The Asian ESP Journal

The Asian ESP Journal

November 2006

Volume 2 Issue 2

Editors: Paul Robertson and John Adamson

Published by the Asian ESP Journal Press

Asian ESP Journal Press
A Division of Time Taylor International Ltd
Trustnet Chambers
P.O. Box 3444
Road Town, Tortola
British Virgin Islands

http://www.asian-esp-journal.com

ISSN 2206-0979 (Online)

Table of Contents:

Foreword by John Adamson……………………………………4-5

1. Dr. Anil Pathak and Dr. Francesco Cavallaro. Teaching……….6-26
   Conflict Resolution: A Study of Two Interactive Methods

2. Françoise and Roger Nunn. Teaching Language and…………...27-53
   Research Skills through an International Media Project

3. Renata Suzuki. Corpora Applications to Economics…………….54-73
   Presentations: A Case Study

4. David F. Dalton. Using descriptive assessment rubrics…………74-84
   as teaching and learning tools

5. Ahmad Sabouri Kashani, Soraya Soheili, & Zinat Nadia Hatmi...85-98
   Teaching English to Students of Medicine:
   A Student-Centered Approach

The Asian ESP Journal

Foreword.

The November edition of Asian ESP Journal presents five articles which very much reflect the diversity in ESP research and teaching methodology. All of them have clear, practical applications in the ESP classroom and are founded upon critical views of current theories. Congratulations to the authors whose papers have been accepted for this end of the year edition.

The first paper by Dr. Anil Pathak and Dr. Francesco Cavallaro from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, entitled "Teaching Conflict Resolution: A Study of Two Interactive Methods", compares the effectiveness of Role Play with an educational computer-based game (ECBG) as part of a business communication course with Singaporean university computer engineering students. The authors' investigation into conflict resolution looks into how Role Play and computer games are seen in terms of their effectiveness among the students. Results show that students who "wish to transfer their skill to real-life situations" tend to prefer Role Play. This study has potential far-reaching implications for the use of role play and ECBG in the classroom.

The second article by Francoise Nunn and Dr. Roger Nunn at the Petroleum Institute, Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, "Teaching Language *and* Research Skills through an International Media Project", puts forward "a framework for teaching research skills using a case-study approach to international news." In this project-based approach extensively utilizing the internet, a three-step approach illustrates how both language and research skills can be enhanced among tertiary-level students. Of great interest is the teacher modeling of the process involved, which does not have the objective of encouraging students to make a "carbon copy" of that finished product, but aims to "develop a fully independent approach" towards their studies.

The third article comes from Renata Suzuki at Sophia University in Japan in the Economics faculty. Her study, "Corpora Applications to Economics Presentations: A Case Study", argues that "student needs strongly dictate course curriculum", and that current textbooks lack authenticity. Suzuki illustrates how teachers can make use of corpora to "tailor presentation curriculum and provide information which facilitates student learning at their zones of proximal development." The study considers presentation relevance objectives according to a framework of strategies and then the selection of "the most relevant corpus to the presentation mode." For this purpose, frequency and collocation are taken as corpus data and related to student needs. This approach to teaching presentations is of potential benefit to teachers wishing to explore how to reduce error anxiety and enhance the students' ability to choose appropriate language.

The next paper by David Dalton, Senior Communications Lecturer at the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi, "Using descriptive assessment rubrics as teaching and learning tools", looks at the concept of 'learning outcomes' and assessment. Dalton considers four areas of concern: the teacher learning curve; effective rubrics; the increase in assessment load and feedback time; and student 'buy in'. He warns against the universal applicability of 'outcomes' and advises that they are "context-determined." The clear context of the Communications Program at the Petroleum Institute is argued as being effective in addressing the four concerns outlined. Drawing upon examples from his own working context, Dalton insightfully refers to the value of assessment as "learning" and as a "teaching and repair tool", as well as "issues of transparency" and "learner buy-in."

The final paper comes from Dr. Ahmad Sabouri Kashani, Dr. Soraya Soheili and Dr. Zinat Nadia Hatmi at Tehran University of Medical Sciences in Iran. The authors in this study compare the English language achievement levels of a small group of students exposed over five semesters to student-centred teaching with those of the majority of students on an established syllabus. Test results of the two groups are correlated, revealing that students taking the established course of study actually performed better. Among the implications of this result is that "students at different learning levels might benefit more from different level-specific evaluation systems." The researchers' thorough analysis serves as a useful resource for other ESP practitioners wishing to contrast the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching at the university level.

We hope you enjoy reading the papers in this edition and look forward to your own contributions.

John Adamson, Ed.D.
Senior Associate Editor
Asian ESP Journal

Teaching Conflict Resolution: A Study of Two Interactive Methods

Anil Pathak and Francesco Cavallaro

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Anil Pathak is an Assistant Professor in Communication Skills at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He has published several research papers in the area of ICT in education. His publications and books focus on the pedagogic aspects of technology. He regularly conducts training programmes in this area for teachers and educators. His most recent project focuses on metacognition and the writing curriculum.
anilpathak@pmail.ntu.edu.sg

Francesco Cavallaro is an Assistant Professor in Communication Skills at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He has worked at various Universities in Australia and he is now living and working in Singapore. His research interests are in sociolinguistics, bilingualism, second language acquisition and in how technology can be integrated into the language classroom. cfcavallaro@ntu.edu.sg

Abstract

Formal oral communication forms a significant part of most of the Business Communication courses at the tertiary level. Role-plays and simulations have long been used in the discovery-based approaches to teach purpose-oriented oral communication. In this study, the effectiveness of Role Play was compared against that of an educational computer-based game (ECBG). These two methods were applied in the conflict resolution (CR) part of a business communication course in a Singaporean university. Three groups of computer engineering students studying communication skills participated in the study.

The aim of the CR lessons was to teach the students to deal with a difficult person in the context of asking for a raise. All groups were initially given a lecture on CR methods. Then one group was asked to work through a Role Play (RP) activity; another group worked on a computer game (G) and the last group was asked to engage in both activities.

The study was designed to answer the following three questions:

(1) Which method (Role play or computer game) leads to more effective learning in terms of the achievement of the course objectives and Why?

(2) Which method is preferred by the students?

(3) Which particular features of each of the methods seem to work better?

The data seems to support the thesis that the RP method is marginally better than G even though the effect is not statistically significant. The results also

show that the Role Play method is generally preferred by the students who wish to transfer their skill to real-life situations. Ratings given by the subjects indicate that out of the given five features of Interactive Game, Animation helped them to learn most, followed closely by the use of Humour. In the case of Role Play method, Tutors' comments helped to learn them the most, while observing other teams playing the roles was the second-most important factor, followed closely by enactment of the situation. Implications for the application of Role-plays in the classroom and for ECBG development are discussed.

Background

Conversation is one of the basic means of oral interaction; therefore, being able to participate actively and appropriately in a conversation is a skill that many language learners would like to and need to acquire. Multidimensional models of communicative competence (e.g. Bachman, 1990; Celce-Murcia *et al*., 1996; Bachman and Palmer, 1996) have identified oral discourse competence as a distinct component of L2 speakers' communicative language ability. Among others, conversational competence can be characterized by the ability to perform openings, re-openings, closings and pre-closings, to establish and change topics, to hold and yield the floor, to backchannel, to interrupt and to collaborate, as well as to recognize and produce adjacency pairs (Celce-Murcia *et al*., 1996).

Purpose-oriented oral communication is an important part of most of communication skills courses. These courses aim at developing conversation skills related to a particular area. Since the conversation skills mentioned in the earlier paragraph radically change with reference to dimensions such as audience, communication goal, and context, purpose-oriented communication demands a special set of abilities.

Role-plays and simulations have long been used in the discovery-based approaches to teach purpose-oriented oral communication in a variety of disciplines (Klabbers, 2001). Simulations are now being conducted with the aid of computers. Both role-plays and Educational computer-based games (ECBGs) can effectively create a teaching context that is conducive for constructivist learning. ECBGs also reduce stress on the learners' imagination. Students can actually see a character and can hear a dialogue. In role-play situations the students need to use their imagination to recreate a scene.

Karmos (1999) examined how the type of task candidates who have to perform in oral exams affects conversational structure and the candidates' opportunities to display their conversational competence. On the basis of the analysis of 30 non-scripted interviews and 30 guided role-play tasks, it was concluded that role-plays can be better measures of the candidates' abilities of managing conversations, that is, performing openings and closings, initiating and rejecting topics, as well as interrupting. In non-scripted interviews, due to the unequal distribution of power, candidates rarely have the chance to initiate a new topic and have no right to initiate the opening or the closing of the conversation. Consequently, these components of conversational competence cannot be tested in non-scripted interviews. In contrast, the findings suggest

that the guided role-plays in the study display several characteristics of conversations: candidates have the right and opportunity to introduce, ratify and reject new topics in the course of the interaction. Depending on the script of the role-play task, they can also initiate the closing and opening of the conversation. These results indicate that guided role-plays, scripted with a focus on conversational skills, have the potential to compel candidates to exhibit their conversational competence.
In this project we decided to consider Role Play with the use of an educational computer game because both of these methods broadly fall within the constructivist paradigm. There main obvious similarities and differences in these two methods are that both allow a free play of imagination; and, while role-plays normally need pair or group work, ECBGs can be used by a single player. Both can be used to encourage students to construct hypotheses, make decisions, and discover principles by themselves (Kearsley 1994). The instructor's task is to transform the learning content into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding and organize it in such a manner that the student is able to build upon what they have already learned, and progression is facilitated. This requirement is very much applicable to the design of a Role Play activity and, equally, to the design of an educational game. The issue of the theory of instruction becomes relevant in this case. Bruner (1966, as cited in Kearsley 1994) states that a theory of instruction should address the following aspects:

1. the most effective sequences in which to present material
2. the ways in which a body of knowledge can be structured so that it can be most readily grasped by the learner

In the light of these two aspects it becomes interesting to analyse the instructional design of educational games. Gaming software ranges from simple simulations to first-person adventure with stunning graphics, compelling storylines and state-of-the-art video. Researchers have, however, questioned the social consequences of gaming as an entertainment activity. It had been argued (Billen, 1993) that games affect cognitive functions, motivation, and may create a divide between the players and the real world. Others have however found that the gaming industry has potential to motivate users by stimulating curiosity. (Thomas and Macredite, 1994). Quinn (1997) argues that educational games need to combine fun elements in a game with aspects of instructional design.

Context, research questions, and research method

Overview: In this study, the effectiveness of Role Play was compared against that of an educational computer-based game. These two methods were applied in the conflict resolution (CR) part of a business communication course in a Singaporean university. This is a technological university where most of the students study engineering. All engineering students have to complete three core courses in communication skills. Students have a high level of motivation towards some of the components of theses courses, one of them being conflict resolution. Like many other courses, this communication skill course follows a lecture-tutorial pattern. Strategies of resolving conflicts are discussed in the lecture while interactive exercises and activities are done during tutorials. All tutorials are conducted in a multimedia laboratory where each student has a multimedia PC to work on. Three groups of computer engineering students studying communication skills participated in the study.

The aim of the CR lessons was to teach the students to deal with a difficult person in the context of asking for a raise. All groups were initially given a lecture on CR methods. Then one group (RP group) was asked to work through a Role Play activity; another group (G group) with a computer game and the last group (RPG group) was asked to do both.

The study was designed to answer the following three questions:

1. Which method leads to more effective learning in terms of the achievement of the course objectives and Why?
2. Which method do the students seem to prefer?
3. Which particular aspects of the method seem to work better?

A detailed questionnaire was used as the measuring instrument. (See Appendix 2.) To avoid a halo effect, some questions asked participants to compare the new teaching method with the established lecture method. The RPG group was asked to compare the two methods with each other and with the lecture. In an attempt to make this study more exploratory rather than a straightforward Method-Comparison Study, we asked the participants to rank various features of the method(s) in order of the importance assigned by them. All responses were kept anonymous and confidential.

Participants: In all 63 participants took part in this study. They were divided according to the class they were attending forming three groups as follows: 18 (RP), 12 (G), and 33 (RPG). We achieved a 100% response rate. All participants are first year students of the Computer Engineering degree programme at a technological university. They were in the 17-24 age group. Their mean (self-rated) speaking ability was 2.32 (closer to ‘Satisfactory’) on a 5 point scale, while their mean (self-rated) ability to understand English was 2.84 (closer to ‘Good’). They had minimal experience with Role-Play, and considerable experience with Computer games. ANOVA results show that none of the background information is significantly different ($P<0.10$) across the three experimental groups. This means that the impact on scores might be largely due to a change in the teaching method, rather than any of the background factors. This suggests that our random allocation of the participants to different teaching methods was successful.

