexibly, however, because it was also decided to include whole texts (papers or book chapters) whenever possible. Within these criteria the aim has been to collect as much text as possible.

Since the texts included in the corpus have been written for publication in Hong Kong, they might in fact be described as 'popular academic' since they are generally written for a readership which extends beyond fellow academics. Topic areas covered include law, politics, sociology, economics, education, urban planning and the environment (no attempt has yet been made to group the texts into 'genres' within the corpus). Law is prominent as a topic, but this reflects its penetration into other topic fields (for example, the political future of Hong Kong). Not surprisingly, '1997' has a tendency to crop up as a topic in virtually any of the texts selected.

The newspaper corpus has been developed with considerable assistance from the *South China Morning Post*, who have provided in machine-readable form more than 2,500 Hong Kong news reports published in 1992-3. As a result this corpus has progressed more rapidly than the academic corpus. The newspaper corpus also covers a much wider range of topics than the items in the book corpus, including, for example, crime reports and reports on entertainment and social events.

Both of the corpora contain samples of writing from both native and non-native speaker writers. I have not attempted to separate these categories, although this might be possible if detailed biographical information on authors were collected. Some care would need to be taken in assigning texts to authors however, since the work of non-native speakers may well be checked by native speakers before publication, while slips might appear during typing of material written by native speakers. These difficulties aside, we can also assume that authors follow more or less strict rules and conventions of the genres within which they are writing. All this suggests that the corpora will not yield valid or interesting information on the native/non-native speaker distinction. On the other hand, as representations of the language which a society has before it, we might expect the corpora to yield interesting data on models of English which are prevalent in Hong Kong.

One question which arises is how representative the corpora are of models of English in Hong Kong. It should perhaps be made clear that there is no intention to suggest that these corpora represent 'Hong Kong English' as a whole. Similarly, it must be recognised that Hong Kong readers of English have access to a wide range of imported models of English other than those represented in the two corpora. Nevertheless, the two text-types selected represent a significant proportion of locally published text, given that for certain text-types (e.g. creative writing in English) locally written and published text is close to zero. It is not known exactly what each corpus represents in terms of percentages of the text which is theoretically available for its text-type. I would estimate that these percentages are relatively high, when compared with other corpora such as LOB and Brown. In the case of the academic corpus, at least one extract is included from each book which was identified from publishers' catalogues as being potentially relevant, and I would estimate the representation of authors to be more than 50% of those who have published locally since 1980.

### Teaching, research and development

In this last section, I would like to discuss some of the ways in which the corpora described might be used in teaching and research, and how they might be developed beyond the current project. A major concern of the project has been the accessibility of locally-relevant corpus data in Hong Kong, and the intention is to make these corpora as widely available as possible within restrictions of copyright. At present this means that researchers will be encouraged to use the completed corpora by arrangement with the English Centre on condition that they are not copied or distributed.

Although it is likely that these corpora will be too unwieldy for direct classroom access (cf. Ma in this volume), a number of applications in ELT are envisaged. These include production of vocabulary lists for locally relevant teaching material, and generation of examples of words, phrases and structures in contexts which are relevant and accessible to Hong Kong students. The value of Hong Kong texts for ELT in Hong Kong can be argued on a number of grounds. Familiarity of content is recognised as an important starting point for new learning, and the presentation of new items within accessible contexts should have positive effects on the learning process. Locally relevant text may also motivate learner interest in English, and a strong case can be made for the use of local texts as a means of developing learner awareness of the roles and functions of English as a language of Hong Kong.

A further argument for the use of a Hong Kong text corpus in teaching and research is that there is strong evidence that many English words are used differently in local text and imported text. In initial trials on 800,000 words of the newspaper corpus, in which concordance output on selected words has been compared with descriptions in the *COBUILD* dictionary, some interesting data was revealed. In an investigation of the words *local*, *locally*, *localised* and *localisation* (Benson, 1993), it was seen that there were extensive differences between the description of these words in the *COBUILD* dictionary and their use in the corpus. These differences covered both the senses of the words and the relationships of derivation among them.

Similar evidence emerged from an investigation of the words *converge* and *convergence*. The *COBUILD* descriptions of these items suggest that the verb *converge* normally takes a plural or collective subject (i.e. *ideas* or *people converge*), and that if the noun *convergence* is followed by a preposition, that preposition will be *of* or *between*. In the newspaper corpus, on the other hand, due to the prevalence of the form *convergence with the Basic Law*, it was seen that the verb *converge* often takes a singular subject, and that both *converge* and *convergence* are most often followed by the preposition *with*. The most prominent patterns in the newspaper corpus turned out to be '*A converges with B*' and '*convergence of A with B*' in contrast to *COBUILD*'s '*A and B converge*' and '*convergence of/between A and B*'. *Convergence* is of course a specialist term in the context of Hong Kong politics, but the interesting point to note is that the emergence of a specialist term is accompanied by a change in syntactic form.

It is anticipated that investigations of the two corpora will reveal more data of this kind. This kind of data may well be of interest to researchers in various fields. It might also be translated into the kind of information which would be of great interest to learners of English in Hong Kong.

The first stage of development of the *Hong Kong Texts on Hong Kong* corpora is scheduled to be completed within one year. Developments beyond that point are uncertain, but it is clear that there will remain a 'shortage' of electronic text in corpus form for the linguistic analysis of English usage in Hong Kong (the need for a corpus of spoken English immediately comes to mind). One proposal which I have raised is the development of a 'Corpus of English Usage in Hong Kong', which would be developed on a modular basis, possibly incorporating existing and developing corpora, and filling in gaps with new corpora, where data can be obtained.

This proposal calls for a degree of cooperation among researchers and a commitment to the accessibility of corpora. There would be clear benefits in developing a local fund of knowledge and experience covering techniques and principles of text collection, preparation and analysis of corpora, use and development of software, handling of copyright problems and creating wider access to completed corpora. These benefits would be additional to the growth of an invaluable source of data on the various manifestations of English in Hong Kong, which would provide systematic and objective evidence in response to concerns over standards of English in the territory. Disseminating information on corpora currently being developed and encouraging their use by researchers might represent a first step towards this goal.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Microconcord* and *Micro-OCP* are published by Oxford University Press, and *TACT* is produced by the Center for Computing in the Humanities, University of Toronto.

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## Plagiarism: A Research Report

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Given the stern admonitions about plagiarism in many university handouts on writing, the number of recent articles on the topic in Hong Kong, and the constant arguments that arise in moderation meetings about possible cases of over-borrowing, it would seem that plagiarism is a major concern in academic writing in English in Hong Kong. Our project seeks to explore a number of questions concerning plagiarism in an effort to understand whether there is indeed a clear problem here that can be labelled as 'plagiarism' (or whether perhaps we are dealing with a broad range of interrelated factors), why it has apparently become a problem here (or why it is seen to be a problem), and what can be done to better inform students and teachers about dealing with these questions.

Specifically, we have identified four areas for investigation:

1. Understanding plagiarism as a very particular cultural and ideological concern. We have been exploring how notions of authorship and ownership of language and ideas developed within a Western academic and literary tradition. This is an attempt to see the stress on ownership, individual creativity and authorship/authority as a very particular cultural and historical orientation. Given recent shifts in this tradition, furthermore, we have arrived at the provocative question as to what happens to plagiarism if we take seriously such notions as the 'death of the author'. This work has also started to raise serious doubts about the whole claim to originality in much of Western scholarship and literature.
2. These general concerns then need to be taken up within the specific context of academic work and "intellectual property". More specifically, we want to explore this in the context of Hong Kong students and their relationship to English and disciplinary knowledge at Hong Kong University. This, therefore, is an attempt to understand the relationships among English (as a language with a particular history and a particular domain of use in Hong Kong), our students (who live and study within a complex series of attachments and resistances to English), and academic knowledge (as it is structured in the context of an English-medium university in Hong Kong). Work here has started to point to the difficulties and contradictions our students face in their relationship to academic knowledge and English.
3. A further dimension of this is to understand the cultural and educational backgrounds of our students. Here we aim to go beyond some of the rather crude generalizations to be found in the contrastive rhetoric literature or other general statements about Chinese practices of memorization. Rather, we want to look generally at concepts of authorship, ownership and authority in Chinese traditions of writing; and more specifically at how students are taught to write in Hong Kong high schools and what is seen to count as appropriate use of source materials. Initial work here has suggested that in looking at different models of writing we need to be very sensitive to different levels of acceptability.
4. We are also trying to discover in more detail how our students (at present, first-year undergraduate students from a variety of faculties) approach their writing tasks. Part of this work involves case studies of students who we feel have overstepped the boundaries of acceptable borrowing. These open-ended interviews aim to discover how these students understand plagiarism, and how it is they have come to use source texts in the way they have. A second approach here involves trying to discover, by means of interviews and surveys, how

students prepare for their writing tasks, and particularly what types of note-taking strategies they employ. Initial work here has started to suggest that behind the "fact" of overuse of sources in a student essay, there may be a vast array of other issues, from time-constraints to reading strategies, from the nature of the source text(s) to methods of note-taking, from unwillingness to attempt to rephrase the words of others to resistance to academic conventions.

It is hoped that as we gather more information in this project, we will be able to understand more clearly what are clearly a complex and diverse set of issues lying behind the generic and problematic descriptor 'plagiarism'. We have already found the need, for example, to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' plagiarism (and various gradations in between), i.e. that good reading but poor writing might lead to overuse of appropriate material, while poor reading and poor writing together might lead to overuse of inappropriate material. We would welcome advice, discussion and cooperation from any colleagues in Hong Kong or elsewhere.

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## **An Investigation of the Bilingual Writing Ability of Students Who Study English and Chinese as First Languages in Singaporean Secondary Schools**

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As part of its bilingual education policy, the government of Singapore has selected nine secondary schools for special assistance. Students in these schools, who represent the top eight percent of the student population, are given the opportunity to take two languages at first language level. This study is an investigation of the bilingual writing ability of Secondary Three students studying both English and Chinese at first language level in these schools.

Four hundred students in five schools were asked to complete questionnaires which included questions on their language background, language use outside of school, and relative competence in English and Chinese. They were also asked to provide the results of their Primary School Leaving Examinations in English and Chinese and their end-of-year results in both English and Chinese for Secondary One and Secondary Two. The students were then asked to write an expository and a narrative composition, half of the students writing in English and half writing in Chinese. A week later the students were asked to write on the same topics in the other language.

An essay evaluation scale was developed to assign overall marks for content, organization, syntactic maturity/language use, and mechanics to essays in both languages. Subscales within each area were devised to provide for assessment of more specific skills.

Careful analysis of the essays should reveal the extent of the students' competence in written English and Chinese. In addition to the comparison of overall scores, specific subskills will be analyzed to determine the students' strengths and weaknesses in written expression in the two languages. Results will be correlated with the PSLE examination and end-of-year results, as well as with information from the questionnaire to determine what sociolinguistic factors might be significant.