Table 1: Design of the study

	Role Play	**Game**	**N**
Group 1	√	**--**	**18**
Group 2	**--**	√	**12**
Group 3	√	√	**33**

Description of RP activity: Students in the tutorial group were subdivided in two major groups. One group was given the role of the boss, while the other was given the role of the employee. The employee was supposed to ask for a raise, while the boss was supposed to act as a difficult person. The two major groups were further subdivided in teams. Each team had two students. One student would actually conduct the discourse (the boss and the employee), while the other student (coach) observed and assisted his/her team mate during the proceedings. This arrangement is summarized below.

Bosses	a. coaches
	b. bosses
Employees	a. coaches
	b. employees

Both groups were given time to read and understand the handouts with their roles. The ‘employees’ needed the time to plan the CR strategies they would adopt. The tutor spent most of this time preparing the ‘bosses’. This was because their role included keeping certain information from the ‘employee’ unless the ‘employee’ asked the right questions. The ‘bosses’ had to be instructed not to divulge this information too readily. The ‘bosses’ also needed time to rehearse their roles together with their coaches. (See Appendix 1 for more details.)

When two teams were engaged in the interaction and their proceedings, the other teams observed them, and tried to improve on their communication strategies when their turn came. Brief comments were made immediately after each team’s performance. The class had a debriefing where the tutors and students offered their comments on the way the proceedings were conducted.

The Game: Students in the G and RPG groups used a computer-based game that had the same theme and storyline as the Role Play. The game was composed using simple flash animation. Dialogues were provided using both voice-over and text. An introduction to the scenario and characters, as well as instructions was provided at the beginning of the game itself. At the end of the tutorial, the class was debriefed and the tutors provided comments on student performance and their use of CR and communication strategies. With the RPG group, the role play was conducted first.

Figure 1: Screenshot of the gaming interface (from http://www.sfhgroup.com/test.asp)

Independent Variables: The experimental treatment in our study is the impact of teaching methods (role play, ECBG, combination of role play and ECBG). Separate descriptions were developed and pre-tested for each method. The lecture was delivered before the tutorials in a lecture theatre using slides and video. The Role Play was specially written for the experiment, and closely paralleled the scenario, the characters, and the storyline in the interactive game. This was intentionally achieved to avoid introduction of an unwanted variable. The scenario was that of an average employee asking a very exacting and difficult employer for a raise.

Dependent Variables: The participants answered twenty close-ended and one open-ended question after they complete the learning activities. The first nine questions related to the background of the learners in terms of age, sex, year at university, nationality, pre-university education, English proficiency, learning from elective courses, prior experience with the teaching method(s) being trialed. The remaining questions asked the participants to rate the learning in the experimental teaching session, attribute the learning to a method, indicate their preferences for the method, and rank their preferences for the features of their learning method. Most questions were on a seven-point Likert scale with verbal anchors ranging from *Very Much* or *Very High* (1) to *Not at all* or *Very Low* (7). For the ranking of the methods, participants could rank their preferred method from 1 to 3.

Control Variables: We controlled other variables that may affect the relationship between learning and the teaching method (dependent variable). We controlled these variables by holding them constant across our experimental conditions. These variables were: learning from the lecture, the tutor, the subject matter, students' previous subject knowledge, and the story line. We made sure that all participants attended the lecture and that all groups had the same lecturer and tutor. We also made sure that the story line of the game and the role play were similar. We used the same subject matter (content) for teaching. All participants were first year engineering students, and by running ANOVA for the 9 questions related to their background we made sure that none of the background information was significantly different across the three experimental groups ($P<0.10$).

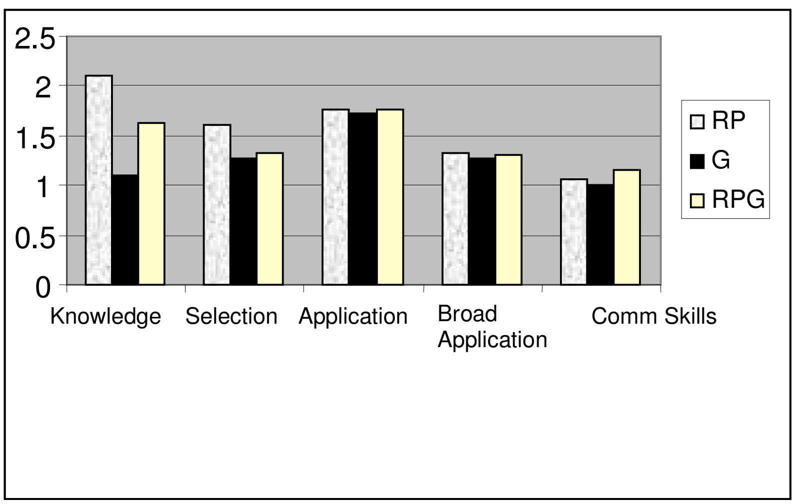
Findings of the experiment

Research question 1- Method Comparison: We tried to measure the impact of each teaching method on five different aspects. They were:

- Knowledge of strategies
- Ability to choose appropriate strategy (Selection)
- Ability to ask for raise (negotiate) (Application)
- Ability to deal with difficult people (Broad Application)
- Overall communication skills

The participants were asked to rate their learning across these five aspects before the tutorial and after the tutorial. They were asked to rate their learning on a seven-point Likert scale where 1 means 'Very High' and 7 means 'Very Low'. The mean difference between the 'Before the tutorial' score and 'After the tutorial' score indicates measured learning for that particular method. Figure 1 shows the mean scores obtained by each subject group in the five aspects of learning.

Figure 2: Mean learning scores achieved through the three teaching methods.



Since the difference in mean scores seems to be significant only in terms of acquisition of knowledge and ability in strategy selection, we need to closely look at the statistical analysis related to these two features. This part of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Multiple Comparisons of the three teaching methods in terms of knowledge acquisition and strategy selection

Dependent Variable	**Comparison**	**Mean Difference**	**Std Error**	**P**	**95% Confidence Interval**	
					High	**Low**
Knowledge	RP with G	1.02020*	.35345	.005	.3130	1.7274
	RPG with RP	-.47475	.27061	.085	-1.0162	.0667
	RPG with G	.54545	.32154	.095	-.0979	1.1888
Selection	RP with G	.33838	.35158	.340	-.3651	1.0419
	RPG with RP	-.27778	.26918	.306	-.8164	.2609
	RPG with G	.06061	.31984	.850	-.5794	.7006

*significant at .005

Results in Table 2 indicate that in terms of knowledge acquisition, the RP method is significantly better than G. As expected, the other two comparisons (RPG with RP and RPG with G) are not statistically significant. This must be due to the dominance of RP in the RPG group. If G was more dominant than RP (in the RPG group), this dominance would have reflected in the statistical significance. However that does not seem to be the case. The data, thus, seem to support the thesis that the RP method is marginally better than G even though the effect is not statistically significant. Our confidence level in RP as an interactive method is stronger than what it was before the experiment was conducted. However, the support for RP is weak in terms of three learning features (Application, Broad Application, and overall development of communication skills) and the data are inconclusive in these three respects. Our analysis of *confidence interval* demonstrates that the effect of RP is considerable (See Table 3).

Table 3: Results of two-way Anova

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Knowledge	Between Groups	7.225	2	3.613	4.235	.019
	Within Groups	50.323	59	.853		
	Total	57.548	61			
Selection	Between Groups	1.126	2	.563	.667	.517
	Within Groups	49.793	59	.844		
	Total	50.919	61			
Application	Between Groups	.148	2	.074	.056	.946
	Within Groups	78.626	59	1.333		

	Total	78.774	61			
Broad application	Between Groups	.026	2	.013	.011	.989
	Within Groups	67.152	59	1.138		
	Total	67.177	61			
Communication Skills	Between Groups	.232	2	.116		
	Within Groups	67.187	59	1.139		
	Total	67.419	61		.102	.903

Method Preference: We checked the manipulation of our experimental treatment by requesting subjects to state their preference for the teaching method as compared against the lecture method. We asked them to rank the preferred method where 1 indicates that they learnt most from this method and 3 indicates that they learnt the least from this method. The results of this study show that the Role Play method is generally preferred by the students who wish to transfer their skill to real-life situations.

Table 4: Method preference indicated by students

	Mean	**SD**	**Std error mean**	**95% confidence interval of the difference**		**T**	**df**	**Sig (2-tailed)**
				Lower	Upper			
Lecture with RP	0.588	1.268	.178	.232	.945	3.314	50	0.002
Lecture with Game	0.111	1.210	.180	.252	.475	0.616	44	0.541
RP with Game	-0.515	1.349	.235	-.994	-.037	-2.194	32	0.036

As seen from the figures in Table 5, the difference between learners' preference for lecture and for the game is not significant. (P>0.05). This shows that the learners are indifferent when it comes to compare the lecture method with the game. This indifference is interesting to note because common sense expects us to assume that game would be preferred to the lecture method. Another interesting fact is that the students definitely prefer RP method when they compare it with lecture and with the game. The comparisons are statistically significant (P<0.05) in these two cases.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test statistics for method preferred by the participants

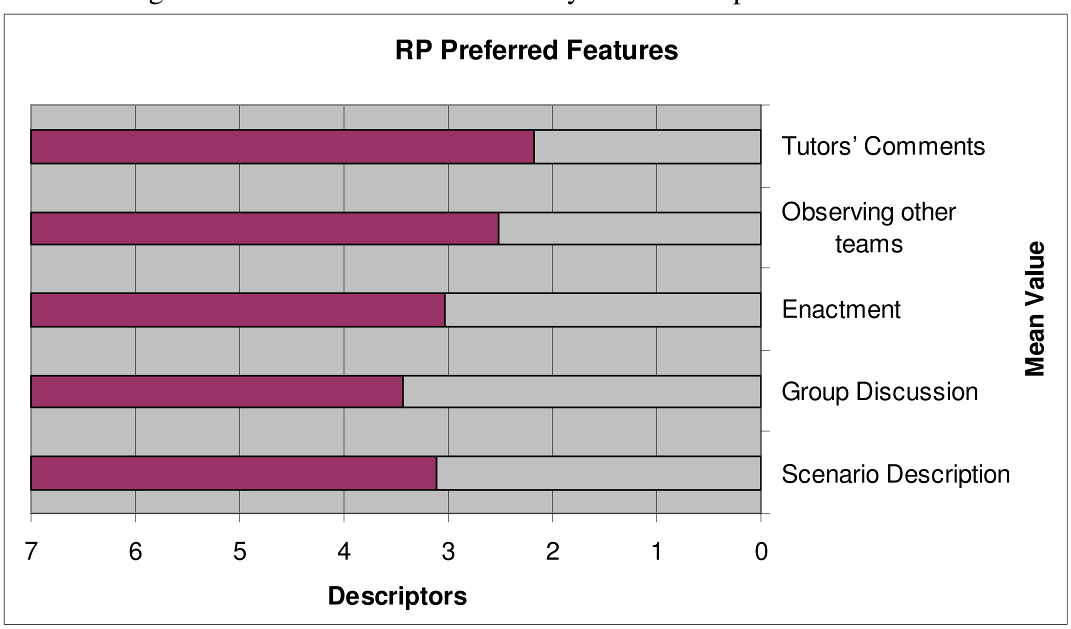
Chi-Square	32.323
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Note: None of the cells have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 15.5.

Table 5's chi square value of 32.323, with 3 degrees of freedom, clears the related critical value of 15.5, so we can affirm the claim that the participants do significantly differ in their self-reported preference for a certain teaching method.

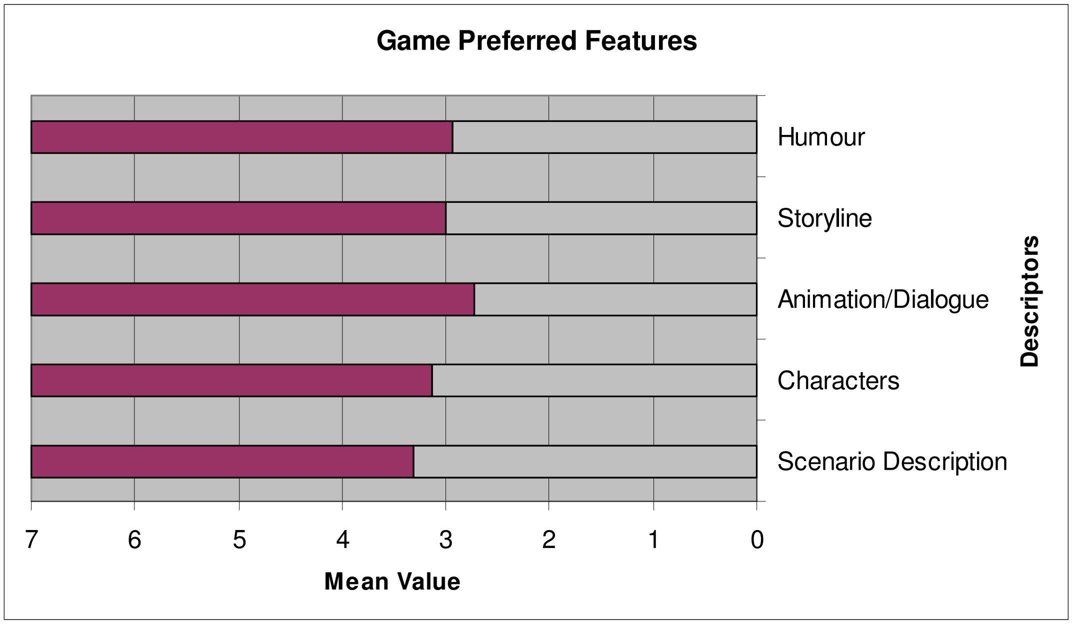
Investigation into the Teaching Methods: After attempting a comparative analysis, let us try to investigate which features of each of these methods are more significant than the other. Let us first analyse features of the Role Play method. Ratings given by the subjects indicate that among the given five features of the Role Play method, Tutors' comments helped them to learn the most, while group discussion on the Role Play was the least important in this regard (Figure 3). Observing other teams playing the roles was the second-most important factor, followed closely by enactment of the situation, and then by the description of the Role Play situation.

Figure 3: Which features of Role Play do students prefer?



When it comes to the features of the Interactive Game, ratings given by the subjects indicate that Animation helped them to learn most, followed closely by the use of Humour. Storyline of the game was third-most important, followed by depiction of Characters in the game. Description of the game's scenario at the start of the game was the least important in this context (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Which features of Interactive Game do students prefer?



A statistical analysis of these results show that the ratings of the descriptors are not significant in any way for RP. For the ratings of the game descriptors, they are only statistically significant when we compare them with those students who said they learned most from the game. In this case, the results of a two-way Anova show that Humour as a descriptor is significant (.035). When we compare the rating of the descriptors with those students who chose the game as the preferred method, the game's storyline is significant (.033) as a descriptor.

Discussion

The manipulation of variables for this experiment suggests that since the participants were Computer Engineering students, a game with an interesting story line and adequate learning mechanism would be preferred for the following reasons:

- Opportunity to work at your own pace
- Opportunity to repeat the learning exercise as often as required
- Opportunity to revisit a desired specific part of the learning exercise
- Freedom to access the Learning resources at any time.
- Economies of cost in terms of time and energy

Interestingly, despite the above-mentioned advantages of the game method, students seem to prefer the Role Play method. Moreover, it was also seen that in terms of knowledge acquisition, students seem to learn significantly better using the Role Play method. These findings strongly highlight the role of faceto-face-communication in teaching purpose-oriented oral communication such as conflict resolution. However, we believe that this research has implications for both teachers and game developers. Findings related to the features of each method show that skills required for both RP and ECBG are: logic, memory, visualization, and problem solving. Established educational theories (Saljo,1979, Schank and Cleary, 1995) argue that development of such skills is fundamental to all learning. While teachers need to focus on using these findings for the selection of an appropriate game, the game developers need to focus on providing a pedagogic base to the gaming activity. Fundamentally, the game developers need to work on the basis of their understanding of the relationship between educational needs and game elements. Such an understanding will help them develop educational games that include visualization and problem solving skills. Games that incorporate a blend of visualization and problem solving can provide sufficient motivation and engagement to the learners. In order to achieve this, the following implications of the present experiment can be made use of.

1. It is important to build in conversation and interaction in the games. The game used in this study was entirely based on conversation and interaction between characters. Students however still seem to prefer the Role Play method. This preference shows that there is a scope for including greater person-to-person interaction in games.
2. By their very nature, ECBG follow a programmed learning structure. Each question has a finite set of alternative answers from which learners choose a path and proceed accordingly. This structure is however highly unsuitable for the development of purpose-oriented oral communication. The developers need to explore other options for the development of these games.
3. Feedback seems to be very important for the learners. Aspects such as animation, dialogue, story line can be significant to hold learners' attention. However, consolidation of learning seems to be the key for the success of a teaching method. Although interactive games do provide feedback in terms of what is right and what is not, and do make suggestions, developers need to improve the quality of the feedback and simulate the existence of a 'live' tutor.
4. Students seem to benefit from watching how other learner perform and learn. It might be useful if performance of each learner is electronically stored, and made available to the other players. According to Malone (1981), three elements contribute to the fun in games: fantasy, curiosity, and challenge. The element of challenge can be further enhanced by letting the learners compare their performance with the performance of other players.

Amory et al. (1999) have developed an interesting model on the premise that educational games contain different aspects, those that promote educational objectives (abstract) and those that allow for realization of these objectives (concrete). According to this model, a game space consists of different components that contain discrete interfaces. These interfaces are either abstract or concrete. The game space embodies all the components (each with their own interfaces) and interfaces that define the interactive learning environment. If the game developers use such a model, it can provide them with a systematic approach for their work. Also, it will allow them to easily identify the game type that is most appropriate to the particular pedagogic purpose.

Conclusion

Computer Engineering students appear to favour Role Play over games, and also seem to benefit more from Role Play in terms of knowledge acquisition. Students identified animation, humour, and storyline of the game as important features. In the Role Play method, tutors' comments helped to learn them the most, while observing other teams playing the roles was the second-most important factor. Development of learning tools based on a combination of the two methods could provide educators with a superior mechanism to enhance learning in virtual environments where knowledge is acquired and skills are effectively transferred to real-life situations. It appears that such development will work at least in the case of computer engineering students.

References

Amory, A., Naicker, K., Vincent, J. and Adams, C. (1999*). The use of Computer Games as an Educational Tool: Identification of Appropriate Game Types and GameElements.* British Journal of Educational Technology *30(4): 311-322*

Bachman, L.F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L.F. and Palmer, A.S. (1996). *Language Testing in Practice,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Billen, A. (1993). Could it be the end for Super Mario? *The Observer* 27 June.

Celce-Murcia. M., Brinton, D.M., and Goodwin, J.M. (1996). *Teaching Pronunciation: A reference for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Karmos, J. (1999) *Simulating Conversations: Oral-Proficiency Assessment.* Language Testing 16 (2): 163-188

Kearsley (1994). Kearsley, G. (1994b). Constructivist theory (J. Bruner). [Online]. Available: http://www.gwu.edu/~tip/bruner.html [December 1, 1999].

Klabbers, J. (2001). The emerging field of simulation & gaming: Meanings of a retrospect. *Simulation & Gaming*, Vol. 32(4): 471-480.

Malone, T.W. (1981). What makes computer games fun? *Byte* 6**:** 258-277.

Quinn, C.N. (1997). Engaging Learning. Instructional Technology Forum. (itforum@uga.cc.uga.edu; http://itech1.coe.uga/itforum/paper18/paper18.html)

Saljo, R. (1979). Learning in the learner's perceptive. Some common-sense conceptions*, Reports from the Institute of Education*, University of Gothenburg, 76.

Schank, R.C. and Cleary, C. (1995). *Engines for education*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Thomas, P. and Macredie, R. (1994). Games and the design of human-computer interfaces. *Educational Technology* 31: 134-142.

Appendix 1: Handout used in the role-plays

The Raise: A drama role play

Role: The boss

Study the situation and background information carefully.

Background
You are a very hard and demanding boss of a medium sized public relations company.

You reward quality but have absolutely no time for mediocrity.

One of your employees, Soon Leng, is going to ask you for a raise in his salary.

You will begin the discussion by telling him that it is your 20th wedding anniversary and don't know what to get your wife as a present.

Your employees
You have three people working in your copywriting section:

1. Soon Leng
2. Tony Lau
3. Hui Fen

1. Soon Leng
He has been working for just over a year as a copywriter. His principal task has been to write text for annual reports. Recently you've asked him to write text for web sites.

His best experience over the year was writing a humorous speech for a CEO at an annual stockholders' meeting. You actually thought the speech was quite good, but one success does not warrant a raise.

His worst experience was a press release he wrote that had the client confronted with a libel suit. You have not forgotten this near disaster.

You think his work is adequate, but you expect excellence from all your employees.

You also believe his work to be inferior to that of his colleagues.

He never joins you and his other colleagues for a drink on Fridays and you have been thinking about firing him if his work does not improve soon. Actually, this might be a good time to do just that if he annoys you in any way!

2. Tony Lau
He has been with the company three years and gets the plum accounts and earns twice as much as Soon Leng. You think very highly of him.

3. Hui Fen
She has been with the company only six months but earns more than Soon Leng because of her previous awards as a newspaper columnist. You think very highly of her too.

Your values

You believe in giving your employees a raise based solely on the quality of their work, not on how long they have been in your company.

You have no compassion and do not allow sympathy or pity to sway your decisions.

You are prepared to invest in training for your employees.

You do not like pets, you think it is unsanitary to have animals living in your house and you think it is stupid to spend money on them.

SECRET info do not disclose unless asked
You will be giving a 'small' party with 300 of your closest friends next week.

You have not prepared a speech for this party and are willing to pay $1500 for a good one.

If Soon Leng asks for training you are willing to pay for it and then consider a raise in six months time if his work improves.

Role: Employee

Study the situation and background information carefully.

Is your gut instinct to avoid conflict?

If you are confronted, do you ignore the aggressor and try to escape? Do you put on a strong offense or do you engage the person in conversation?

What is the winning strategy?

In this drama you will speak to your boss **about getting a raise**.

Your task
You will rely on logic and your knowledge of human nature in order to successfully negotiate yourself out of a difficult spot.

In this simulation you will encounter a difficult person, your boss, with whom you will have to negotiate to get a raise.

Your challenge will be to navigate the minefield of this person's psyche and emerge with the best possible outcome.

Try to make the choices in your negotiation that you would normally make in this situation and then observe yourself as you play.

Background
Your name is Soon Leng. You have been working for just over a year as a copywriter for a medium sized public relations company. Your principal task has been to write text for annual reports, which you hate. Recently you've also been asked to write text for web sites.

Your best experience over the year was writing a humorous speech for a CEO at an annual stockholders' meeting.

You believe you are a great speech writer and would love the opportunity to demonstrate your skills again.

Your worst experience was a press release you wrote that had the client confronted with a libel suit. It wasn't entirely your fault though; you relied on confidential information provided by the client which you assumed was accurate.

Overall you believe your performance has been above average. You also work longer hours than the other two writers, Tony Lau and Hui Fen.

Tony Lau has been with the company three years and gets the plum accounts and makes twice as much as you.

Hui Fen has been with the company only six months but makes more than you because of her previous awards as a newspaper columnist.

You are a bit of a loner and don't socialize with the others in your office. You have never asked your boss for anything and have not made any effort to build any sort of relationship is with him.

Immediate financial problems
Last month, you maxed out your credit card with the purchase of a new car, and your loan payments eat up all your discretionary income. You need a raise simply to maintain your current standard of living.

Two days ago your financial situation hit a crisis because you discovered that your beloved cat "Mr Whiskers" requires a six hundred dollar operation or it will die.

You need a 20% raise.

You also feel that you need some training in web development. You know of a six-month web development course starting soon.

Appendix 2: **Survey Questionnaires used in the study**

Survey Questionnaire 1: Group G

Group: FM4

Personal Data: ☐ **Male** ☐ **Female**

Your experience with computer games:

I am addicted to them	I play them a lot.	I play the games sometimes.	I have very little exposure to computer games	I have seldom/never played the games.
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1. You have just completed a tutorial on Conflict Resolution (Handling difficult people). How would you rate your knowledge and skill level at this stage?

Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. From which source do you think you learnt more about this skill? Please rate the following options. 1= I learnt the least from this source. 3 = I learnt the most from this source

Lecture	Group Discussion	Playing the game 'The Raise'
☐	☐	☐

3. Which features of the game do you think helped you learn more effectively?

Game: The Raise

Description at the beginning of the game	The characters in the game	Animation and dialogue	The storyline	Humour and fun involved
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. ***Please rate your own learning below. Circle the appropriate number below.(1= Very little achievement 5 = Excellent achievement)***

	Before this tutorial		After this tutorial
My knowledge of conflict resolution strategies	1 2 3 4		1 2 3
My ability to select an appropriate strategy	1 2 3 4		1 2 3
My ability to ask for a raise	1 2 3 4		1 2 3
My ability to deal with difficult people	1 2 3 4		1 2 3
My overall communication skills proficiency	1 2 3 4		1 2 3

5. If you could use only one method to learn this skill, which one would you choose?

Class discussion	Computer-based animated game
☐	☐

6. Please write a paragraph (about 8-10 lines) about your learning experience with the gaming activity.

Survey Questionnaire 2 : Group RP

Group: FM2

Personal Data: ☐ **Male** ☐ **Female**

Your experience with computer games:

I am addicted to them	I play them a lot.	I play the games sometimes.	I have very little exposure to computer games	I have seldom/never played the games.
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. You have just completed a tutorial on Conflict Resolution (Handling difficult people). How would you rate your knowledge and skill level at this stage?

Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. From which source do you think you learnt more about this skill? Please rate the following options. 1= I learnt the least from this source. 3 = I learnt the most from this source

Lecture	Role Play	Group Discussion
☐	☐	☐

9. Which features of the game do you think helped you learn more effectively?

Role-Play

Description of the situation	Discussion in your group	Enacting the situation in your group	Watching other groups enact the situation	Tutors' comments on the discussion
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. Please rate your own learning below. Circle the appropriate number below.(1= Very little achievement 5 = Excellent achievement)

	Before this tutorial					After this tutorial			
My knowledge of conflict resolution strategies	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
My ability to select an appropriate strategy	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
My ability to ask for a raise	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
My ability to deal with difficult people	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
My overall communication skills proficiency	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4

11. If you could use only one method to learn this skill, which one would you choose?

Role-play	Class discussion
☐	☐

12. Please write a paragraph (about 8-10 lines) about your learning experience with the gaming activity.

Survey Questionnaire 3 : Group RPG

Group: FM5

Personal Data: ☐ **Male** ☐ **Female**

Your experience with computer games:

I am addicted to them	I play them a lot.	I play the games sometimes.	I have very little exposure to computer games	I have seldom/never played the games.
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. You have just completed a tutorial on Conflict Resolution (Handling difficult people). How would you rate your knowledge and skill level at this stage?

Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. From which source do you think you learnt more about this skill? Please rate the following options. 1= I learnt the least from this source. 3 = I learnt the most from this source

Lecture	Role Play and Group Discussion	Playing the game 'The Raise'
☐	☐	☐

15. Which features of the game do you think helped you learn more effectively?

Role-Play

Description of the situation	Discussion in your group	Enacting the situation in your group	Watching other groups enact the situation	Tutors' comments on the discussion
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Game: The Raise

Description at the beginning of the game	The characters in the game	Animation and dialogue	The storyline	Humour and fun involved
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. Please rate your own learning below. Circle the appropriate number below.(1= Very little achievement 5 = Excellent achievement)

	Before this tutorial		After this tutorial
My knowledge of conflict resolution strategies	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4 5
My ability to select an appropriate strategy	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4 5
My ability to ask for a raise	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4 5
My ability to deal with difficult people	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4 5
My overall communication skills proficiency	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4 5

17. If you could use only one method to learn this skill, which one would you choose?

Role-play and Class discussion	Computer-based animated game
☐	☐

18. Please write a paragraph (about 8-10 lines) about your learning experience with the gaming activity.

The Asian ESP Journal

Teaching Language *and* Research Skills through an International Media Project

Françoise and Roger Nunn

Françoise Nunn has taught various combinations of English and French over the past thirty years. She has an MA in Advanced Language Studies from UWE, Bristol . Her main academic focus is discourse analysis and pragmatics. She is particularly interested in the pragmatic analysis, the translation and the teaching of humour. Where possible, she prefers to teach both French and English, to translate from French into English and from English into French, and to use both as equally as possible.

Roger Nunn has worked in EFL for over 30 years in seven different countries, including more than 22 years in Asia. He is currently working at the Petroleum Institute, a new University in Abu Dhabi, where he teaches communications and research skills. He is also Senior Associate Editor of the Asian EFL Journal. He has a Trinity College TEFL diploma, an MA and Ph.D. in TEFL from the University of Reading, UK. His Ph.D. study was on teaching methodology and curriculum development across cultural boundaries in a Middle East setting. He has published widely on a variety of topics and is particularly interested in international and intercultural perspectives on language teaching. He can be reached at rogercnunn@yahoo.co.uk

Introduction

This paper proposes a framework for teaching research skills using a case-study approach to international news, requiring the extensive use of easily available Internet news sites. In Nunn (2006), a task-based approach to designing instructional EFL units was advocated. The aim of such units was to provide a balance between learning how to engage in a meaningful task or project and improving second language ability. The approach taken here attempts to adopt similar principles in relation to teaching research skills to second language learners using a project-based approach. This paper outlines the pedagogical approach briefly and provides in some detail an example of a research analysis that is used as a pedagogical tool throughout the semester-long instruction period. The sample is exploited pedagogically both as an introduction to the topic and to the skills of research and analysis required by the students to design their own project. The students' own project starts after the initial skills have been introduced in part one of the course. In part two it runs parallel to the pedagogical exploitation of the sample project for several weeks. Finally, in part three, the students' own projects take center stage. The example of a research project is presented to students not as a model but in order to introduce the kind of activities and skills that will then be needed independently by students working in small teams on their own independent projects. Extracts from two such projects designed by students will be presented at the end of this paper to indicate that students need not be required to design a carbon copy of the teacher's project. Indeed, they can be encouraged to develop a fully independent approach.

The example presented as the central part of this article was originally drafted as a research report but is not presented as one finished text to students. Students are asked to engage in the same kinds of skills that the researchers needed, such as text analysis and text comparison using the data selected by the teacher as they work through different stages of the project. Key concepts such as the Hallidayan characterization of "modality" and "transitivity" are presented through activities using the texts from the sample analyses. The approach adopted here frequently uses "task repetition" (Bygate 2001, pp.23-48) to stimulate the development of EAP skills and language acquisition. As in the EFL unit reported in Nunn (2006), the unit designed here also attempts to exploit Ellis's (2005) ten principles of SLA, (p. 14) such as the need to ensure that learners also focus on form when engaged in meaning-based activities (principle 3), the need to provide extensive input (principle 6) and the need to provide opportunities for extensive output (principle 7). This list will not be presented in this paper in full as it can be found online in both Nunn (2006) and Ellis (2005). This twin project approach can therefore be seen as a semester-long project-based unit of instruction that allow all of the ten principles to be considered in the design of activities.

Designing and conducting a case study is a holistic EAP research activity that goes well beyond the field of language learning. Students establish a database, set research objectives, conduct comparative text analyses, present results of a data analysis, discuss the implications of these results. The deliverable outcomes of their research are in the form of spoken group presentations and full written research reports. However, a case study also combines many useful sub-skills for advanced language students that feature in Ellis's principles. These include extensive and intensive reading, detailed text analysis, vocabulary development through identifying and analysing lexical fields, as well as genre-based text analysis using central systemic tools such as modality and transitivity in relation to purpose and context. Furthermore, an Internet case study provides a clear purpose to web-surfing, confronting students with challenges in critical thinking and providing insights into the way we access and process information across cultures by catching the international news process in the act as it reports world conflicts which have far-reaching global consequences.

An Overview of the Task-based Research Project Unit

Activity type	***Purpose***	Example activities
Pre-task Listening/ Reading Activities	Providing input Introducing topic area and lexis Extensive reading and listening Modelling future	Mini-Lectures on the media process for note-taking Text samples – reading to establish what happened in the reported event – providing evidence for interpretations

	activities	
Language focus at various stages of the unit	Focus on form, practising language useful for text analysis tasks Using media texts from the teacher's example project to provide intensive reading and listening comprehension practice	Study of modality Text comparison (comparing modality in two texts on the same event broadcast on the same BBC webpage) Study of transitivity Text comparison (comparing transitivity in two contrasting versions of the same event written at a two-week interval) Intensive reading Making "lexical field" maps of a text and discussing connotation

Initial Tasks Based on the Teacher-led sample project	Modelling the tasks and providing task familiarity Teaching basic research skills	Generating research questions Internet data collection - team-based Internet searching Sample analyses based on research questions Comparing these to the teacher's analyses

Final Tasks ***Student-led outcomes***	Planning own macro media-research project Task repetition Project design Internet research skills Extensive and intensive reading *Student generated input and information* Self and peer assessment/evaluation of students and unit Final self-assessment Reporting research in a spoken team presentation Writing a research report individually	Students design their own team project Research aims/questions Data collection Data analysis Micro-analysis sessions Assessed group presentations Written research report

During this kind of research project, the teacher can adopt a variety of roles. **Teacher-centred stages** include:

- providing a conceptual framework and establishing key concepts;
- providing a route map in clearly defined research stages;
- presenting a sample study to illustrate the key concepts and research techniques;
- leading language activities such as detailed text analyses and comparisons.

Student-centred stages can involve the following items. The list also indicates a possible route map for students to follow:

- forming and working in small cooperative research teams;
- establishing research objectives or questions;
- designing a research proposal and plan;
- collecting data in the form of media texts for comparison;
- selecting texts for detailed scrutiny;
- presenting analyses to the class orally (text and data analysis skills);
- leading class discussion; (in preparation for the "discussion section" of a research report.
- consulting with the teacher and evaluating team progress;
- drafting and proofreading skills in producing a final research report.
- Self and peer evaluation based on rating scales.

The sample case study presented in this paper will provide more detail than would actually be presented to many classes. What is actually selected to present to each class depends on the teacher's assessment of the situation, including practical considerations such as the time available, and pedagogical considerations such as the needs and abilities of each group.

Providing a Conceptual Framework: Key Concepts

Many of these concepts are best taught through illustrative examples from the sample case study. They are presented separately here only for the purposes of this paper. Fowler (1991, p. 13) suggests that, "News is not 'found' or even 'gathered' so much as made. It is a creation of a journalistic process, an artifact, a commodity even." Before the construction process starts, news has to be selected and assessed for its '**newsworthiness**'. Fowler (1991, p.13) points out that " 'news values' … perform a '**gate-keeping**' role filtering and restricting news input" adding that "negative events score high on most criteria, so receive massive newspaper and television coverage." He then adds that "the origins of news values are complex and diverse: they include general values about society such as 'consensus' (…)" He explains (op. cit, p. 49) that the ideology of consensus means that, "the interests of the whole population are undivided, held in common." However, it is clear that even if the readership of a newspaper can be seen as a consensual group (which is far from certain) an Internet website is accessed by a much more diverse readership. A **BBC** website “audience”, for example, is less easily described as a cohesive consensual group. In international news stories presented on websites, concepts such as ‘news values’ and ‘consensus’ are complex. A story from another “geographical location”, where different cultural values exist, is expressed in terms of the values of the news reporters and editors but not necessarily for a consensual mono-cultural audience.

Mey (1993, p. 293) points out that news writing can never achieve absolute “neutrality”. A basic presupposition of neutrality is the existence of a non-ideological attitude or position, what Mey calls a “zero point”. Setting the zero point can only be done if we know what the values are; however, those values are precisely what an analysis seeks to determine. This does not mean that we cannot distinguish between attempts to be fair or neutral and deliberately biased one-sided representation, but it does explain why the major challenge of international media analysis is identifying the way ideologies and values are embodied in language. Multiplying the perspectives will clearly be one important technique.

Modality and **transitivity** are two important categories which help students to identify the values and attitudes of news writers towards their text. Within this view, a project-based approach will be illustrated to raise awareness of and promote the ability to use modality for specific and important academic purposes. A full discussion of "modality" within a systemic linguistic perspective can be found in Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). Thompson (2004, pp. 65-75) provides a highly readable summary of the systemic notion of modality. He points out (p.73) that "one genre where an investigation of modality can be rewarding is news-reporting" explaining that "in newspaper leaders – articles expressing the newspaper's view on a current event – you often find modalization occurring as the writer ponders various aspects of the event and the possible implications…". Thompson (2004, p. 53) links modality directly to academic report writing, characterizing modality as the extent to which a proposition is "valid" and "the degree to which the speaker commits herself to the validity of what she is saying" (p. 69).

Fowler (1991, p. 85) suggests that, “truth modality varies in strength along a scale from absolute confidence – down through various degrees of lesser certainty.” Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p.618) refer to modality in terms of "the area of meaning that lies between yes and no – the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity". Fowler (1986, pp. 131/132) defines modality as “the grammar of explicit comment, the means by which people express their degree of commitment to the truth of the propositions they utter, and their views on the desirability or otherwise of the states of affairs referred to.” Similarly, Fowler (1991, p. 64) suggests that modal expressions indicate “judgements as to truth, likelihood or desirability". He argues that “writing which strives to give an impression of objectivity e.g.: scientific reporting or certain traditions of ‘realistic’ fiction, tends to minimize modal expressions”. However, Fairclough (1989, p. 129) suggests that sentences with no modal verbs still express modality, showing “one terminal point of expressive modality, a categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition."

Fowler (1991, p. 69) points out that in Hallidayan linguistics "language performs simultaneously three functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual." (See Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) for a full explanation of systemic functional grammar.) Modality is part of the interpersonal function. In this function, "the speaker is using language as the means of his own intrusion into the speech event, the expression of his comments, his attitudes and evaluations, and also of the relationship that he sets up between himself and his listener, in particular, the communication role that he adopts, of informing, questioning, greeting, persuading, etc."