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## Book Reviews

### Who Needs Stylistic Analysis? A Review of *Practical Stylistics*, Oxford, OUP. Widdowson, H.G. (1992)

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More than twenty years ago, in the pages of *The Use of English*<sup>1</sup>, Henry Widdowson was involved in a debate with Sydney Bolt which centred on the way in which stylistic analysis relates to literary criticism. The focus of the debate was Widdowson's interpretation of the Robert Frost poem 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening', that interpretation, and the debate itself, eventually becoming the concluding chapter to *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* (Widdowson, 1975).

Widdowson's interpretation, based on "the preponderance of pronominal forms in the first verse" (ibid, p.117) and on the "notion of possession, basing our speculation on the slender evidence of the double occurrence of 'his'" (ibid,p.118), presents the poem as a conflict between "elemental freedom" on the one hand and "social constraint" on the other. Bolt's response was to point out that Widdowson's stylistic analysis of the poem concerned itself only with "those features of the language which it shares with prose" (ibid, p.121), going on to point out that the inversion of normal word order in the first line and the repetition of the last line of the poem force the reader to realise "there must be a latent meaning beneath the manifest one" (ibid, p.121). A recent paper by Thorne entitled 'What is a poem?' re-examines that debate and comes down squarely on the side of Bolt. Thorne (1989) writes:

Bolt's general comment on Widdowson's (1972) analysis is one I think many people would want to make; if this is a stylistic analysis of 'Stopping by woods', who needs stylistic analysis? Who needs to have it demonstrated to him that the poem can be read as a first-person description of a man pausing on a journey in winter to look at some beautiful woods which belong to someone else...?Moreover, as Bolt rightly points out, in talking only about this reading Widdowson is missing the most important point about the poem, what, in fact, makes it a poem. (p.282).

Now this is a serious charge and amounts to an indictment of Widdowson's notion of stylistic analysis. Thorne goes on, however, to make an even more serious charge. Commenting on Bolt's reading, which takes the poem to be a meditation on death and the attractiveness of death, he writes:

Since Bolt does not make the point it is important to add that it is not just he and his students who have read the poem in this way. Almost without exception, the literary critics who have written about 'Stopping by woods' have come to the conclusion that it is the expression of a death wish. The most striking feature of Widdowson's commentary is his failure to recognize even the possibility of this reading (p.283).

By demonstrating convincingly that the language of the poem requires that it be read as metaphor, the reading that Bolt offered, Thorne exposes what he sees as the twin problems raised by Widdowson's approach: not only is that approach seriously lacking in itself, it also impedes more potentially fruitful analyses. In support, Thorne points out that Widdowson, while on the one hand

claiming "...that no matter how exhaustive an analysis is made, it can never exhaust all possible meanings" (Widdowson, 1975, p.122), goes on to dismiss Bolt's analysis by saying that he can "...see no warrant in the actual text for this interpretation" (ibid, p.122).

With the publication of Professor Widdowson's (1992) new book on stylistics, *Practical Stylistics* (hereafter PS), and the undoubted success it will have on account of its author's enormous international reputation in the world of ELT, the central question posed by Thorne's paper becomes of even greater urgency. Do we need Professor Widdowson's particular brand of stylistic analysis? That is to say, do we need "an approach to poetry" (which is the sub-title of the book under review) that offers the following conclusion to one of its chapters:

I have explored what this Yeats poem means to me, and I have pointed to features of the language which seem to me to give warrant to this meaning. But other interpretations are, of course, possible. We can come to no conclusions ... Poems represent [ideas and experience], fashion them into a form which we can apprehend without being able to explain (pp.24-25).

At first glance, we might wonder at the barrage of first person singular pronouns. The author, it would appear, despite claiming to offer "an approach", is not in the business of staking general claims, and the rest of the paragraph seems to support this view, with its possibility of "other interpretations" and inability to offer either "conclusions" or explanations. It is interesting to note, however, how the first person singular, so prominent in the first sentence, gives way to the plural form "we", which, one presumes, represents all of us rather than Professor Widdowson himself. In this transformation, I would contend, we see again the characteristic trait in Widdowson's discourse to which Thorne has drawn our attention - the closing down of alternative possibilities.

The disarming subjectivity that informs that first sentence as it explores the poem's meaning and highlights language features which support that meaning is replaced by a totalising perspective which holds that certain things are objectively true - no conclusions, no explanations. Presumably, if one were rash enough, like Bolt, to argue for a different meaning or the possibility of an explanation or conclusion, one would be told, quite firmly, that our author can "see no warrant in the actual text for this interpretation" (Widdowson, 1975, p.122), which of course must mean that there can't be one for, unlike Professor Widdowson, we have no way of grasping what the significant features of the text may be. We have been told!

It is worth pausing to examine this point in more detail, for it goes to the heart of Widdowson's approach to stylistics and to what is, perhaps, the central problem facing stylistics as a discipline. Of his own analysis of the Frost poem, he writes:

Here we have an interpretation of Frost's poem based on the careful consideration of certain linguistic features in it and the manner in which they relate to each other within discourse to achieve the communicative effect. But only those linguistic features which appear to be significant have been dealt with, of course, and this means that the interpretation will not satisfy those who give prominence to different linguistic features in the poem. (ibid, p.121).

While the first sentence is non-controversial, the second has embedded within it a rather neat rhetorical manoeuvre, not uncommon in Professor Widdowson's writing on this subject. For Widdowson, only certain linguistic features have significance but, because other readers might well "give prominence" to "different linguistic features", there will probably be disagreement over interpreting the text. So far, so democratic. But notice that only one interpretation is granted "significance". Readers can bestow "prominence" where they wish, Widdowson appears to say, but to uncover what is inherently 'significant' in a text requires a Widdowsonian analysis. Yet this analysis, we should remind ourselves, is introduced by the hesitant "Perhaps the first thing that one notices, if one is looking at the language of the poem

without troubling about what it is attempting to convey...."(ibid, p.117), and is followed by what the author himself terms "slender evidence".

Central to the enterprise of British stylistics as represented, say, by Leech's *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, Leech & Short's *Style in Fiction*, Fowler's *Linguistic Criticism* or Halliday's well-known essay (1971) on the representation of language in Golding's *The Inheritors*, has been the notion that the tabulation and analysis of linguistic features in terms of their functional significance is attempted in as objective a manner as possible. This is because of the underlying conviction that readers of a text will generally respond to the same linguistic features and will, generally, invest these with the same significance. This conviction is itself based on the formalist notion that readers will respond to literary texts in roughly similar ways because of how the author has 'foregrounded' (or drawn attention to) certain stretches of language in the course of composing the text, through the use of such devices as rhyme, alliteration and assonance, and/or through deviating from established norms by using archaisms, non-grammaticality, etc. Therefore, the foregrounding argument runs, if a reader such as Bolt gives prominence to a particular linguistic feature in a text, such as an inversion or repetition, that is because he has in some way been led to do so by the very way in which the text has been constructed. That is to say, the stylisticians' position is that there are general rules in operation which may be retrievable through analyses which are themselves overt and replicable.

Widdowson's approach, on the other hand, is much less objective, much less general. For example, he gives no reason for focusing on the two occurrences of 'his' in the Frost poem. On the face of it, this linguistic feature does not seem unusual and, therefore, appears unworthy of comment. (The verb 'think' also occurs twice, a fact not mentioned by Widdowson.) Bolt's point, however, that the last line of the poem is repeated, constitutes an obvious oddity with regard to the poem as a whole and thus could be viewed as being of potentially greater significance, both in terms of the poem in question and as a general rule. If a poem contains one line that is repeated, Bolt might argue, pay attention to that line because it is very likely to be significant.

The essential difference is between a stylistics that aspires towards the status of a science by espousing a theory which, it is believed, holds true for all poetry, thus allowing generalisations to be formulated, principles to be clearly enunciated, predictions to be made and tested; and, on the other hand, a stylistics that is rooted in an investigation of whatever features of the text appear subjectively significant to the individual. In fact, one sees little difference between Widdowson's approach and what used to be called 'close reading'. Indeed a commentator, Fernando (1985) writing about one of Professor Widdowson's papers on literature teaching makes just this point, "...I fear I cannot get it out of my head that there is absolutely nothing new here" (p.198). Writing about the same paper another commentator, Politi (1985) states:

Now, if I am sceptical about the readings proposed by Professor Widdowson, it is not because 'I fear the destructive force of rational thought', but rather because there is too little of it (p.196).

With Professor Widdowson, we would appear to be in the presence of someone more concerned with offering us a street-map than a set of geographical principles, "rules of thumb" rather than "rules that hold true all of the time", a "local" as opposed to a "general hermeneutics" (Fish, 1989, p.316). And, indeed, Widdowson wishes the first part of his book - *The significance of poetry* - to be read in precisely this way, "as an unfolding personal narrative of enquiry" (PS, p.xiv), while Part Two, *The teaching of poetry*, is presented in a more academic style.

Yet there must be an established core of reliability to any 'personal narrative' such as will convince us that we are in the presence of a narrator whose story-telling we can trust, whose street-maps we are willing to follow, whose 'approach' we are willing to adopt. In the chapter alluded to above, we are led, through a discussion of Yeats's poem *Memory*, to what is perhaps the central concept of the author's approach to poetry, which is that poems do not *refer* to experience but, rather, *represent*

experience. In order to demonstrate the truth of this, we are offered several reformulations of the poem, after one of which we read:

The poem thus recomposed conforms more closely to the title. It is about memory in general, and particular remembrances are mentioned as supporting illustration, whereas the original is about remembrances in particular and the general nature of memory is mentioned as explanation. The rhetoric is changed but the logical relationship between the propositions remains the same: A *because* B (the original) = B *so* A (the reformulation). In this sense, the two versions can be said to express essentially the same meaning (PS, p.18, emphases in original).

Yet, he goes on, "...the meaning of the poem cannot be captured in this way." According to Widdowson, although we can reformulate the poem in a variety of ways, we can never catch the essential meaning because that is captured in the very structure of the poem itself. In the case of the Yeats poem, for example, a reading of it provides the experiences that constitute the 'memory' which the poem represents.

Here is the poem itself, for reference:

#### Memory

One had a lovely face,  
 And two or three had charm,  
 But charm and face were in vain  
 Because the mountain grass  
 Cannot but keep the form  
 Where the mountain hare has lain.

All of this is quite convincing - as far as it goes. Yet this chapter, entitled 'Procedures for interpretation', does not, in point of fact, deliver what its title promises, even to the extent of plurality. What Widdowson does is to reformulate a poem - twice in verse, once in prose and once, in the Notes (PS, p.193), in a kind of dialogic verse :

One had a lovely face.  
 One who?  
 A girl in youth I used to know.  
 And one or two had charm.  
 Girls too.  
 But charm and face were in vain.  
 Why so?.

So where, one might reasonably ask, are the 'procedures'? Presumably, in order to analyse a poem in the 'Widdowsonian' way, we must reformulate it. But how? And how many times? And will all reformulations lead to the same result? How do we know? Of this particular exercise Widdowson writes: "In accordance with the procedure [sic] I have been practising of reformulating the poem to incorporate different possible interpretations..." (PS, p.193).

Yet if, as he has claimed, other interpretations are possible, the question we must ask is how many reformulations are necessary to 'incorporate' all these 'different possible interpretations' such that, eventually, we can arrive at some meaning of the poem which is warranted by its language and structure. Not only are we not given any general details of this 'approach', we are not even given any clues as to how we should set about the task of reformulating poems. In short, we are not dealing with stylistics as an academic area of enquiry but, rather, as personal revelation. It is, in fact, difficult to get over the notion that it is the writer, rather than the reader, who stands to benefit from this 'unfolding personal

enquiry'.

We move on to slightly clearer, if no less contentious, ground in Chapter 5, which examines how "features of grammar" can realign "established categories of meaning" (PS, p.33) in poetry. An extract from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal is compared with the poem that her brother William wrote about the same experience and Widdowson points out that the journal "refers to a good deal of detail which William disregards." (PS, p.34). This fact is interpreted as being significant so that, we are told, the poem represents "a perception of what is essential about the scene, some elemental and simple symmetry..." (PS, p.35). Leaving aside the fact that Widdowson appears to break one of his own rules by using events/data from *outside* the text to provide a purchase on what is being represented *within* the text itself<sup>2</sup>, he seems not to consider that William was actually writing a poem and that he may simply have found it difficult to cope with the fact that there were, according to his sister, 42 cattle feeding (the relevant line in the poem runs - "There are forty feeding like one!") and that it might have been difficult for him to incorporate into his poem the fact that there were "lasses spreading dung", much as he may have wished to. The commentary on the first four lines of the poem, however, allows us to see a side of Professor Widdowson that might astonish those of us who associate him with the development of communicative language teaching. The lines in question run -

The Cock is crowing,  
The stream is flowing,  
The small birds twitter,  
The lake doth glitter.

After being introduced to "semantico-grammatical categories", we are presented with the following "semantic co-ordinates" which, we are told, encode "kinds of temporal experience":

<i>point in time</i>	<i>period of time</i>
<i>present</i> present simple	present continuous
<i>past</i> past simple	past continuous (PS, p.36)

Many language teachers such as myself might be puzzled to 'learn' that the present simple tense represents a present point in time: it looks like it's back to the drawing-board for all these materials writers who insist on explaining the present simple as representing 'generalities', 'universal truths', 'routines', and so on. And we'll have to re-educate all our poor benighted English students who have struggled to learn that the present simple is neither present nor simple (It now appears that it is.) and that the answer to the question "What do you do at the moment?" (Not, of course, "What are you doing at the moment?") should not involve the present continuous as they might have thought but the present simple ("I read.").

In the second part of his book, Professor Widdowson presents "...activities which will engage students with poetic texts and draw their attention to the possible significance of particular linguistic features as conditions on interpretation" (PS, p.90).

These are very much in keeping with his central concern of reformulating the text and include re-ordering the lines of a poem, completing poems by filling in blanks, offering students re-written parallel texts to compare with the original poems, comparing poems with prose pieces, and so on. Such activities have become increasingly popular of late, as Widdowson says, and he makes no claims for originality. One major problem with them, however, and this is true for all such reformulation activities, is that it is not at all obvious that the designers of such tasks are themselves competent enough to lead others through them. Informal testing of the testers, as it were, suggests that teachers of language/literature and/or stylistics are themselves often unable to do what they require their students to do and that subsequent discussion is only legitimated by virtue of the fact that it is the teacher who is in possession of the original document<sup>3</sup>.

Professor Widdowson's main concern, he tells us, is an educational one and, indeed, his defence of poetry in the face of increasing demands for school subjects to be utilitarian and cost-effective is eloquent. The first two chapters of Part Two in particular, dealing with "the point of poetry" and its "educational relevance", are both powerful and persuasive. As he puts it :

There is little sign of interest (in Britain at any rate) in basic questions about educational criteria for curriculum design. People talk a good deal about what should or should not be included in the National Curriculum for subjects like History, English, Modern Languages, and so on, but the debate is almost totally devoid of any consideration of basic educational purpose....and it reduces for the most part to a confrontation of competing prejudices (PS, pp.83-84).

According to Widdowson, poetry should form part of any educational curriculum because the study of poetry, as proposed in his book:

...attracts attention to particular uses of language and allows for diversity of response. As such it encourages the kind of scepticism, recognition of relative validity, and critical scrutiny of established modes of thought and expression which....should be the purpose of education to develop (PS, p.82).

It is a great pity, therefore, that such a fine defence of poetry should be enshrined in a book which signally fails to fulfill its promises. In the absence of any statement of guidelines as to how his approach is to be put into practice and in his advocacy of practical activities which tend to deny students immediate access to the original texts, Professor Widdowson, far from presenting an approach that offers the opportunity to "demystify poetry, democratize it" (PS, p.179), succeeds in reinforcing the old stereotypes that poetry is difficult, that there is nothing that can be generalized about the nature of poetic discourse and that a 'guru' is required whose privileged readings should be followed.

If this *is* stylistic analysis, we really don't need it.

#### Notes:

1. The relevant issues are *The Use of English* 24(1,3,4) Chatto & Windus.
2. See PS, Chapter 10 - in particular the discussion of the poem *Railwaymen*, pp.65-66.
3. See my article 'Lexicide & Goblin-spotting' in *ELTJ* 46(2) for a fuller coverage of the argument, together with Richard Walker's reply *ELTJ* 46, No.4, and my (hopefully final) response (*ELTJ* forthcoming).

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***Evaluating Second Language Education***  
edited by J. Charles Alderson and Alan Beretta  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

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*Evaluating Second Language Education* is written primarily for language teaching professionals who are likely to work as (or with) evaluators of language teaching programmes. The book presents a short editorial introduction, opening and closing chapters by one of the editors, and eight 'state-of-the-art' evaluation studies, each with an editorial commentary. In the opening chapter, 'Evaluation of Language Education: An Overview', Alan Beretta contrasts the lack of attention given to evaluation studies in language programmes with the wealth of work in other areas of education. Charles Alderson's closing chapter, 'Guidelines for the Evaluation of Language Education', attempts without prescriptivism to systematise practical issues that will arise during an evaluation. The book as a whole offers reflective experience as a way to "contribute to an understanding of the discipline of evaluating second language education" (Editors' introduction, p.2).

The eight case studies are: Insiders, outsiders and participatory evaluation (Alderson and Scott); Evaluating a program inside and out (Lynch); The 'independent' evaluation of bilingual primary education: a narrative account (Mitchell); Issues in evaluating input-based language teaching programs (Palmer); Program-defining evaluation in a decade of eclecticism (Ross); Evaluation of classroom interaction (Slimani); Moving the goalposts: project evaluation in practice (Coleman); What can be learned from the Bangalore Evaluation (Beretta). The projects are set (respectively) in Brazil, Mexico, Scotland, the U.S.A., Japan, Algeria, Indonesia and India. English is the second language in most cases, but Mitchell's study concerns Gaelic-English bilingualism, and Palmer's study examines the learning of German in an American university. Five studies are set in universities and range from first-year undergraduate teaching to teacher education; the other studies are those by Mitchell (primary education), Ross (junior college) and Beretta (secondary education).

My response to the case studies was to skim-read the introductions and closing parts, returning to the chapters selectively according to interest, and to focus on issues and "lessons" that might be applied in my own working circumstances. Some of these were the relationship between programme evaluation and teacher development (Alderson and Scott); quantitative and qualitative evaluation (e.g. Lynch); problematic relations between evaluations and policy development (Mitchell; Coleman); ways to conduct rigorous and interesting classroom-centred research (Slimani). I also found the editors' contributions helpful in suggesting connections between the contextualised case studies and their possible applications to other circumstances. I shall keep going back to the book.

An earlier review of Alderson and Beretta by Davies (1992) raises some important questions about current approaches to language programme evaluation. Indicating courteous scepticism over insider involvement in evaluations and over a place for qualitative analysis, Davies asks whether "an evaluation necessarily means telling the reader everything" (1992, p.208). The danger of overkill in qualitative studies is real, and a fully comprehensive account of a language programme must remain unattainable. Yet one can avoid the excesses of enthusiasm without total abstinence. To avoid becoming submerged in unusable qualitative data, Lynch (p.93) specifies the need for an explicit purpose when drawing upon and categorising information. As sources of such data, Lynch mentions journal entries, daily logs, observations, meeting notes, questionnaires and interviews (p.69), while his coding categories (p.77) include goals, processes, events, settings, participants and outcomes. Despite Davies's misgivings

on the point, qualitative data can offer important insights for an evaluation. For example, the frequent mismatch between teaching plans and learning outcomes (Slimani) might simply go unnoticed if evaluations were carried out solely by outsiders concerned with performance measures.

Davies's main problems with the book, however, concern its editorial stance and its case study approach. The editorial commentaries on the case studies involve some repetition of themes, and Davies finds a need for a critical review of second language evaluation that is separated from accounts of practice. Above all, Davies finds the major theme "dispiriting" in its rejection of the possibility of objectivity in programme evaluation.

The adoption of a case study approach is presented by the editors themselves as a principled choice. Alderson and Beretta in their introduction (pp.1-3) describe second language programme evaluation as requiring "ad hoc investigation that appears to have no tradition that can be appealed to", in contrast with evaluation studies in other social and educational spheres (a tradition drawn upon in Beretta's overview chapter). The use of case studies is intended to capture experiences and problems of evaluators in particular settings, and to avoid unreal "cleaned-up" accounts of the evaluation process. While commenting that all eight case studies are "firmly grounded empirical enquiries", Alderson and Beretta observe that "at this stage of our development, the history of an evaluation is probably more important than its findings". They suggest the value of learning from accounts of decision-making processes during evaluations.

As a mode of knowing, the case study approach appears better respected and more highly valued in applied (educational) linguistics today than was often the case before the 1980's. Case studies include an important element of narrative (explicit in Mitchell's title). Hymes and Cazden (1980) argue for greater recognition of narrative thinking, presenting it as a legitimate but greatly undervalued way of exploring and conveying knowledge.

If anything, a case study approach tends to privilege other forms of knowing than those most closely associated with technical rationality and efficiency. Work in the ethnographic tradition has encouraged case studies, allied to research practice whereby the observer seeks to formulate descriptive and evaluative categories used by participants themselves, rather than imposing a preconceived framework of analysis; van Lier (1988) among others has brought this tradition firmly to bear on the second language classroom. Careful exploration of experience in particular contexts also appears crucial in the development and validation of "local forms of knowledge" called for by Pennycook (1989, p.613).