Fowler (1991, p. 87) argues that: "traditional linguists had regarded language as primarily a channel for communicating ideas and facts about the world but modern trends emphasize that language is also a practice, a mode of action; as we are saying something we are also doing something through speaking." Fowler adds that, "this aspect of the interpersonal function of language, relating to speech acts, has been studied particularly by linguistic philosophers, and notably by J.L. Austin and also J.R. Searle ('illocutionary acts'). Austin in Fowler (1991, p.88) states that "there are verbs naming many thousands of speech acts in English ('request', 'stipulate', 'ban', 'declare', 'announce', 'solicit', etc." and that there is a high density of speech act verbs in newspapers ('indicated', 'demanded', 'published', 'accused', 'dealing with', 'asked', 'condemning'). These verbs, according to Fowler, are examples of speech act verbs showing beliefs and values when writers are reporting or commenting on the world. Reporting verbs in a news story are one means of expressing modality. Modality can also include the notion of desirability, through which "the speaker/writer indicates approval or disapproval of the state of affairs communicated by the proposition." (op. cit., p. 87).

Linguistic means of expressing modality include (Fowler 1986, pp. 131-132):

- Modal auxiliaries;
- Modal adverbs or sentence adverbs: (e.g. 'probably', 'surely');
- Evaluative adjectives and adverbs: (e.g. 'cowardly' 'fortunately','regrettably');
- Verbs of knowledge, prediction, evaluation: (e.g. 'seem', 'believe'). [For newspapers we must also add reporting verbs/verb phrases such as "claim", "is reported to have said", "according to …" "unconfirmed reports suggest that…".]
- Generic sentences: universal truths, proverbs, (e.g. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that…" Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the irony here suggesting the writer does not herself acknowledge this.)

News writers use modality to express their degree of commitment to the reliability of the information or evidence that other people utter and that they are "just" reporting. In this sense modality can be one means of indicating a writer's ideological "point of view". Ideology for Fowler does not suggest anything derogatory. For him it is "simply the system of beliefs, values and categories by reference to which a person or a society comprehends the world". (1986, p.130) Fowler's categories help us to identify values and beliefs in relation to the representation of information.

In Hallidayan linguistics, "t**ransitivity**" is part of the ideational function. Fowler (1991, p. 70) emphasizes the importance of "the facility to analyse the same event in different ways" in Halliday's approach. In the ideational function, "the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world; this includes his experience of the internal world of his own consciousness, his reactions, cognitions and perceptions, and also his linguistic acts of speaking and understanding." Fowler (op. cit., p. 71) underlines that "newspapers provide abundant examples of the ideological significance of transitivity." He (1991, p. 71) characterizes "transitivity" as "the foundation of representation". Transitivity embodies "some basic semantic relations in terms of which the propositions conveyed by the sentences are organised." (Fowler, 1986, p. 156) Important concepts of transitivity include: 'agent', 'object', 'action', mental process' which are (op. cit.) "a small set of presumably universal categories which characterize different kinds of event and process, different types of participants in these events, and the varying circumstances of place and time within which events occur." In news text, the roles assigned to people in terms of transitivity (deliberate action, passive action or state, accidental action) and the way that actions are characterized as aggressive, friendly, antisocial, will all form part of the ideology, point of view or world view embodied in the text. The roles assigned to participants in events are represented by transitivity. "Actions" are semantically opposed to "states", but also include considerations of agency and intention, such as whether someone "jumped", "fell" or "was pushed". Other important categories are "beneficiary": *A gave B a present*; '"experiencer": *We saw/watched the match*; "instrument": *He hit him with an axe.*

Transitivity provides different options that engage writers in a selection process. Hence, as Mey (1993, p.293) suggests, news writers cannot be neutral in the way they represent an event. There is no zero point to choose and all choices indicate ideology. This point is illustrated in Fowler (1991, p.72) who cites examples of "transitivity variance" between headline and report. The headline "PC shot boy from 9 inches" reports a complex incident as simple categorical truth with regard to agency, with a further implication that the action was deliberate. The report, however, goes on to suggest only that this was something that "was told" to prosecutors (agency has not yet been definitively established) and that the death was "accidental". Use of the agentless passive in the report which forefronts the "affected participant" or "patient" - "A boy of five was shot" - further suggests that the headline prejudges the need to establish the facts of a complex event. Related to the way roles are assigned to participants is the way key media figures tend to be provided with a pre-established serialized role independently of the events described. In fiction, a writer might create a character who represents a world view. In newspapers the characters are "real" but the media recreates them to represent an ideology. Osama bin Laden embodies "terror", Lady Diana the "fairy princess". The way media icons are represented is rarely based on detailed, intimate, reliable knowledge of the person involved.

In the light of the above, we might conclude that the most reliable news reporting will be that in which the levels of **modality** adopted reflect the real level of the writer's knowledge in relation to the event. Newsreaders can compare alternative sources on the same event and the same sources over time to determine an appropriate degree of reliability that can be assigned to information. **Transitivity** is more deeply embedded in the text. Alternative sources are once more essential, as different parties to an event will represent roles of participants in a very different light.

Establishing a Database

Again a much wider range of texts will be provided here than many courses would require. In some cases, only two texts might be used for comparison, but an adequate intercultural comparison normally requires at least three different sources. www.onlinenewspapers.com/ is a useful site for locating a wide variety of international media sources. The case study itself will help determine which sources to use and how many. A difficult compromise is always necessary between the demands of detailed analysis and the need for a broad spectrum of sources. The case study presented below has reasons for referring to the same sources twice rather than drawing on a wider variety of single sources as it is highly significant that the two British news outlets change their versions of the same event considerably over time.

According to Bell (1991, p.14), stories can be divided into 'hard' news and 'soft' news. The category we will examine closely in this case study belongs to the former as it deals with war and more specifically an overnight commando raid on Taleban[1] positions near Kandahar, Afghanistan on Friday, October 19, 2001. Boyce et al. (1978) in Fowler (1991, p. 156) suggest that, "(…) war reporting is one of the earliest historical forms of news and a stimulus for the growth of news media." American Senator Hiram Johnson's much cited remark that in war truth is "the first casualty" is very relevant to this study. War or conflict, therefore, is a good locus for examining the media process under pressure. No sources deny that this particular raid took place, but, although the raid was clearly "newsworthy" and extensively covered in the media, what actually took place is very difficult to establish even for the critical reader. The research aim is hence to determine how far it is possible for a critical reader to establish what actually took place during the Kandahar "raid".

We shall firstly refer to a **Pentagon Briefing on U.S. Ground Operations in Afghanistan** of October 20, 2001, the day after the raid. We shall then refer to a written report from the **BBC** news website **Key sites targeted by US troops** (Oct. 20, 2001), followed by a second report also from the **BBC** news website on the same day, **Helicopter crash kills two US soldiers.** Thirdly, two short **BBC** news video extracts also of October 20, 2001, hyperlinked to the same web page, have been transcribed and analysed. These all use the Pentagon

[1] Variant spellings, Taleban/Taliban, are used in this paper in order to respect the spellings of cited sources.

briefing as a main source of information.

For comparison, very different retrospective versions of the same story on the same **BBC** website will be analysed: **US special forces 'botched mission'** (Nov. 5, 2001) and on the **GUARDIAN** newspaper website: **Revealed: how bungled US raid came close to disaster** (Nov. 6, 2001). These two reports (Nov. 5 and Nov. 6) reconstruct the story two weeks later. Finally a **PAKISTAN TODAY** website report **Fighters Drove Off US Raid: Taliban**, published on the same day as the earlier versions of the **BBC** story (Oct. 20, 2001) will be discussed. All these sources are still available for the students to access in archives on the relevant sites except the **PAKISTAN TODAY,** as this source does not maintain an extensive archive, so a print-out of the text had to be provided to students. This is therefore a useful point at which to discuss with students the merits of keeping hard copies of key documents.

Having provided a conceptual framework and established a corpus of texts for a case study various approaches are possible. Students can firstly be challenged to locate alternative source texts that shed new light on the same events. This provides practice in extensive reading techniques. It is time-consuming, but students obtain first-hand practice in web-searching, rapidly scanning text summaries and whole texts to locate the few relevant texts that will shed light on the incidents in question in relation to the media process. Once texts have been established, sample analyses and comparisons can be provided for intensive reading as a basis for discussion. Further texts should be reserved as an exercise in analysis in which specific concepts such as modality or transitivity are highlighted. The analyses below are presented to students only after they have themselves analysed and compared at least some of the texts.

Sample Text Analyses

The Pentagon briefing that followed the first raid on the Taleban on Oct. 20 is revealing at the level of news values and in particular truth modality. Firstly we are told that these are 'excerpts from the Pentagon briefing'. These selected parts of the briefing have been chosen by the 'U.S. Department of State's office of International Information Programs who acknowledge that 'this site is produced and maintained' by them. It is difficult to know which parts of the briefing have been omitted as it has not been possible to find the full briefing elsewhere and it is not available on the Pentagon's own website.

Before the briefing proper begins, six very short one-sentenced paragraphs give the main points about the raid, going from what is considered newsworthy to what is considered less so. Bell (1991, pp. 168/9) points out that, "this [technique] is described by journalists as the 'inverted pyramid' style – gathering all the main points at the beginning and progressing through decreasingly important information." This is a common feature of journalism. We can find an example in the last paragraph of this Pentagon summary, therefore the least prominent position, where we are told that 'General Myers also noted that air operations are continuing, as well as humanitarian food drops.'

When the questions begin, General Myers avoids the embarrassing ones by saying that 'what [he] simply can't do is talk about any of the tactics …' And shortly after that in response to another question, he says: 'Again I'm not going to discuss the number of troops'. And much later in the briefing: 'Again, I'm not going to go into the specific aircraft that supported this operation.'

After these initial questions, as noted above, General Myers uses truth modality in a very significant fashion. Here are a few revealing examples: 'we had I think it was two people injured in parachute drops…' 'I think it's pretty well established the Taliban lie.' 'We think that ['the significant amount of dust'] had something to do with it.' ['the crash of the helicopter'] 'As you would expect going into Taliban-held territory, you would meet resistance.' 'I think you have to be careful with extrapolating this to the future.' 'I would not draw any extrapolations that this means anything like you're trying to impart to this.' 'But one of the messages should be that…' '…The other, the airfield was similarly, we thought of intelligence value.' 'We were hoping to find intelligence there.' 'We did not expect to find significant Taliban leadership (…)' 'We of course were hoping we would, but we did not expect it (…)'. The following statement by General Myers about Taleban resistance has been widely quoted in the western media, and in particular in the **BBC** news reports referred to below: 'it was, I guess you could characterize it as light.' Examples of adverbs used for modality include: 'They are <u>certainly</u> not life threatening.' 'In this case, any claims that they shot this helicopter down are <u>absolutely</u> false.' 'That's probably easy for us to say here in this room. For those experiencing it, of course, it was <u>probably</u> not light.'

Here are a few examples (the text contains many) of what Fowler (1991, p. 86) calls "straightforward truth claim". He also points out that "a straightforward truth claim does not, in fact, need any explicit modal verb; this is not to say that there is no modality, but that in the normal case, it does not need to be expressed." 'I have several video clips of yesterday's action to show you.' 'In the first clip you'll see (…)' 'The next clip is (…)' 'Next you'll see troops (…)' 'Next you will see actions (…)' (His description of the video clips is important because of the controversy regarding the content of the video footage, as we shall see below.) The two paragraphs that follow this, where General Myers gives his 'quick recap' of 'yesterday's air operations' – prior to the raid – are also very indicative of the wish of the military to be positive about their various actions. Therefore, the briefing contains a significant number of "straightforward truth claims", providing much rather detailed information, particularly involving numbers. It is interesting to note that sometimes General Myers is prepared to give a lot of information and sometimes he is not, as seen above: 'On Friday we struck in 15 planned target areas.' And in the following paragraph: 'Also yesterday we again flew four C-17 missions (…)', '(…) delivering approximately 68,000 rations (…)', etc. The attempt to justify and provide a positive tone continues later on in the briefing: 'They are doing fine'. 'There was a significant amount of dust.' 'The rotor wash brings up the dust and makes landing very very difficult.' 'It was another Taliban command and control facility.' 'The mission overall was successful'; this has later been quoted in the press, (together with other quotes), although not always in this same 'positive' light. As mentioned above, this statement by General Myers was meant to reassure a certain consensual group.

BBC Website Report

This report comes from a page of the **BBC** news website also from October 20, 2001. The complete date 'Saturday, 20 October, 2001' and time '21:39 GMT 22:39 UK' are included; they are written just above the headline. The report appeared on the same day as the briefing, the day after the raid. It is not bylined. This could imply that the nine short, one-sentence paragraphs (for easier reading) were probably gathered from a variety of sources, thus the lack of ownership. The article has a headline, **Key sites targeted by US troops**, written in a slightly larger font size, in bold letters, with a "distinctive, telegraphic syntax", according to Bell (1991, p. 186). It also has an abstract, a body copy, in which a single quote in direct speech, by Richard Myers, is included in one separate paragraph in the middle of the page, slightly to the right; the quote is written in a slightly bigger font size for emphasis. The small picture at the top of the article comes from the footage released by the Pentagon. It is not clear what it represents until one has read what is written (in very small font) underneath it, which reads 'a Pentagon video showed a parachute drop'.