While the case for in-depth explorations of particular situations seems compelling in this light, there remains a need for attempted generalisation if accounts of various evaluation studies are to "contribute to an understanding of the discipline of evaluating second language education" (editors' introduction). This brings us to questions of a disciplinary framework, and of the status of knowledge claims.

Candlin observes that much second language research lacks an overall theory of discourse and a social orientation, and consequently produces "underdetermined analyses which may act to trivialise the complexity of human social interaction" (Candlin 1990, p.474). Although his concerns are mainly with the limited vision of narrowly-focussed studies in the positivist tradition, Candlin also points out the danger of producing only "some mere listing of unmotivated and unwarranted subjective meanings" (p.479) in seeking to acknowledge the place of subjectivity and of differing viewpoints when undertaking data collection and analysis.

Davies's doubts about qualitative analysis, and perhaps about a case study approach to the development of a discipline, here find an unexpected echo. However, the responses of Candlin and Davies towards subjectivity and differing viewpoints could scarcely be more divergent. Favouring ethnographic rather than experimental accounts, Candlin argues that experimental work has a place within a more comprehensive and self-questioning or "reflexive" approach towards the use of research

procedures in applied linguistics. Such a reflexive approach to data gathering and treatment appears highly relevant to language programme evaluation (Beretta, p.20; Alderson, p.299). It appears able to handle multiple viewpoints, and to give weight both to subjective judgements and to an aspiration towards generalisable knowledge.

In seeking to encourage a disciplinary perspective, Alderson and Beretta do not themselves propose any overall theory or framework for the evaluation of second language education. The nearest they come to a model is in Alderson's "guidelines" to the evaluation of second-language education programmes, which aim

...to offer suggestions about how to set up and carry out evaluations in any given setting. The section attempts to provide a balanced overview and discussion of the issues encountered in the evaluation of second language education ...(and) to furnish insights into the nature of evaluation in a way that is intended to provide practical guidance to would-be evaluators (Alderson and Beretta, pp.2-3).

An outline model of the stages of an evaluation is then used for expository convenience. Alderson's account follows "the usual and logical stages in the conduct of an evaluation: planning, implementing, interpreting, reporting, using, evaluating" (p.274). (For more detail, see my article in this issue.)

Using upper-case letters to stigmatise claims that he considers excessive, Alderson rejects the notions that there might be "One Best Way" to conduct an evaluation and "One Truth" to reveal. Purposes, projects, people, timescales and resources will all affect the choices to be made during an evaluation. Different interpretations will need to be constructed and presented from (and for) different viewpoints. Alderson reassures us that this "emphatically does not mean that 'anything goes': it is essential that evaluations be conducted in a principled, systematic and explicit manner", but he also insists that "No evaluation is ever objective...The best we can hope for is pooled intersubjectivity and reduced or neutralised partiality" (Alderson, pp.274-275).

Reacting to such observations, Davies (1992) bemoans what he describes as "a strong editorial undertow... offering only a dispiriting doubt as to whether evaluation is ever possible". Dismissing preoccupations over the partial and often partisan nature of judgements, and the impossibility of an objective stance, as "an extreme observer's paradox position", Davies adds "one longs in the editorial commentary for the sort of sprightly kick Dr. Johnson offered to the anomic gloom of Bishop Berkeley" (Davies 1992, p.207).

Potted philosophy is dangerous - a comment that could promptly backfire on this writer. However, Davies's allusions to Berkeley notwithstanding, a conviction that an "objective" stance is unattainable surely need not lead us to reject external reality, or to renounce all prospects of socially constituted knowledge. For example, Lakoff (1987) offers a resilient and cheerful optimism about human capacity to attain knowledge, while at the same time arguing against "objectivism" and in favour of "experientialism" as the basis upon which our knowledge of the world has necessarily to be composed. To suggest that "reality" is observed, and constructed, from some point of view is (in this view!) to accept the conditions by which reality can be known, and not to despair of its existence.

The problem for objectivism, which at least has serious implications also for a positivist belief in "objectivity", is that reality cannot be known and conveyed independently of some point of view. The ideal "God's eye" view may be the ultimate synthesis of all views, rather than the one perfect vantage point. Such a synthesis is humanly unattainable - which also offers a principled reason to keep enthusiasm for qualitative analysis within manageable bounds.

What might an experientialist view of reality imply for the evaluation of educational programmes?

External and educational realities exist, but different elements of reality will be more or less salient, and more or less closely related, according to the perspectives from which they are considered. Any reasonable degree of consensus among people will reflect a synthesis of views that is itself put forward within a shared and socially constructed perspective. A successful evaluation report, then, will offer an account that gives sufficient heed to the perspectives of different "stakeholders" in a project to be acceptable to these groups or their representatives, with acceptability and success being matters of degree, and related to users in contexts. Above all, a successful report will actually be used.

To assert that second language programme evaluation is a practical activity is not, however, to consign it wholly to the realm of the arbitrary, the makeshift and the convenient. An evolving "discipline" of second language evaluation seeks to establish standards of practice and to afford its own socially constructed perspective, wider in space and time yet narrower in "professional" focus, upon this area of activity. Alderson and Beretta's book brings us closer to such a discipline. In so doing, *pace* Davies, *Evaluating Second Language Education* also offers hope.

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## Review Essay: Imagining and Confessing

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What, one may be tempted to ask, have imagination and confession got to do with language teaching? To those used to the standard myths and stories of applied linguistics, ostensibly very little. Certainly, this essay does not deal with more obviously relevant topics such as stylistics or evaluation as do the other reviews in this section. And yet I want to suggest that such topics do indeed have more to do with language teaching than might at first appear to be the case. One of the problems with applied linguistics, as I have argued elsewhere (Pennycook, 1990), is that it tends either to take the form of programmatic prescriptions for classroom practice or to take the form of a positivistic social science concerned somewhat obsessively with measurement and objective description. What I find lacking in this body of applied linguistic knowledge are broader means for reflecting on my teaching practice in terms of cultural and philosophical implications of language teaching. It is my hope, then, that by turning to such books as Richard Kearney's (1988) *The Wake of Imagination* and Jeremy Tambling's (1990) *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, I shall be able to raise (but not necessarily answer) some rather different concerns.

I should point out from the outset that neither my interest here nor that of the two authors being reviewed is in imagination or confession in some narrow sense of the words. Rather, the issue is one of trying to understand historically, or, in Foucault's terms, as a "history of the present", how imagination - how humans come to create meaning - and confession - how humans are required to speak the truth about the self - have been constructed. Such questions are important, first of all, as part of an understanding of how 'Western' beliefs about language, meaning and subjectivity have come to be as they are. In light of the global spread of western forms of culture and knowledge, it is crucial for those of us closely tied up with this spread to be able to deal ethically with our own position by being able to understand its very particularity. We need, therefore, to deconstruct and understand historically how currently taken-for-granted beliefs about language, meaning and subjectivity are very particular cultural and ideological positions. As part of our project on plagiarism (see Reports section), for example, a crucial first step was to attempt to understand how it was that Western concepts of authorship and ownership of language and ideas came into being. Such questions, it seems to me, need to form the first step of our work if we are to deal in any ethically justifiable manner with our position as purveyors of Western languages, cultures and knowledges.

Imagination and confession also have more immediate connections to the domain of language teaching. These concerns suggest the need to examine how we understand creativity and meaning in second language education. The most common view on these matters in the Western applied linguistic tradition appears to be that of a modernist-humanist subject in control of his or her meaning and simply, therefore, in need of a second code with which those meanings can be realised. If, however, we take seriously the issues raised by an examination of imagination and confession, this view of individuals as the authors of their meanings and of languages as transparent codes for the realisation of those meanings can be seen as very particular, and highly contestable, historical and cultural views. Furthermore, if we understand people not as these modernist-humanist individuals producing meaning, but rather as subjects who are as much *produced by* language and discourse as they are *producers of* language and discourse, the significant question becomes not "How do we give students access to the second code?" but rather "What are the implications of asking students to speak and write their way into new discourses in the second language? What new subjectivities are put into play by our teaching?" Centrally, then, this exploration of imagination and confession raises questions of authority and authorship in meaning and

speaking, questions of undoubted concern, I would suggest, to those of us engaged in language education. I shall return to these issues later.

### Histories of imagination and confession

What, then, do the two authors understand by 'imagination' and 'confession'? In fact, both Kearney and Tambling are reluctant - and I think quite rightly so - to provide hard definitions of their topics. Such a proposition would ultimately be impossible since both are dealing with historically shifting concepts. Kearney, drawing on Paul Ricoeur's notion of *narrative identity*, a concept which allows for "historical mutability as an integral part of our self-understanding," attempts to "narrate the stories of this concept, to recount the history of how it came to be" (p.17). Similarly, Tambling points to the importance of avoiding a belief that there is an "essential form of words or actions called 'confession'"; even a position that acknowledges "varied confessional practices" may be insufficient (p.2). Ultimately, he suggests that a history of confession can be written if it concedes that however discontinuous one practice may be from another, these practices have "fed off the rhetoric" of each other (p.3). We are not dealing here, therefore, with standard histories that attempt to explain the development of some apparently firm concept over time but rather with histories that acknowledge that their subject is constantly shifting.

I was drawn to Kearney's text by an appealing theme - a genealogy of imagination in Western philosophical thought - and by the prospect of being taken for a ride through Western philosophy, from Plato to Derrida, not by way of general summaries of their work but rather by examining the ways in which they deal with the particular topic of the book, imagination. Kearney argues that the history of imagination in the West can be divided into three main periods: the premodern, the modern and the postmodern. The first era is exemplified by the "*theocentric* paradigm of iconography" in which the imagination is seen as a reflection of God-given reality; the second by "the *anthropocentric* paradigm of self-portraiture" in which the human mind moves to the centre of the creative process; and third by the "*ex-centric* paradigm of parody" in which images are seen to be nothing but reflections of each other (p.11). Finally, the book also offers in its conclusion various suggestions for how we can escape from some of the problems of paralysis, fragmentation and relativism in postmodern philosophy. Signalling a certain alarm at the notion of postmodern imagination as only image upon image, his book aims not only to describe these different historical formulations of the imagination but also to argue for a form of postmodern imagination that avoids "the extremes of both traditional quietism and modern voluntarism", that is to say a view of meaning that avoids both the premodern tendency to stand guard over 'original' meaning and the modern tendency to overemphasize the autonomous individual as the source of all meaning (p.33).