The article is mainly attributed to one authoritative source, namely the **Pentagon Briefing** cited above, represented by US Officials and US Joint Chiefs Chairman Richard Myers, whose name is highlighted in a grey box, also for emphasis. (His "quasi-title" in Bell's terms (1991, p.195) is rather impressive. Bell (p.196) actually says that such a title implies "that this person belongs to a class as exclusive as heads of state or the nobility. It implies a uniqueness (…). For the media a title embodies a person's claim to news value.")

In this article, Richard Myers is reported directly from the Pentagon briefing as saying that the resistance could be characterized as 'light'. This quote in direct speech, in a separate paragraph, appeals to the notion of "consensus", but of course only for those who support the Western view of the conflict. What makes it still more reassuring for one consensual group is that in the body copy, it also says that US troops 'did not meet significant resistance', thus reinforcing the point. A fuller quotation of the comment about 'light' resistance is also used in Bridget Kendall's video report (hyperlinked to this article and analysed below). This indicates how news editors have to quote selectively from the same sources (here the above mentioned extended press briefing and interview of Richard Myers which runs into several pages when transcribed.) This point about the apparently 'light resistance' becomes one of the sources of controversy, which we shall discuss in more detail below.

General Myers is then reported as saying that 'two servicemen were lightly injured in the parachute jump but were 'doing fine''. It is interesting to note that, even though this is supposed to be what General Myers said, a few words have been slightly changed by the reporter: 'servicemen', here, for 'people' in General Myers' briefing, 'parachute jump' for 'parachute drops' and also 'lightly injured' for 'injured'; these are not very significant as such but they show however how easy it is for news reporters to change what people have said, when reporting. 'Lightly injured' and 'injured' however, could lead to more speculation as to the degree of injury. The only thing that has been accurately reported here has been the verbal phrase 'doing fine'. Reported speech, a common device in news reporting – whether written or broadcast – through which the writers express their commitment to the reliability or even to the truth of the evidence (modality), is extensively used in this article. It is introduced by the following verbs: 'say', 'told', 'said' (three times), 'saying'. It is a way for the writers to distance themselves from what they are reporting.

Towards the end of the article, we can read that General Myers 'denied a Taleban claim that they had shot down a US helicopter.' As it seems clear that this incident is to be treated as 'a mishap', it may be one of the reasons for it to be mentioned towards the end of the article, almost in passing, as will also be the case in Stephen Sackur's report below. We may also note that the Taleban claim, in addition to its inferior position, is embedded in the Pentagon refutation. The reporting verb 'claim' further weakens its credibility.

This article, **Key sites targeted by US troops** was written at '21:39 GMT 22:39 UK'; it follows another **BBC** article, written on the same day at '10:45 GMT 11:45 UK', bylined to the **BBC**'s Susannah Price in Islamabad. Her article, written in the morning is entitled **helicopter crash kills two US soldiers** ('in neighbouring Pakistan'). Later on in this report, one can note a rather serious editing mistake, which is likely to be a direct consequence of the speed they have to work at in the editing room; it reads: 'However, they said, it landed inside *Afghanistan*' (bottom p.1). 'However, they said, it landed inside *Pakistan*' (top p.2)! (Our italics in both cases).

The abstract is presented as "straightforward truth" in that no modal auxiliaries, adjectives or adverbs have been used. "Straightforward truth" has only been used once more after that, in the third paragraph: 'Three Pakistani airfields are being used by the Americans for search and rescue missions.' Modality expressing lesser certainty has been used significantly in a very large part of her report: 'The American military said it was an accident'. 'The Taleban say they shot down the helicopter. A Taleban spokesman also said they had repelled the land forces…' 'The Americans said…' 'Pakistani sources said…' 'But the Taleban now say…' 'However, they said…' All these are linked to the 'Conflicting reports'. This article by Susannah Price in Islamabad has not attacked the 'truth' of the 'facts'; it has, through modality, merely quoted the sources it has had access to. It has also on two occasions used "straightforward truth" to describe the events.

Hyperlinked Video Reports (See appendix for full transcripts)

In the modern media process, the recipient has more control over the order in which s/he accesses information and is better able to notice inconsistencies. Hyperlinked to the article **Key sites targeted by US Troops** is a video report using Pentagon footage of the US raid on the Taleban. The reporter was Stephen Sackur, a BBC Foreign Affairs correspondent in Washington in 2001.

The first part of this video report is analysed in detail, other parts are only referred to in passing (see appendix for full transcript).

> *Extraordinary night vision footage of US army rangers parachuting onto a Taleban airfield outside Kandahar. A dramatic opening to special forces combat missions behind enemy lines. On the ground several blinding flashes as US troops moved into the airfield buildings. The Pentagon says resistance was light. No number put on Taleban casualties. This, one of two raids last night, the other on a house belonging to the Taleban Leader Mullah Omar. At the airfield a small weapons cache was discovered then destroyed.*

This short extract is noticeable for its elliptical structure (omitted verb or incomplete verb form, determiners or both). 'Extraordinary night vision footage', 'No number put on Taliban casualties', 'This, one of two raids last night, etc. The reason for the elliptical nature of this report and of TV reports in general could be, as Bell (1991, p. 29) suggests, that "television news items average over 60 seconds each." In television broadcast news, it is easier to identify the large amount of editing that takes place to produce one short report. There are seven sections in the full report, which are in some ways equivalent to paragraphs in written reports. The embedding of the Taleban claim in the last section is, however, more obvious in the video footage than in the webpage article where Sackur's voice-over comment interrupts the Taleban official in mid-sentence. It is also revealing that in the fourth section of his report, Stephen Sackur mentions the helicopter crash, almost in passing and it could even be taken as a separate incident 'one went down over Pakistan.' Is it clear that this 'one' was involved in the raid in question? This is yet another example of the embedding of news which one does not wish perhaps, for ideological reasons (the morale of the troops, the viewers), to emphasize.

According to Bell (1991, p. 148), although news tends to have some of the patterns of narrative, it does not usually follow a chronological order nowadays. Schudson in Fowler (1991, p. 173) says that "reporters moved from being recorders or stenographers to interpreters about the turn of the century." Readers (or viewers) are often told the outcome of an event at the beginning of an article or news report to keep their interest and make them want to read on. In this report we have elements of a narrative (Labov, 1972), such as when, who, what, where; the complicating action: what happened (then), and the resolution: what finally happened. The event took place at 'night', the people involved were the 'US army rangers'; a little more detail is given about them: 'special forces combat missions', placed 'behind enemy lines', they were 'parachuting onto a Taliban airfield outside Kandahar.' 'The US troops moved into the airfield buildings.' We are told of the first resolution: 'No number put on Taliban casualties'. As for the raid on the second location, it took place 'on a house belonging to the Taliban Leader Mullah Omar'. No detail is given about what was found or not found, or whether there were casualties.

Despite the fact that the **BBC** is not a tabloid, adjectives are used to create a sense of excitement for viewers. The extract begins with a very powerful adjective, which makes the first line particularly attention catching and encourages the viewer to watch on: '*Extraordinary* night vision footage of US army rangers (…). It is followed by a second sentence almost parallel to the first one in both length (almost the same number of words) and style (apart from the use of the determiner 'a'): 'A *dramatic* opening to special forces combat missions behind enemy lines'. The effect of the two powerful adjectives '*extraordinary*' and '*dramatic*' (our italics) is strengthened further with the use of the noun phrase '*blinding flashes*' – a parallel to 'extraordinary night vision footage', a long three-epithet phrase. This stylistic device makes the event appear like fiction, although this is war. It adds to the sensationalizing side of the report. The dramatic, almost 'entertaining' style of this commentary represents a form of modality, which could be seen to create an effect of "desirability" in Hallidayan terms. To express "desirability", "the speaker/writer indicates approval or disapproval of the state of affairs communicated by the proposition." (Fowler 1991, p. 87)

In the middle of Stephen Sackur's report, the Pentagon is quoted as the main source of information. Bell (1991, p. 192) suggests that "the quality of a story's sources affects its news value. The more elite the source, the more newsworthy the story." But he then goes on to say that "it is also clear that readers cannot assess for themselves the credibility of the sources – or of the story." We might also wonder whether even the specialist reporter can either when the source is the Pentagon. As shown in the transcript, the first part of Stephen Sackur's report is immediately followed by the Pentagon statement: 'The mission was overall successful. We accomplished our objectives. To those in uniform who accomplished it they have never let us down and er… (there was hesitation in General Myers' voice at this point, in Sackur's report, transcribed with 'er…') yesterday was no exception.' The statement presented here is positive, aiming to convince the viewer belonging to one consensual group that the mission succeeded. Interestingly, the whole middle section of General Myers' statement in the form of a response to one question, has been cut. It talked about the 'credibility' and 'professionalism' of the army – including himself 'Dick Myers'. Although the comment is part of one rapid, spoken response, the editing is not detectable to the viewer.

There is some confusion in the naming of the locations of the raid: 'an undisclosed location' in the **Key sites targeted by US troops** article, whereas the two video reports give more precision on the name of the location (the Taleban stronghold of Kandahar). Stephen Sackur says: 'a Taleban airfield outside Kandahar', and Bridget Kendall talks about 'an airfield near Kandahar'. The article does not mention 'a house/compound belonging to the Taleban leader Mullah Omar' (reported in Sackur/Kendall's hyperlinked video reports), it refers to a 'command and control facility' as well as to a 'command complex' at 'targeted sites' USED by LEADERS of the Taleban AND al-Qaeda terror network (our capital letters). The word 'house' used by Stephen Sackur is interestingly a very neutral one in this context of terror network and terror attacks.

In Sackur's video report, 'a small weapons cache was discovered then destroyed.' Similarly to Fowler's (1991, p. 86) category of "straightforward truth", Fairclough (1989, p. 129) suggests that sentences like this with no modal verbs show "one terminal point of expressive modality, a categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition." In the article, we are also told that 'the troops seized intelligence material at the command complex.' Neither the viewer nor the **BBC** editor has any independent means of verifying these statements, so the form of categorical modality is inappropriate.

In the second hyperlinked video report, London-based BBC reporter Bridget Kendall also reports the day after the raid. The first part of her report cited below is interesting in that she – unlike Stephen Sackur – seems either to have had a little more time or distance to reflect on the raid, or the state of confusion is such that she does not know herself what to make out of the (possibly contradictory) 'facts' she was given.

> What happened last night was, of course, wrapped in secrecy and still only a few details have emerged. What I have been told is that at least a hundred US special forces including army rangers entered Southern Afghanistan under cover of darkness. Now, where they came from is classified information, but they could have been flown in from warships in the Arabian Sea and then transferred to C130 aircraft at air bases nearer by. There were apparently two targets: *(close up on the locations mentioned on the map)* an airfield near Kandahar and, some distance away, a compound belonging to the Taleban leader, Mullah Omar.

Her text, unlike Stephen Sackur's Washington report, does not quote any official sources and uses more modal auxiliaries, 'what I have been told', 'could have been flown'. She also uses an adverbial 'apparently', verbal and noun phrases, all gradually showing that the mission in question has not been that clear-cut, 'wrapped in secrecy' (suggesting that what took place is unclear); 'still only a few details', 'classified information', 'apparently two targets'. She very much distances herself from what she is reporting through the use of modality. However, at the end of her report (see attached transcript), she inexplicably moves to categorical commitment for what seems less than certain even in the briefing: 'But these highly trained US commandos weren't expecting to snatch Taleban leaders. Their main purpose was to gather intelligence.'

In her report, we are given slightly modified pieces of information, an approximate number as well as a more detailed description of the people involved: 'at least a hundred US special forces including army rangers'. This is quite a common feature of news where details tend to vary even from reporters working for the same agency. This can be misleading for the viewer or reader who watches or reads the news on the same topic. In his report, Stephen Sackur was far more positive as to the 'truth' of the 'facts': 'this, one of two raids last night'; therefore, when the viewer hears Bridget Kendall's report s/he begins to wonder what actually happened.

Another extract from the Pentagon briefing follows her introduction:

> As you would expect going into er… Taleban-held territory, you would meet resistance, and we met … we met resistance at both objectives: the airfield and the other objective. It was er… I guess you could characterize it as…as… as light.