I was drawn to Tambling's text not because of some fascination with Catholicism or police methods of gaining dubious convictions (though these are not inconsequential concerns), but rather because he starts with that point that has long fascinated me in Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, where Foucault suggests that "Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth.... The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface" (1980, pp.58-60). Foucault thus sees confession as a broad range of ritual practices, from the Catholic confessional to the psychiatrist's couch, that demand that we tell certain "truths" about ourselves. This in turn must be seen as part of Foucault's larger project of exploring how we are made subjects. Thus, as Tambling puts it:

Confession is constitutive of the subject in that Foucauldian inflection of the term. Those addressed by a confessional discourse are 'interpellated' (hailed, singled out by name), and are subjected, i.e. made to define themselves in a discourse given to them, and in which they must name and misname themselves; and secondly, made to think of themselves as autonomous subjects, responsible for their acts (p.2).

This notion of being addressed by a confessional discourse, of being called to speak the truth about the self, then, is concerned ultimately not with confessional practices themselves but with ways in which we are constituted as subjects by such discourses. Tambling suggests four particular eras and models of confessional practice: the early Christian period of confession as penance in a public arena, exemplified by St. Augustine's *Confessions*; the 16th century inward turn to the private space of the confessional box; the 18th and 19th century 'panoptical' internalisation of confession, exemplified by the 'Romantic' confessions of Rousseau, Wordsworth, Dickens and others; and the 20th century locus of confession in the medicalised domain of the clinic.

### The premodern

The first part of Kearney's discussion of imagination focuses on three main domains, the Hebraic, Hellenic and Medieval. This *premodern* (theocentric) period can be characterised by a belief in truth as external to humans (either theologically or ontologically), with the imagination at best as a mirror of the real and at worst as a crime against the real. The Hebraic tradition was to a certain extent ambivalent, since imagination (*yetser*) was interpreted both as the evil that brought about the Fall of 'Man' (Adam presuming to be like God) and as the good that presented the possibilities for change. The Hellenic tradition, by contrast, was singularly dismissive of imagination; Plato argued that reason alone could gain access to the pure Ideas and Essences and that imagination was but a pseudo-world of imitations (hence his dismissal of poetry and art as worthless imitation). These two traditions were brought together in the work of Augustine who largely followed this view of imagination as 'mimetic' representation. His legacy to medieval thought was to condemn imagination ethically "as a transgression of the divine order of Creation", and epistemologically "as a counterfeit of the original truth of Being" (p.117). Medieval philosophy, then, bore a basic antipathy toward imagination. It is interesting to observe, furthermore, that even in the Eastern Orthodox church, which developed a long tradition of religious iconography, the icons did not bear the names of the authors, for they were seen as reflections of God and not as creations of humans.

Tambling also sees Augustine as a central figure to his genealogy of confession, arguing that it is with Augustine's extended problematizing of his inability to control his sexual urges that two particular aspects of confession are put into play: there is a particular construction of a unitary self, a single 'I' here, one whose history can be constructed through confession; and there is a particular need to confess publicly, to tell of the struggles over this self to an audience. What starts to emerge, then, is a way of publicly narrating one's past life as sin (a very particular narrative that posits a self overcome by bodily urges) and a view of this public shame as a means of expurgating sin and constructing a new narrative of the future. Interestingly, this amphitheatre model of confession is more or less the complete opposite of the later panopticon: in the one, the confessant (the person who confesses) is at the centre, surrounded by onlookers; in the other, the confessants are arranged on the outside, observed by the all-seeing central observation tower. Such an observation points to an important theme in this book, namely how confession is intimately linked to changing - and, one should add, more totalizing - technologies of power. From these Augustinian origins of confession, there is a gradual transition in the Middle Ages from confession as a once-off, public display in front of an audience to confession as a repeated and very private practice; and from confession as an account of oneself before God to confession as a recounting of sins before a figure of authority. This move, as Tambling points out, marks an important shift in terms of an understanding of the self and of the growing regularization of the practice of confession. Christianity thus:

locates truth in the inward parts, not inscribed on the body, and not publicly demonstrable.... Thus the issue of the role medieval confession plays in producing a subject marked out by deep inwardness, links with another - how the demand for truth produces a self that is marked by the desire to show that it possesses truth (p.40).

Despite the shift from the confession as public penitence to private sacrament, there is also an interesting continuity here in the increasing means available - and eventually obligatory - for narrating the self.



Indeed this cultivation and control of the self, while on the one hand clearly changing over time, on the other hand provides an intriguingly coherent story when set against the historical ruptures described by Kearney. Indeed, in some ways the confessing self is a clear precursor to the modernist individual.

### The modern

Kearney suggests that the *modern* (anthropocentric) era marks a dramatic change in views on imagination: "what most distinguishes the modern philosophies of imagination from their various antecedents is a marked *affirmation* of the creative power of man<sup>1</sup>. The *mimetic* paradigm of imagining is replaced by the *productive* paradigm" (p.155). Thus, meaning is no longer viewed as a property of some transcendent Being or Truth but rather as a product of the human mind. Taking on the challenges of the Enlightenment's positioning of humans at the centre of the universe, of Descartes' cogitating subject and Hume's scepticism, Kant attempted to "rehabilitate the validity of objective knowledge by establishing the validity of the subjective imagination" (p.169). In this view, imagination ceases to be an imitation of the world and becomes the *sine qua non* of all knowledge, since it is imagination that in effect mediates between sensations (the empirical) and our understanding of them (the rational). If Kant is doubtless better known for his retreat from the radical implications of this view and his later stress on rationality, his views were to influence the German idealists, Fichte and Schelling, who sought to elevate the imagination as the absolute source of human thought; human imagination became an almost divine source of inspiration. This in turn was to greatly influence the whole Romantic era and especially Coleridge.

It is interesting to observe that Tambling focuses on the writers of the Romantic era as profoundly confessional. If the individual becomes the centre of all inspiration, the locus of meaning and creativity, it is also the locus of the confessing self, a move Tambling charts from Catholic confession to Protestant autobiography. Now the confessor (the person to whom a confession is made) "is internalised fully" (p.92). The Puritan diary, with its demand for an account of every moment of the day, becomes the Protestant autobiography and then the Romantic confession (Rousseau, Wordsworth, De Quincey and so on). At this point, then, the external moral discourse of Christian sin and the subsequent version of the moral codes of the confessional become internalised discourses of the every day. The obligation to confess, to speak truths about the self, have become commonplace narratives of the self. With the shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric model of meaning, modern individuals confess to themselves, narrate their lives according to the internalized discourses of morality.

In showing this transition, however, I think Tambling conflates two models, the Catholic confessional and the panopticon. While there are obvious parallels to be drawn between the shift from public confession to private confessional and the shift from public punishment (hanging, whipping etc) to private punishment (incarceration), the Catholic confessional seems directly comparable with early stages of internalization and not the later stages of panoptical control. The Catholic confessional is a crucial part of that process of interiorization of regulatory discourses but it seems to me to be part of the period of regulation that Foucault (1979) associates with the dark prison cell rather than the back-lit self-regulation of the panopticon. As Foucault suggests,

Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected....Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the autonomous functioning of power (pp.200-201).

This, I would suggest, is not the carceral equivalent of the Catholic confessional, nor of Protestant autobiography or Romantic confession, but rather of the 19th century's development of professional and disciplinary modes of surveillance that demand a speaking of the truth, particularly the judicial, educational and psychiatric. The literary equivalent would probably more likely be the realist or naturalist novel of the 19th century.

To return to Kearney's theme: While the Romanticists were eventually to retreat into an

imaginary world of their own, the centrality of imagination was taken up by existentialist philosophers. Existentialism affirms the centrality of individual imagination, but where romanticism and idealism led to a vision of the imaginative as a separate and isolated domain pursued by the lonely artist, existentialism brought the imagination back into everyday life. Nietzsche was to explore the implications of this move furthest in his utter rejection of any absolute truth and his insistence on 'perspectivism' - the existentialist pluralism of subjective viewpoints. Gone is any appeal to universals or absolutes; in their place are the struggles of individuals to come to terms with the absence of meaning beyond their own will to mean. This line of thinking was to lead to Heidegger, Camus and Sartre and their commitment to a struggle for imagination in a meaningless world. Imagination is not an addition to human consciousness but the crucial condition by which humans are able to achieve freedom by going beyond the real. Ultimately, however, Sartre was to find himself trapped between the contradictory claims of the existentialist espousal of the individual and the humanist stress on the universal. It was to be the postmodern philosophical shift that was to end this humanist dilemma by signalling the end of 'man'.

### The postmodern

*Postmodern* (ex-centric) thinking in its various forms decentres the humanist subject from its central position in modernist thinking and thus questions the concept of imagination as a product of modernist, bourgeois thought. Lacan's developments and critiques of Freudian psychoanalytic theory stress the *imaginary* nature of the belief in an *ego* in control of a unitary self. Althusser's Marxist social philosophy focuses on the imaginary nature of the belief in the individual as the key player in historical change; he points instead to the importance of understanding the primary role of social class and ideological state apparatuses. Foucault's broad-ranging work demonstrates how the very concept of 'man' is a construction of the human sciences: "it was on this transcendental threshold of modern thought that the 'strange figure of knowledge called man' first appeared and revealed a space proper to the human sciences" (p.267). Barthes' work, a move from 'semiology' (the science of signs) to 'semiotics' (a critique of signs), aims to demystify the ideological *imaginaire* of Western bourgeois belief, that assumption that the subject is the source of universal meaning. Perhaps most significantly, Barthes signals the 'death of the author'. Finally, Derrida's work challenges the whole metaphysical belief in origins, what Derrida calls *logocentrism*: "there is no primordial 'presence' (foundation, reality, truth, idea) of which writing could be said to be a re-presentation at second hand. There is no such thing as an original event of meaning" (p.281). Derrida questions the whole Western tradition of privileging *logos* over *mimesis*, of being/essence over representation, and leaves us with an endless series of imitations. Thus, as Kearney explains,

Right across the spectrum of structuralist, post-structuralist and deconstructionist thinking, one notes a common concern to dismantle the very notion of imagination. Where it is spoken of at all, it is subjected to suspicion or denigrated as an outdated humanist illusion spawned by the modern movements of romantic idealism and existentialism. The philosophical category of imagination, like that of 'man' himself, appears to be dissolving into an anonymous play of language (p.251).

Clearly such a decentring of the humanist subject must have profound implications for any broad notion of confession since it is the very practice of confession, broadly conceived, that has played a crucial role in creating, and providing the narratives for, that unitary self. Here, however, I found Tambling rather lost his way, or, perhaps it is fairer to say that I lost his way. Rather than continuing to map out the changes in confessional practice, Tambling turns more and more into his largely deconstructive readings of various texts that he takes to be confessional. In his discussion of Romantic confession, he suggests that all writing is basically confessional: "Confession, then, characterises the nature of writing" (p.121), a claim that sits rather at odds with any suggestion that we take seriously the notion of the death of the author. From there, his text moves more and more towards various readings of literary works and, in very un-Foucauldian fashion, towards increasing psychologising of the authors, so that by the time he gets to Dickens, he confesses to be engaged in something of a "psychobiography" (p.136). Thus the potential of his 19th century chapter, 'Doing the police in different voices' gets dissipated in his

psychobiography of Dickens; the potential of the discussion of 'Clinical practices' gets lost in the discussion of Mann, Dostoyevsky and Sartre; and the potential of 'I live on my own credit: confession and post-modernism' is never realised.