This time, as the transcription shows, General Myers sounds rather less convinced about what he is saying; modal auxiliaries and modal expressions are extensively used in his statement: 'can expect', 'would meet', 'I guess', repeated twice with the use of 'er…' in the middle of his utterance, showing hesitation. The transcription of the two reports shows that although in Kendall's case the quote from General Myers is in full, this is not the case in Sackur's report as mentioned above. Because it was a verbal report, marks of hesitation were very revealing and have been added. It is very enlightening to read a transcript that does not transcribe hesitation and to read the same transcript that does. It inevitably gives the viewer another 'reading' of the statements. This is one of the main differences between *watching* a TV report and *reading* a newspaper report. In this extract, the verb of modality 'guess' and the last modal auxiliary 'could', followed by 'characterize it as light', might make the viewer, who listens carefully to what is being said, wonder what this hides. In the transcription of the Pentagon briefing, some of the hesitation is removed. General Myers shows some hesitation, but in a less obvious way than in the spoken version of it: 'It was, I guess you could characterize it as light'.

The Emergence of Contradictory Reports

In a 'follow-up' article (Bell 1991, p. 174), on the same **BBC** website, on Monday, 5 November, 2001, 12:37 GMT, a very different version of the same story starts to emerge, **US special forces 'botched mission'**. A detailed analysis of this article will not be provided here. It will be used only for comparative purposes. The way the story opens is very revealing as it makes no reference to the **BBC**'s own previous representation of the same events: 'An operation by United States special forces inside Afghanistan launched two weeks ago went badly wrong, according to a report in the New Yorker magazine.' The indefinite article '*an'* tends to suggest no previous reference by the **BBC** to these events.

The reference to the video footage analysed above in some detail (Stephen Sackur's report) is also very revealing. Presented by Sackur as something exciting and newsworthy, it is here referred to as 'grainy footage', attributed to the United States: 'The United States released grainy footage showing troops being dropped by parachute behind enemy lines.' The implication might even be that the **BBC** would never use such inferior American footage.

The author of the article, Martin Plaut, commits himself categorically (Fairclough, 1989, p. 129) to the ‘new facts’: ‘The raid left 12 commandos of the elite Delta Force wounded after they ran into stiffer than expected resistance from the Taleban’. This is very different from the ‘light’ resistance presented in the October 20 article **Key sites targeted by US troops**, citing the authoritative American Joint Chiefs Chairman Richard Myers in an influential early part of the article. Towards the end of this follow-up article (therefore arguably in the least influential location on the reader’s opinion) as pointed out above, ‘the US military has categorically rejected these allegations’. Indeed even the ‘light’ resistance admitted on October 20 by General Myers has now been changed to ‘(…) That’s simply not true. There was no resistance, the Taleban were in complete disarray.’ While General Myers is no longer supported as a reliable source, we might note that this does not mean that the Taleban are now presented as reliable.

An important contrast between the original October 20, **Key sites targeted by US troops** report and this follow-up article involves the use of “transitivity”. Through the use of transitivity, the November 5 article now represents the elite troops as the “affected participants” or “the patients” Fowler (1991, p. 75). This can be contrasted with the previous (Oct. 20) article **Key sites targeted by US troops**: ‘troops attacked and destroyed two targets overnight but did not meet significant resistance’, in which the same troops were first presented as ‘agents’ in Fowler’s terms.

Fowler (1991, p. 84) suggests that “categorization by vocabulary is an integral part of the reproduction of ideology” in media texts. There is a very high density of “lexical reiteration” (Halliday and Hasan 1976, p. 304) related to the topic of armed conflict. It is difficult to identify any lexical fields beyond this topic. Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 320) refer to “(…) the cohesive effect achieved by the continuity of lexical meaning.” It is interesting to extract items from the lexical fields as they reflect a development through the texts from the early articles and the broadcast reports to the later contrasting reports, which cast doubt on the success of the mission. A close look at the lexical items from the various sources almost reveals a ‘synopsis’ of the initial version of events. When we look at the ‘failed-mission’ lexical field, we notice a marked contrast in connotation. The more neutral military terminology, which dominates early reports, is replaced by more negative connotations related to failure in the follow-up articles.

<u>Military Action/Armed Forces:</u>

Nouns: ‘troops’, ‘targets’, ‘airfield’, ‘servicemen’, ‘airspace’, ‘ground’, casualties’, ‘resistance’, ‘mission’, ‘objectives’, ‘uniform’, ‘pressure’, ‘crew’, ‘raid’.

Verbs: ‘targeted’, ‘attacked’, ‘destroyed’, ‘seized’, ‘were injured’, ‘shot down’, ‘parachuting’, ‘discovered’, ‘pounded’, ‘killed’.

Noun phrases: ‘key sites’, ‘parachute drop’, ‘special forces’, ‘parachute raid’, ‘Pentagon briefing’, US Joint Chiefs Chairman’, significant resistance’, ‘Taleban forces’, ‘command and control facility', 'Taleban leader', 'Air Force General', 'intelligence material', 'command complex', 'US officials', 'parachute jump', 'Taleban claim', 'US helicopter', 'combat operation', 'air strikes', 'US army rangers', 'combat missions', 'enemy lines', 'airfield building', weapons cache', 'special forces operation', 'Taleban stronghold', 'military strategy'.

<u>Lexical field of (failed) mission</u>:

Nouns: 'crash', 'mishap', 'allegations', 'wounds', 'enemy', 'claim and counter-claim', 'disaster', 'debacle', 'setback'.

Verbs: 'wounded', 're-assessing', 'attempted', 'were enraged', 'was inflicted (by)'.

Noun phrases: 'furious assault', 'no stealth', 'military denial', 'parachute injuries', 'stiff resistance', 'complete disarray', 'botched mission', 'bungled US raid', 'ferocious Taleban ambush', 'review of war tactics', 'intense fire', 'ferocity of the Taleban resistance', 'advisability of such missions', absence of clear intelligence', 'heavy resistance', 'fierce Taliban response', 'a lot of blood'.

Verb phrases: 'went badly wrong', 'ran into stiffer than expected resistance', 'operation went wrong', 'simply not true', 'caught US commandos unawares', had failed to break the taliban's morale', US switched its military strategy', (US) 'soldier's foot blown off', 'found…stripped off anything that might provide useful intelligence', 'forcing them to retreat', 'had triggered an inquiry', '2 Delta commandos were wounded'.

A Non-Western Source

A brief comparison with a newspaper from a non-western source situated closer to the conflict geographically, is revealing. **PAKISTAN TODAY**'s website, in their October 20 article, therefore just after the raid, **Fighters Drove Off US Raid: Taliban**, emphasizes the confusion much more clearly in their leading paragraph than the **BBC** report of the same date. **PAKISTAN TODAY** gives the Taleban the leading position both in the headline (with its use of transitivity, with the Taleban as "agents", 'drove off') and in the leading paragraph. However, their leading paragraph immediately indicates contradictions even between statements: 'The ruling Taliban claimed Saturday their fighters drove off US commandos… and shot down the helicopter that US and Pakistani officials say crashed by accident in Pakistan.' In this first sentence all relevant sources are reported, suggesting a more balanced approach to modality between opposing sides in the conflict.

PAKISTAN TODAY does not at any point disguise the confusion as to what actually happened: 'the official Taliban news agency in another dispatch claimed no battle had taken place.' However, **PAKISTAN TODAY** does make it clear that the shot-down helicopter reported by all sources was actually 'supporting the operation', something which is not always clear on the **BBC** pages, where the helicopter crash could be read as a separate incident. On the **BBC** pages the helicopter is mentioned only after a section on 'other developments', which provides a very incoherent text, if the helicopter crash is intended to be read as part of the same raid. **PAKISTAN TODAY** emphasizes the confusion still further with yet another quote from the Taleban reported on **Al-JAZEERA TV**: 'I think we hit one of the helicopters, but I am not sure.' The reader is left with a very unclear image of what happened, but this is an appropriate level of modality, considering the conflicting sources of information.

A co-written article on **the GUARDIAN** web page (Nov. 6, 2001) even suggests that: 'A simultaneous raid by army rangers on Kandahar airstrip was carried out only after forward troops had checked that the area was clear. It was mainly for the benefit of the cameras to boost the rangers' morale.' This is presented as categorical truth, but as mentioned above, the reader does not have the means to check the reliability of the information any more than in the original articles. And being told in the article that 'the account given to the Guardian was consistent with an article in the New Yorker magazine yesterday', does not particularly help as it uses one secondary source to support another.

One version of the 'resolution' of this story, in Labov's terms (1972) can be seen here in **the GUARDIAN** web page article (Nov. 6), 'The debacle, which saw US Delta Force soldiers come under intense fire from the Taliban, prompted a review of special forces operations in Afghanistan (…)'. It also 'sparked a debate in the Pentagon on the advisability of such missions in the absence of clear intelligence'. And it leads to 'questioning of the leadership of the war's US commander, General Tommy Franks', who is 'too hidebound and too steeped in US military doctrine … to lead a special forces campaign requiring guile and stealth'. This has also lead to a remark from a 'British defence source that 'we need proper, joined-up, serious operations'.

All these statements, while contentious, tend to suggest that the raid was not after all the 'success' it had been 'hailed' to have been. Had it been a success, none of these statements would have needed to be made or else there is a worryingly significant contradiction between American viewpoints on the sequence of events. It is interesting too that, except for one source in Pakistan, these western media organizations seem to need "reliable" western sources to persuade their readers that the mission was unsuccessful.

Conclusion of the Analysis

This analysis deals with one item of "hard news", namely the controversial overnight US special forces raid near the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, on Friday, October 19, 2001. The inconsistency of the news reporting has been illustrated, underlining the difficulty for the reader/viewer to have a clear picture of what really happens on the world scene. The **BBC**'s Martin Plaut, even two weeks after the event, suggests that 'exactly what did take place is, at this stage, impossible to assess.' He concludes his November 5 article by stating: 'this kind of claim and counter-claim is likely to become an increasingly familiar aspect of this conflict.' **PAKISTAN TODAY** was, however, able to represent the contradictory versions from the first day, with a more balanced use of modality.

This case study has mainly concentrated on the way truth is represented through modality in the media. It has attempted to show that through the different forms of modality (modal auxiliaries, modal verbs, reporting verbs, adjectives and adverbs,), news writers and reporters sometimes even represent contentious news as "straightforward truth", in Fowler's terms. Fairclough (1989, p. 129) suggests that "the prevalence of categorical modalities supports a view of the world as transparent – as if it signalled its own meaning to any observer, without the need for interpretation and representation." This is usually done without any modal auxiliaries or adjectives and adverbs. But the use of modality in news reporting can also be a means for reporters to distance themselves from the 'facts' they present.

In his novel *Ways of Escape* (1999, p. 17), Graham Greene points out "(…) how little I had learned of life and politics during three years in the sub-editors' room of *The Times*". This is a rather revealing statement from a novelist who later sought out all the international trouble spots of his time. It tends to underline the difficulty journalists or sub-editors who stay at home experience in getting a clear picture of the events that take place elsewhere and which they have to deal with. This idea is emphasized in Fairclough (1989, p. 129) who suggests that " 'News' generally disguises the complex and messy processes of information gathering and interpretation which go into its production and the role therein of ideologies embedded in the established practices and assumptions which interpreters bring to the process of interpretation."

"Postmodernism" according to Strinati (in Storey 1994, p. 436) "is … an argument about the mass media taking over – a cultural invasion of our senses which knows no boundaries, only surfaces". Strinati further suggests that in our "post-modern" world "reality is what the media says it is, namely a question of images and surfaces" and that "the world has come to consist of media screens and cultural surfaces." In this case study, we have observed a highly sophisticated technical process of media production, but a much more primitive ability to report. The possibility of "surfing the web" may increase our ability to diversify information sources. Nevertheless it is still difficult to find sources that provide credible information or sources that truly represent other voices. In terms of so-called postmodern thought, the media is highly polished on the surface. The speed and pressures of modern society oblige most news recipients to remain at this superficial level, but when we take the time to glimpse below the surface a very different picture emerges.

Pedagogical Conclusions

Having experienced media analysis using a database established by the teacher, students are then challenged to research a different conflict of their own choice, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict either using similar techniques, or, for more advanced students developing their own approach. Students in classes who experienced this material chose a variety of topics. One study was entitled, "How Language is Used by Journalists". This dissertation was based on accounts of British journalist, John Simpson's arrival in Kabul ahead of the "Northern Alliance in 2001. This extract from his conclusion (see appendix 2), demonstrates an ability to use the concept of modality:

> Readers/viewers need to be able to work out whether they can believe the information given by media by looking at the language used by journalists. For example Simpson did not say that he liberated Kabul, however, Hodgson reports that he did it ‘singlehandedly’. By looking at the use of language carefully, such as “Media monkey” or “Simpson liberated Kabul”, readers/viewers can understand that Hodgson criticizes Simpson. When journalists criticize someone, they often use expressions like these and often do not use modality appropriately.