There are a number of reasons for this that I think are worth expanding on since they are to some extent shared by both authors and since they raise larger issues concerning attempts to write such genealogies. First, where I start to part company with Tambling is in his reluctance to deal with psychoanalysis as a site of regulation and his insistence that it can be a significant site of resistance to confession:

I want to argue, against anti-psychoanalytic tendencies in Foucault's writings and those of Foucault, Deleuze and Danzelot which stress 'normalizing' tendencies in [Freud's] work and interpretations of people, that any consideration of resistance to confession must see it as crucial, important strategically, not necessarily, despite appearances, (as in the case of American ego-psychology, which Lacan attacks so strongly) part of the problem (p.179).

While there is certainly something to be considered here, especially in the warning not to conflate American ego-psychology with other variants and in the recognition that Freud's ideas were far broader than later interpretations have allowed, Tambling's discussion of the clinic more as a site of resistance to confession than as a site of regulation seems to me to deflate the earlier argument that the clinic represents the culmination of the development of confessional practice.

The second issue concerns the disciplinary focus of both books. While both, in trying to present genealogies of imagination and confession, step beyond the normal disciplinary boundaries of philosophy and comparative literature, both also rely to a large extent on those disciplines for the stories they tell. Thus, while Tambling is clearly to some extent resistant to the canon of literature, he nevertheless relies increasingly on his own deconstructive readings of Wordsworth, Dickens and so on to make his points. This gradual inward turn by Tambling towards literary texts leads to his readiness to accord almost all literary works the status of confession and thus to concentrate on how such texts can be read as indicative of eras of confessional practice. This not only sits at odds with Tambling's frequent mention of the death of the author but also, it seems to me, leads to a rather closed argument: as confessional practices become wider and wider, all writing becomes confessional and thus any text can be analyzed as an instance of confession. There are two further problems with this: First, I think there are a number of doubts as to how much Dostoevsky or Dickens can tell us about 19th century policing and clinical practices. My suspicion is that while certain literary texts, from Augustine through to Rousseau, may be fine exemplars of confession, confessional practice needs to be sought thereafter in the broader cultural domains of the clinical, juridical and educational (for some interesting connections between psychiatry and education, see Goodson and Dowbiggin, 1990). Second, this points, I think, to a problem with some aspects of cultural studies (both books could be said to fall into this domain): in broadening the focus of literary and other studies to the wider domains of cultural analysis, there has been an exciting broadening of work and a crucial challenge to the insidious high/low culture divide. Yet, to the extent that some writers under the cultural studies rubric return to the same literary texts and now claim to be dealing with culture in a very broad sense, there is a dangerous new presumption to be able to find the world in the literary text.

Similarly, Kearney bases much of his discussion on the "great tradition", the "keyphilosophers", a problem that Kearney at times seems aware of but avoids addressing. The problem here is that by discussing imagination as conceived by Plato, Augustine, Kant, Heidegger, Sartre or Derrida, we are told a lot about a particular tradition of thought but not much about a whole range of other parallel and alternative traditions. Although suggesting a certain allegiance to Foucault's genealogical method, Kearney has basically written what is in some ways a traditional history of thought while Tambling has written what is in some ways a traditional piece of literary criticism. I was left wondering about all those others - the alternative readings of the Adamic story in, for example, gnostic texts, the celebration of the

imagination in medieval folklore, the concept of the imagination today that coexists with all that is supposedly postmodern. On the medieval period, for example, Kearney closes the section by reminding us that "the Christian attitude to imagination is not all there is to the medieval imagination" for there also existed a significant 'a-Christian' counter culture "sustained by the popular folk arts which accorded a central place to three main areas outlawed by the onto-theological orthodoxy - *magic*, the *body*, and *dreams*" (p.138). Of course it would have been a different book had Kearney pursued these other possibilities but I am left pondering the extent to which the "great philosophers" represent cultural epochs or stand apart from them.

There also seems to be a major disjuncture between Kearney's conclusion and the rest of the book: his proposal that we read history against the grain and seek to open up counter-memories and subjugated knowledges does not sit easily with his earlier reading of the canon of Western philosophy. Perhaps most obvious, and this is also to some extent a problem with Tambling, is the failure to deal with women and others' challenges to philosophy. If this is excusable in the premodern and modern eras to the extent that it is acknowledged that this is a history of classic philosophy, it seems to be a major lacuna in the postmodern era in which women could be said to be at the forefront of the rewriting of received knowledges. My point here is not to argue simply for some greater inclusion of women by numbers but rather that had Kearney dealt with women's writing on postmodernism, rather than only with the male philosophers, he might have been left not so much with the deconstructive turn of Derrida, Lyotard or Barthes or the neo-Marxist tautologies of Frederic Jameson but with the more grounded (or "situated" to use Donna Haraway's phrase) knowledge implied by feminist work. The point here is that in attacking the canon of (male) Western thought, women and postcolonial writers tend to end not so much in a position of postmodern despair that all is just image upon image, but rather in a regrouping around new possibilities for feminist and postcolonialist politics.

Finally, with both authors, we run into the difficulty of defining what is meant by postmodernism. The question that I think needs to be asked, a question that both seem to skirt, is whether one considers postmodernism to be a cultural and philosophical response to some posited real material conditions - a superstructural reflection of changes to the social infrastructure in post-industrial society - or whether, on the other hand, postmodernism is taken to be a cultural-philosophical shift not necessarily based on primary objective and material conditions (for a discussion of this question in terms of comparative education, see Rust, 1991). This question is important both because it implies a difference between a modernist-materialist stance (the former) and a postmodernist-cultural stance (the latter) on how postmodernism is understood and because it implies a very different position on whether one is prepared to talk of a "postmodern world" or a "postmodern take on the world" (or worlds). The first position seems to articulate a modernist view of postmodernism, one that tries to provide another Grand Narrative to explain the existence of postmodern culture in terms of late industrial capitalism. The other is a more postmodern view that eschews such teleologies. Kearney is not altogether clear on this, though his argument seems to rest on a belief that there is a very real crisis - an apocalypse even - of the imagination in the postmodern era. Thus, he suggests that "the deconstruction of imagination is a global phenomenon and not merely the rarefied invention of a few Parisian intellectuals" (p.299). This argument he then proceeds to support by analyzing cultural forms from literature, film, plastic arts, painting and architecture. It is one thing, however, to show that these ideas are not merely to be found in French postmodern philosophy but can also be seen in diverse cultural forms; it is quite another to suggest that the existence of postmodern parody in a Beckett novel, a Wenders film, a Warhol painting or a Los Angeles hotel constitutes evidence of a "global phenomenon". Tambling is also unclear, it seems to me, on how he understands postmodernism, though his argument that postmodernism produces a "self-fashioning" subject that demands a freedom from the past and thus from confession, appears to suggest that postmodernism is a real historical period producing real historical subjects. There is also need for caution in accepting the periodizations of these two books as if cultural and temporal changes form neat historical blocks. As Hoy (1988) suggests, furthermore, periodization is "a modernist tool" (p.13).

The point here is that while I believe that postmodernism is indeed not merely the invention of a few Parisian intellectuals, it should also not be seen as necessarily the cultural logic of late capitalism

(to use Jameson's phrase), since such a proposition runs the danger of claiming another Grand Narrative for the world. In the context of Hong Kong, for example, I feel we need to be cautious about assuming that Hong Kong is now an extension of the postmodern world and that imagination here has now therefore become nothing but a series of imitations, or that Hong Kong is now producing "self-fashioning" subjects. Such an argument recapitulates in a postmodern form the type of epistemological presumption more often associated with modernism. Rather, I think we need to ask to what extent a postmodern understanding of the imaginary and confession can help an understanding of contemporary Hong Kong. This position would locate postmodernism as a specific Western cultural and intellectual phenomenon that may or may not have relevance to the cultures and philosophies of Hong Kong.

### Implications

Despite these misgivings, both books nevertheless have a lot to offer. Both end with suggestions as to how to proceed beyond the dilemmas of postmodern imagination and confession. Tambling concludes with the suggestion that:

Resistance might begin by an awareness that the confessional position is just the one that various structures of social life have historically drawn people into, with all the sanctions of patriarchy, the Law, God, Absolute Right and Truth. Resistance begins when people start to pick at these abstractions and to ask where they are coming from, and exactly why such an investment is made in them (p.212).

Kearney's suggestions as to how we can move forward in face of what he sees as the postmodern apocalypse of imagination constitute a key part of his book and provide a very thoughtful and useful consideration of how to regroup from the postmodern dilemmas of hopelessness, parody and eternal repetition. He argues that having:

Demystified the excesses of the premodern and modern paradigms of imagination, we may be in a position to discover another kind of relation between self and other - one more human than humanism and more faithful to otherness than onto-theology (p.362).

What Kearney envisages is, first and foremost, an ethical imagination, a response to the call of the *other* to be recognized and respected in his or her otherness. Secondly, this needs to be combined with a poetical imagination, an ability to play and to envisage alternative possibilities. Thus, while he acknowledges that "it is no doubt salutary to debunk the more naive aspects of the humanist imagination: e.g. its belief in the inevitability of historical progress and its almost messianic claims for the idealist subject," (p.361), he argues for a version of postmodern imagination that "would strive to i) open us to the concrete needs of the other in the postmodern here and now, and ii) explore how we might effectively engage in the transformation of our social existence" (p.387). This requires hermeneutic, historical and narrative tasks so that imagination becomes "committed to the reinterpretation of our cultural memory" (p.393) and to an understanding of identity as a shifting narrative rather than a fixed entity.

The issues raised by these two books have, I believe, a number of significant implications for language teaching. First, there is the question of understanding our cultural traditions concerning language, meaning and subjectivity as very particular. A key part of Tambling's argument is summed up in his statement that

Every century, it seems, can discover a 'new' individuality, a 'new' belief in the personal: but if the subject receives its naming at least partly through confessional practices, there is no essential self to be named or found: each period will produce its own subject that fits with the ideological discourses of the age (p.73).

Kearney's discussion of how imagination is also conceived differently in different periods has similar implications. On the one hand, this view requires us to understand our views on language, meaning and

subjectivity as particular to both a temporal epoch and a cultural space. Since, as I believe, language learning and teaching are deeply concerned with meaning and subjectivity and with linguistic and cultural difference, it is crucial that as language teachers we have more than superficial means at our disposal to reflect on what it means to see meaning as located in pre-existent truths, the human mind or elsewhere in the world, or what it means to speak, or to be asked to speak, or to take up a position in a certain discourse. On the other hand, this perspective in turn requires that we be open to understand alternative positions on language, meaning and subjectivity from different cultural and temporal moments. Thus, while there are general implications to be drawn from these accounts of imagination and confession, our position as teachers in Hong Kong must surely be to reflect on both the particularity of Western traditions and their relationship to Hong Kong/Chinese traditions. We need to ask how imagination - the understanding of human creativity and meaning - and confession - the incitement to speak particular truths about the self - have been constructed in this context. How do Chinese public rituals of performance and confession, for example, relate to this Western history of confession? And what is the relationship between a Western decentring of the humanist subject and a cultural tradition that appears never to have elevated the individual to such a preeminent position in the first place? As I said earlier, opening up western understandings of authorship and originality to critical investigation while at the same time trying to understand Hong Kong/Chinese understandings of textual authority and ownership, has been a crucial first step in attempting to come to terms with the concept of plagiarism.

Second, there is the question of resistance. Put together, imagination and confession create a very interesting story of how Western concepts of imagination, authority (God, the individual, the sign) and the subject have changed. While on the one hand, there seems to have been a loosening of authoritative control over the imagination, on the other there seems to have been an ever-greater emphasis on authoritative practices of creating, narrating and regulating the Western subject. The implications of a view that we have little influence over the imaginary and are increasingly regulated through professional and disciplinary modes of confession suggest a need, amongst other things, for pedagogical strategies of resistance. Kearney's ethical-poetical imagination and his hermeneutic, historical and narrative tasks suggest that a critical approach to education cannot be effectively pursued through a process of rational ideology critique, an attempt to show how a real world is falsely represented: "It is certainly unlikely that any amount of 'knowledge' about the falsehood of our experience is going to help us think or act in a more effective or liberating way" (p.386). It is unfortunate that Tambling's focus on resistance is taken up primarily in the domain of psychoanalysis and that he does not enlarge on how "awareness" of the confessional position could be arrived at. The implications of Kearney's argument suggest that resistance to the power of confession could not be achieved through some simple raising of critical awareness. Rather, he suggests that we need to learn to answer the ethical demand to respond to the other and to investigate critically our cultural imaginaries. This is, I think, a highly significant point, for it suggests that any critical approach to education cannot proceed through an attempt to "correct" students' "false ideas" but rather must proceed through an attempt to explore the "cultural imagination", how it is that students think as they do.

Third, there is the question of understanding the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. If we question the view of the individual subject speaking their meanings into a new language, the crucial question then becomes how we understand meaning. Kearney's account shows how, historically, the locus of meaning has changed according to shifting cultural, philosophical and material conditions. Tambling's account, on the other hand, stresses how various discourses call on the subject to speak certain 'truths' about the self, truths that indeed construct the self. Crucially, then, discourses here are not passive media for our meanings but active producers of both our meanings and our selves. We are not only speaking subjects but we are also subjected to meanings. Discussing Foucault's work on confession, Weedon argues that "To speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become *subjected* to the power and regulation of the discourse" (1987, p.119). The point here is that in concentrating almost exclusively on how students can find words to express their ideas, we ignore the ways in which that finding of words also implies a taking up of a position in a discourse and a constructing and regulating of the subject. As Arleen Schenke (1991) suggests:

Because autobiographical work in teaching is a practice in 'breaking the silence' of personal and social histories, and because these histories, in E.S.L. teaching in particular, are traversed by legacies of colonialism, it matters fundamentally who speaks and who listens, under what conditions of possibility, and along the lines of which political and pedagogical agendas (p.48).

Finally, there is the need to establish a clear position on where we take meaning to be located. Following Kearney's attempt to develop a way of thinking about meaning that avoids the extremes of both traditional quietism and modernist voluntarism, I think some of the challenges posed by teaching in Hong Kong require a similar project. Our students are commonly accused of intellectual quietism; they are seen as being too accepting of textual authority. In place of this assumed passivity, they are asked to be more critical and original, to be the authors of their own meanings. Clearly in some ways a belief in textual authority on the one hand and a belief in personal authority on the other can be interpreted in terms of theocentric (premodern) and anthropocentric (modern) models of meaning. Here we should be extremely cautious, however, for while it is useful to locate a mistrust of higher authority and a stress on individual meaning-making within the context of shifting Western cultural and philosophical orientations, it is extremely dangerous to assume either some linear path of development here or that Western understandings of meaning and authority can be mapped onto Hong Kong. That is to say, while such an analysis is useful for us to reflect on the historical and cultural influences on a Western belief in individuals as the authors of their meanings, it is inappropriate to believe that this view is necessarily better or historically justified. Rather, it seems useful to pursue a third position, a postmodern stance that questions both quietism and voluntarism but does not sink into either relativism or despair. This implies an acceptance, according to Kearney,

That there is much to be learned from the postmodern deconstruction of the humanist subject and its pretensions to mastery. Such a deconstruction may indeed prove, if we acknowledge its limits, to be a healthy *dispossession* of the ego-centric subject.... After the disappearance of the self-sufficient imagination, another kind must now reappear - an imagination schooled in the postmodern truth that the self cannot be 'centred' on itself; an imagination fully aware that meaning does not originate within the narrow chambers of its own subjectivity but emerges as a response to the *other*, as radical interdependence (p.387).

If, then, postmodernism can imply not a presumption that we live in a "postmodern world" but rather a humility that questions the authority of the subject and of western cultural traditions, there seems to be a greater possibility for more equitable relations between those of us schooled in western cultural and academic traditions and those from other traditions. It is perhaps only from such a position that we can engage ethically with our students.

#### Notes

1. Kearney uses 'man' and 'he' throughout this book with apparently no concern. He also, even in his discussion of postmodernism, ignores the contribution to these debates of feminist and other recent critical work from the margins (see later). This is, I think, a serious failing. Tambling is somewhat erratic in his use of pronouns but nevertheless shows himself to be aware of the dominance of "patriarchy". It is therefore, as he admits (p.8), a shame that he nevertheless concentrates so much on the classical male canon of literature and literary criticism.

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## Conference Reports

### **Courses or Resources? A lecture-workshop session**

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A lecture workshop was conducted by Alan Maley in March 1993<sup>1</sup> in Hong Kong, under the auspices of Oxford University Press. While he did refer to a number of O.U.P.'s publications, the substance of Maley's presentation touched on L2 English teaching and learning methodologies which, while not revolutionary, are worth reviewing and reflecting upon in the Hong Kong context.

In Hong Kong, language teaching and particularly English language teaching is commonly conducted in institutions with many classes of the same age level and many students per class. It is also usually the case that many language teachers are not trained in the language teaching discipline. The teaching/learning context in HK is thus constrained by two factors: 1) institutional teaching and learning depends upon set courses which strive to meet established exam-driven objectives so that standards can be maintained for large numbers of students; 2) teachers depend upon set course work and prescribed textbooks to meet the course objectives because they are not sufficiently trained or lack the confidence to create their own materials and methodologies. Maley's topic question "Courses or Resources" was therefore something of a moot point. There is not necessarily a choice available for many language teachers in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, Maley proceeded in his presentation by setting up a paradox between courses and learning. He established that courses are based on predetermined arrangements of material or a fixed syllabus while learners are typically more complex and variable than one course is realistically capable of accommodating. He suggested that textbooks were a clear example of the 'fixedness' of courses. All the key choices - topics, tasks, functions, skills, order of presentation - have been pre-determined by the writer and publisher. This selection process also obviously involves omitting specific language features which might be crucial to a particular learning context. Teacher-prepared materials which support specific objectives are also bound to a fixed agenda in the same way. In either case, a set agenda of learning objectives tends to predetermine learner identity, confining him or her to a limited set of needs.

Maley set these features of courses in contrast to characteristics of learners, which he reviewed in four major areas:

- 1) Learners do not always learn what is taught. There is always the potential for a discrepancy between the teacher input and learner intake.
- 2) Learning is rarely linear or mechanical. Rather it often proceeds in irregular jumps and relies on a recursive process of rehearsing old information to fit newly presented information.
- 3) Learners are all at different levels involving different initial levels, rates of progress, abilities to process information and learning styles.
- 4) Learning contexts are different. This might involve the unique selection of students in a

class as well as the combination of teacher and students, the physical difference in classrooms, the match or mismatch in expectations of students and teachers and a host of other factors which create the learning context. (Bickley, 1989 covers these points and many more in detail.)

Maley's obvious resolution to this paradox between courses and learning is to forego dependency on a set course or textbook. As already mentioned, this is generally not practicable in institutional terms, especially in Hong Kong. Perhaps in recognition of this, he suggested a series of options to reduce the dependency. These options involve activities which allow for increased learner involvement in determining the content of a course. The more learners can contribute to the content of the classes, the more likely they will progress according to their individual requirements and limitations. While clearly adding to classroom dynamics, it should be kept in mind that in the majority of teaching and learning situations in Hong Kong, these options are not necessarily viable. Time pressures combined with very large class size, exam-driven syllabuses, and inexperienced teachers conspire to prohibit innovation.

The first he called the "wet Friday afternoon" option. Examples of learning activities which Maley cited were the use of songs, games, newspaper pictures, cartoons, off-air recordings (taking copyright into account), and the timeless "hangman". Whereas these appear to be cosmetic time fillers, they have a significant place in allowing individuals to explore and use language at various levels and in divergent ways. They also provide opportunities for exploring current events, fashion or social trends and culturally relevant topics. The intention is that options of this type should not replace but rather supplement courses. Making time for them in a fixed syllabus is the problem teachers in Hong Kong face.

The second option he termed "teacher tinkering". This is a common practice in which the teacher manipulates or adapts set materials to allow for extension and reinforcement of the learning objectives in the materials. Making effective modifications to materials draws on individual teacher's creative talent, experience or both. Teacher tinkering can however be the result of teacher boredom and may have mixed consequences. A novel approach to teaching which may be more entertaining to both teachers and students may not necessarily emphasise the objectives crucial to an exam driven syllabus as in Hong Kong. Teacher tinkering might then be to students' detriment.

In the third option, Maley suggested the preparation of a series of modules which could be covered at the teachers discretion. With this option, teachers may have the opportunity to be more flexible in their responses to a class's needs, particularly in ordering the sequence of modules, again to assist reinforcement and consolidation. He warned that this did pose a danger of inappropriate choices, that is, like set courses and textbooks, the selection of possibilities is fixed. ESP courses or sequenced language learning programmes might take advantage of this option. In these cases, there are limited expectations from both the learner and the teacher, so set modules could be arranged and rearranged depending on learners' needs.

The fourth option he referred to as "quarryman" or "cobbler". This option takes from all the possibilities - course work, resource books and the myriad teaching techniques available, and cobbles together a course which allows for great flexibility. This option encourages creativity in teaching and has the potential of being quite sensitive to learners' needs. If there is a set of core objectives, teachers using this option might develop a number of strategies to achieve them (The HKU English Centre English for Arts Students course is a good example of this.) On the other hand, there is a potential to neglect core objectives for the sake of variety or even dwelling too long on what is merely entertaining for the learner and/or the teacher. This option seems to have two further potential drawbacks. One is that the cobbling together is done beforehand in which case a predetermined course is formed. The other drawback is that the teacher is required to continually create teaching materials. Keeping teaching fresh is certainly good but if one is responsible for many classes it can become a burden or worse yet, there may be a tendency to foist the same materials on all regardless of the differences between classes.

Maley categorizes the fifth option as "Process". Instead of using specific materials, the teacher sets the scene for a process to take place and students themselves provide the content. Examples of this option are project work, community language learning and drama techniques. (For examples and discussion of project work see Allison and Lee, 1990; Fried-Booth, 1986. For community language learning see Blair, 1982; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; and Stevick, 1990. For drama techniques see Maley and Duff, 1982.) Process teaching requires considerable classroom management skill and a sufficient degree of willingness on the part of students. Other factors such as cultural differences, level of maturity and student experiences with such techniques must also be taken carefully into consideration. One possible difficulty is whether or not students perceive that there is discernable learning taking place. "Process" learning is not always quantifiable and fee-paying students or concerned parents cannot necessarily be expected to generate the faith required to persevere in this approach to learning.

The sixth option was referred to as "do-it-yourself generalizable procedures". In this option, the teacher chooses materials, for example texts, and then operates a series of generalizable procedures on these texts. A partial list of such procedures recognized by all teachers, are: selection, ranking, reconstruction, media transfer, interpretation, matching, expansion, reduction, comparison, contrast and analysis. Maley pointed out that a survey of published materials would reveal not only these but other procedures which are commonly used. The suggestion is to build up a bank of texts and apply a series of generalizable procedures to them. Like the first option, the texts themselves can be updated constantly, keeping topics fresh and relevant. Individual language teachers and schools, centres and units generally do keep such resource banks as supplementary materials. In-service training of the development and use of materials ought to be encouraged and time given for this purpose. In fact it would seem to be crucial. While student-centred and creative, this option would require careful management and record keeping so as to monitor what was done, the results and what the next relevant task(s) might be.

As an example of this option, Maley suggested using a human interest type newspaper article (of which there is a daily and plentiful supply). The learner is asked to write down questions he or she would like answered and which cannot be answered from the content of the article itself. Based on the reading comprehension, the content of the lesson leads to discussion, speculation, inferencing, expansion - all of which stem from the learners particular level of language proficiency and interest level.

Maley's presentation was received enthusiastically by the audience, many of whom are teachers in the local Hong Kong education system. That they attended the presentation was indicative of their interest in developing more effective methodology. Unfortunately, the many thousands of other teachers under the actual situation of Hong Kong's educational community may well be unwilling to relinquish control of learning content to students in the near future. Until the education establishment in Hong Kong empowers teachers to foster student-centred classroom methodology, courses and textbooks will hold sway in classrooms. Presentations like this one to encourage greater teacher autonomy and attention to individual student needs should be a regular and relentless thrust in teacher training and in-service training for language teaching in Hong Kong.

#### Note

1. Alan Maley's presentation, 'Courses or Resources', sponsored by Oxford University Press, was given at the Tsim Sha Tsui YMCA on March 27, 1993.

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**The Second International Conference  
on Teacher Education  
in Second Language Teaching  
24-26 March 1993**

**Reported by Christine Heuring  
The Southwest China Teachers University**

The target audience for this Conference organised by the Department of English at the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong was teacher trainers of students for whom English is their second language. The presenters and observers were from at least 21 different countries including Hong Kong, U.K., Japan, Taiwan, U.S.A. and Canada, as well as Oman, Brunei, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sweden, Sri Lanka, and China. Having such a variety of countries represented was conducive to an atmosphere of international exchange and was a credit to the Conference's organizers. It certainly made the word "International" in the Conference's title appropriate.

The plenary sessions featured Donald Freeman, Mike Wallace, Courtney Cazden, Amy Tsui, Rod Ellis, and Mike McCarthy. Each of these speakers focused on a specific area of teacher training. Titles included, 'Bridging the Gap between Language Awareness and Classroom Tasks', 'Immersing, Revealing, and Telling: From Implicit to Explicit Teaching', and 'Exploring Three-way Collaborative Supervision in Language Teacher Education'.

Besides the six plenary speakers more than one hundred persons made presentations during the parallel sessions. There was an exceptional variety of topics ranging from very specific titles such as 'Using the Fine Arts to Train Teachers in Micronesia' to the remarkably broad topic of 'Learning How to Teach'. Faced with the challenge of choosing which sessions to attend, I focused on my area of particular interest, teaching in China, and for my professional development, action research, an area about which I knew little. I was well rewarded in both cases.

At least six parallel sessions dealt with China and Taiwan specifically. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts I was unable to attend all six. However, the sessions I attended afforded some new insights. Susan Babcock's discussion of culture shock in the classroom for both teachers and students in Taiwan gave a new perspective on the phenomenon of culture shock. She discussed the difficulties that arise when students encounter the 'mini-culture' of the foreign teacher's classroom.

Eva Lai, an entertaining and lively presenter, described a very interesting in-service teacher training project in China. She reported on the project's development which came about through World Bank funding. The goal of the workshop was to introduce teaching techniques in support of new English textbooks about to be adopted in China. She described the innovative way the organizers motivated the teacher-trainees. Often mere acceptance into a training course will automatically result in benefits to the participants regardless of the level of the student's participation. Motivation in this course, however, involved an achievement test at the end of the course after which the top five students were given prizes and a job promotion.

In all I found the conference a very satisfying experience, because I had the chance to gather information and share insights in an already familiar area, as well as to gain some experience in a novel area such as action research projects. Such opportunities for professional development are surely a worthwhile goal for both participants and organizers at a conference.

Next year's conference at the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong will be the Second International Conference on English for Professional Communication. In 1995 the Conference theme will again be Teacher Education in Second Language Teaching.

## **Regional English Language Centre (RELC) Seminar Language for Specific Purposes: Problems and Prospects**

**Reported by Cynthia Lee  
The University of Hong Kong**

The RELC 28th Regional Seminar was held in Singapore from 19th to 21st April, 1993, attracting more than 600 participants from Asia, South East Asia, Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., Canada and Europe. The opening speech was made by Mr. Sidek Saniff, Minister of State for Education, Singapore Ministry of Education.

62 papers were presented and seven plenary speakers addressed a variety of issues about teaching Language for Specific Purposes (henceforth LSP) concerning the LSP curriculum, LSP teaching materials and teaching methodologies and the role of LSP in the workplace and community. The seminar also included a series of workshops and a panel discussion on the theme - English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Southeast Asia: Current Concerns.

The first plenary speaker was Alan Walters. Walters examined the current trend of LSP in terms of the relationship between LSP and course design, LSP and academic input, LSP and teaching materials, attitudes and skills of the LSP practitioners. Recent LSP course design has adopted a 'top-down' approach which has been greatly influenced by the results of research as well as by the availability of commercially produced materials. Walters suggested using a 'bottom-up' approach, that is to study the LSP materials. The role of LSP materials, therefore, had to be broadened. In addition, materials should be 'teacher-friendly' and 'learner-centred'.

Dr. Rosemary Khoo, the Director of the RELC Council, reported the results of a project entitled 'English for Business and Technology' (EBT), a collaborative venture between the National University of Singapore and New Zealand, which was concluded in December, 1992. The aim of the project was to create an EBT support centre at RELC in which resources were accessible and which would assist EBT practitioners in ASEAN countries in course design and instruction. The project collected information about the use of English from 45 business companies through one-to-one interviews and questionnaires. A number of research articles, in-house publications, teaching materials and reference books were collected.

Ann M. Johns was concerned with the interaction between texts of particular 'genre' and 'environment'. She noted that students were not given enough opportunities to understand issues such as for whom the text was written and the purpose of the text. The 'genre' of a particular text could be recognised by means of its form, style, metalinguistic features and communicative purposes. Introducing a wide range of texts to students was crucial because, aside from their textbooks, students were not exposed to many written texts. Such limited exposure would result in passive reception of knowledge. In view of this, the best and effective way to widen students' exposure would be for teachers to start from texts which students are familiar with. Texts would be authentic and experts would be consulted. An LSP teacher would act as a mediator between texts and students.

Larry Selinker presented much strong evidence arguing for an LSP-related domain-bound view of interlanguage and an equally restricted interlanguage view of LSP as mutually reinforcing. His discussion focused on the absence of two structures in interlanguage English in relevant LSP, and non-LSP, contexts:

1. learning categories, leading to the non-use and underuse of other structures,
2. the overuse of tenseless clauses that lead to the non-use and underuse of other structures.

Ian G. Malcolm believed that there was a compatibility between degree studies and LSP in tertiary institutions. He introduced a range of specific purposes courses in English and other languages that had been incorporated into degree or degree-support studies at the university. Four main types and approaches were described: 'first aid', academic skills, the thematic approach and the 'immersion' approach.

Christopher N. Candlin pointed out that current changes in the organisation of the industrial workplaces and new relationships between professionals and clients in the community imposed new directions and offered fresh challenges to the teaching of LSP. Evidence was drawn from the historical change of LSP in Australia. He claimed that LSP teachers should not be satisfied with their linguistic and pragmatic awareness of specialised discourse. They also needed to have a clear understanding of the relationship between discourse and social structure and social change. Such contexts required LSP teachers to have an intercultural sensitivity. The roles of LSP teachers, teaching materials and curriculum had to be reconsidered so as to meet the workplace and community changes.

Dr. Tickoo suggested adopting an ecologically sensitive alternative to the linguistics-based LSP curriculum. LSP must align itself with relevant developments in 'literacy studies' and studies of 'reading-writing connections' on the one hand; on the other hand, it must align itself with studies in second language acquisition and in school-level process and genre approaches. Most importantly, it must evolve in taking on participant roles in service centres and the workplace where the bulk of LSP operated.

The Conference provided a good venue for LSP practitioners to discuss the latest LSP principles and theories. The most important message I got from the Conference is that LSP teaching is not only concerned with linguistics-based studies and theories, it also embodies inter-and intra-cultural communication problems. Another international conference on LSP will be held in Australia from 1st to 4th September, called 'Communication in the Workplace: Culture, Language and Organisational Change'.

Next year's RELC Seminar on the theme 'Reading and Writing: Research Implications for Language Education' will take place in Singapore from April 18-20th.



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