The independent project stage can lead to very interesting and original media investigations. Although this was an international study, another student focused on the misreporting of an important local problem on waste disposal on Teshima Island, in Southern Japan. Although it used some linguistic analysis, it was more an investigation of media ethics, which is only indirectly linked to "modality". (See appendix 3). The student in this case conducted her own investigation on the local media coverage of a problem of public interest, including her own interviews with local journalists and environmental campaigners.

> The main cause would be that reporters did not turn their eyes on the islanders, just staying at their private press club. The important thing, on the other hand, is that the media turn their eyes on the public, for the public forms a society. Further, an idea of ‘public journalism’ suggests that the local media should present possible solutions to some problems and help citizens participate in solving the problems. In fact, the solutions by the local media, which is subject to the political power of the area they serve, might be biased and the extent to which a person can think of something as his or her own is not so great.

A detailed case study is a demanding task for students, but can be conducted at different levels of sophistication. For advanced students of international studies, an international media case study has several advantages. It provides practice in a variety of language skills. It gives students a hands-on introduction to research techniques. At the same time it develops an understanding not only of major international conflicts of our time, but also of the often complex intercultural issues that are raised when readers are confronted with the difficulties of evaluating contradictions between media sources on these conflicts. When students decide to apply investigative techniques learnt through international investigations to local problems, this may also paradoxically indicate that they have made the study their own, leading them to the important understanding that "international" does not exclude "local".

References:

Bell, A. (1991) *The language of news media* Oxford: Blackwell.

Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral interaction. In Bygate, M., Skehan, P., Swain, M. (2001). Researching pedagogic tasks second language learning, teaching and testing. Harlow: Longman.

Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. In P. Robertson, P. Dash and J. Jung (Eds). *English language learning in the Asian context* (pp. 12-26). Pusan: The Asian EFL Journal Press. http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/September_05_re.php

Fowler, R. (1986) *Linguistic criticism*. Oxford: OUP.

Fowler, R. (1991) *Language in the news*. London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and power*. Harlow: Longman.

Greene, G. (1999) *Ways of escape*. London: Vintage.

Halliday, M.A.K. and R. Hasan (1976) *Cohesion in English* London: Longman.

Halliday, M. & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar*. (3rd revised edition of Halliday's Introduction to functional grammar.) London: Hodder Arnold.

Labov, W. (1972) The Transformation of experience in narrative syntax. *In Labov, W.* Language in the Inner City*, Philadelphia: University of* Pennsylvania Press, 354-96.

Mey, J. (2000). *Pragmatics. An introduction* (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nunn, R. (2006) Designing Holistic Units for Task-Based Learning. *Asian EFL Journal* (Vol. 8, Issue 3) http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/Sept_06_rn.php

Reah, D. (1998) *The Language of Newspapers*. London: Routledge.

Strinati, D. (1994) Postmodernism and Popular Culture in Storey, J. (1994) *Cultural theory and popular culture. A reader.* pp. 428-438 Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Thompson, G. (2004) *Introducing functional grammar*. London: Arnold.

References from the Internet:

US State Department Website: 20 October 2001
Pentagon Briefing on U.S. Ground Operations in Afghanistan
U.S. Special Forces attack terrorist and Taliban targets
http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01102005.htm
First retrieved on Nov. 13, 2001

BBC Website: Saturday, 20 October, 2001, 21:39 GMT 22:39 UK

Key sites targeted by US troops
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1609000/1609762.stm
First retrieved on Nov. 13, 2001

BBC Website: Saturday, 20 October, 2001, 10:45 GMT 11:45 UK
Helicopter crash kills two US soldiers
Susannah Price in Islamabad
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1610000/1610236.stm
First retrieved on Nov. 13, 2001

First Video Hyperlink from BBC October 20, 2001 page: ***Key sites targeted by US troops***
http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1610000/video/_1611108_raids22_sackur_vi.ram

Second video Hyperlink from BBC October 20, 2001 page: ***Key sites targeted by US troops***
http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1610000/video/_1611108_forces22_kendall_vi.ram

BBC Website: Monday, 5 November, 2001, 12:37 GMT
US special forces 'botched mission'
Martin Plaut
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/newsid_1638000/1638830.stm
First retrieved on Nov. 16, 2001

Guardian Website: Tuesday November 6, 2001 ***Revealed: how bungled US raid came close to disaster***
Delta Force caught in ferocious Taliban ambush
Debacle prompted review of war tactics
Luke Harding in Quetta Julian Borger in Washington and Richard Norton-Taylor
http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4292852,00.html
First retrieved on Nov. 23, 2001

Pakistan Today Website: Saturday, October 20, 2001
Fighters Drove Off US Raid: Taliban
Kathy Gannon & Amir Shah
http://www.paktoday.com/drove20.htm

Appendix 1 (Video Hyperlink Transcripts)

Video Hyperlink from BBC October 20, 2001 page: "Key sites targeted by US troops".
http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1610000/video/_1611108_raids22_sackur_vi.ram

Stephen Sackur (voice over Pentagon video footage described below)

Extraordinary night vision footage of US army rangers parachuting onto a Taleban airfield outside Kandahar. A dramatic opening to special forces combat missions behind enemy lines. On the ground several blinding flashes as US troops moved into the airfield buildings. The Pentagon says resistance was light. No number put on Taleban casualties. This, one of two raids last night, the other on a house belonging to the Taleban Leader Mullah Omar. At the airfield a small weapons cache was discovered then destroyed.

(Next comes an extract from a Pentagon press briefing by General Richard Myers, US Joint Chiefs Chairman)

The mission overall was successful. We accomplished our objectives. To those in uniform who accomplished it they have never let us down and er yesterday was no exception.

(Then comes Stephen Sackur, voice over AL-JAZEERA footage)

This, the view from inside Kandahar last night. The special forces operation so close to this Taleban stronghold designed to put further pressure on a city already pounded by US war planes.

(Voice continues over Pentagon footage of an aircraft carrier)

American combat helicopters now massed on Aircraft carriers within striking distance of Afghan targets. But last night one went down over Pakistan, two crew were killed.

(Next comes statement by President Bush)

These soldiers will not have died in vain. This is a just cause, it's an important cause.

(Extract of a statement by a Taleban official)

I have initial reports that helicopter was hit…

(Stephen Sackur, voice over, interrupting)

A Taleban official today claiming they shot down the US helicopter, "nonsense" ["nonsense" is stressed by the speaker] according to the Pentagon.

Tonight more US bombing raids, operation "Enduring Freedom" is in a new phase. Air power now being used in conjunction with special forces on the ground. The pressure on the Taleban and Al-Qaeda is mounting. Stephen Sackur, BBC news, Washington.

Second Video Hyperlink from BBC October 20, 2001 page: “Key sites targeted by US troops”.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1610000/video/_1611108_forces22_kendall_vi.ram

Bridget Kendall (to the left of the screen, with a map of the area round Afghanistan behind her and a large heading in the bottom right hand corner “SPECIAL FORCES”)

What happened last night was, of course, wrapped in secrecy and still only a few details have emerged. What I have been told is that at least a hundred US special forces including army rangers entered Southern Afghanistan under cover of darkness. Now, where they came from is classified information, but they could have been flown in from warships in the Arabian Sea and then transferred to C130 aircraft at air bases nearer by. There were apparently two targets: *(close up on the locations mentioned on the map)* an airfield near Kandahar and, some distance away, a compound belonging to the Taleban leader, Mullah Omar.

(Richard Myers, same briefing different excerpt)

As you would expect going into er Taleban-held territory, you would meet resistance, and we met … we met resistance at both objectives: the airfield and the other objective. It was er… I guess you could characterize it as…as… as light.

(Back to Bridget Kendall, voice over troop preparation video footage)

Pentagon pictures showed troops preparing gear and loading onto transport planes ahead of the raid. But these highly trained US commandos weren’t expecting to snatch Taleban leaders. Their main purpose was to gather intelligence.

Charles Hayman Editor Jane’s World Armies

… allied forces on a very steep learning curve and getting some experience of operating on the ground. What we are almost certainly going to see now over the next few nights is probably a lot more raids like this one ...

(Bridget Kendall voice over winter footage in Afghanistan)

… and they’ll have to hurry. Winter in Afghanistan is round the corner making already hazardous ground operations even more treacherous. Bridget Kendall, BBC news.

Appendix 2

Conclusion of a student's written report of his independent research project: "How Language is Used by Journalists." This is a final draft in a multidrafting approach which includes peer and teacher feedback on language.

Conclusion

Readers/viewers need to be able to work out whether they can believe the information given by media by looking at the language used by journalists. For example Simpson did not say that he liberated Kabul, however, Hodgson reports that he did it 'singlehandedly'. By looking at the use of language carefully, such as "Media monkey" or "Simpson liberated Kabul", readers/viewers can understand that Hodgson criticizes Simpson. When journalists criticize someone, they often use expressions like these and often do not use modality appropriately.

When we read quotations, we also have to pay attention to whether they are reliable or not. News writers/reporters often cut quotations and use just what they think necessary for their reports as we saw in the example in Hodgson's report. When we could not find more than one source reporting the same event, we should not trust the information instantly. For example we have already seen an example of this in Simpson's comment, "It was only the BBC". The BBC was the only organization which entered Kabul before the Northern Alliance, and Simpson could not distance himself from the event.

In this dissertation, I showed examples of adequate modality used in Simpson's book in Chapter 1. Also, I said that some words are inappropriate to use with any modal expressions. I talked about how categorical modality is used and the situation in which it is not appropriate to use it. It is not about the use of language, but I could find a typical example in which the Guardian criticizes Simpson of the BBC, and the BBC which supports Simpson. The BBC does not report what Simpson said at the interview with MacGregor.
Journalists should use adequate modality to communicate with readers/viewers well. It is natural that when journalists report something they cannot be sure they need a higher level of modality. However even when they report what they witness with their own eyes, or events in which journalists are deeply involved, they still need adequate modality.

Appendix 3
Part of the abstract from a student's dissertation: "The Teshima Island Problem".

This dissertation is an analysis of news reporting on the Teshima Island problem aiming at understanding issues over the local media and considering their ideal state. The Teshima Island problem is an event in which a large amount of industrial waste had been illegally brought into a small island in Kagawa Prefecture from 1978 to 1990. The media, even the local newspaper Shikoku Shimbun, did not report the event until the raid by Police in 1990. The main cause would be that reporters did not turn their eyes on the islanders, just staying at their private press club. The important thing, on the other hand, is that the media turn their eyes on the public, for the public forms a society. Further, an idea of 'public journalism' suggests that the local media should present possible solutions to some problems and help citizens participate in solving the problems. In fact, considering that the solutions by the local media, which is subject to the political power of the area they serve, might be biased and that an extent to which a person can think of something as his or her own is not so great, it would not be successful so easily. Anyway, an emergent need for the local news media is to think of the public's opinion.

Note: An earlier and shorter version of this paper was published in the International Communication Department Journal, Faculty of Humanities and Economics, Vol. 4 (pp. 63-90) of Kochi University, Japan. (September 2003)

The Asian ESP Journal

Corpora Applications to Economics Presentations: A Case Study

By
Renata Suzuki
Department of Economics, Sophia University, Japan

Bioprofile: Renata Suzuki currently works at Sophia University teaching Economics English. She has extensive experience working with all levels and ages during her twenty-one years in Japan as an EFL teacher/lecturer. She has designed courses combining environmental awareness with English education, and published a free book of ecosongs for kids available at http://www.onegreenleaf.net. She is interested in peace education, learner autonomy, environmental EFL curriculum design, and internet tools in the classroom (CALL), including particularly blogs for classroom observation and professional development. Visit and comment at her blog http://grankageva.blogspot.com/. She can be contacted at renate@zaa.att.ne.jp

Abstract

The field of corpus studies with its exploration of language in use has revolutionized our understanding of language and how it works. However, changes in attitudes to language teaching are only slowly coming about, aided by recent textbooks which incorporate authentic texts and findings based on 'real' language. Particularly in the world of ESP, where student needs strongly dictate course curriculum, adequate textbooks may not always be available. The sphere of Economics presentations is such an example.

This paper offers a case study of how the teacher can usefully implement a corpus study to tailor presentation curriculum and provide information which facilitates student learning at their zones of proximal development. The study examines presentation relevance objectives according to a framework of strategies (Sperber &Wilson, 1986,1995; Dor, 2003). It then considers how to choose the most relevant corpus to the presentation mode. By examining two kinds of corpus data, frequency and collocation, the paper shows how the teacher can obtain results directly related to student language challenges and help students meet relevance objectives. The study suggests cognitive and affective benefits to students including informed choice of language and reduced fear of error. The paper finally highlights three areas of further research: the pragmatic function of 'ostension' (Sperber & Wilson) in presentations, the relevance of the diachronic nature of corpora to the classroom, and pedagogical issues concerning which type of corpus data may be most profitable and accessible presented directly to students or in a teacher-led condensed form.

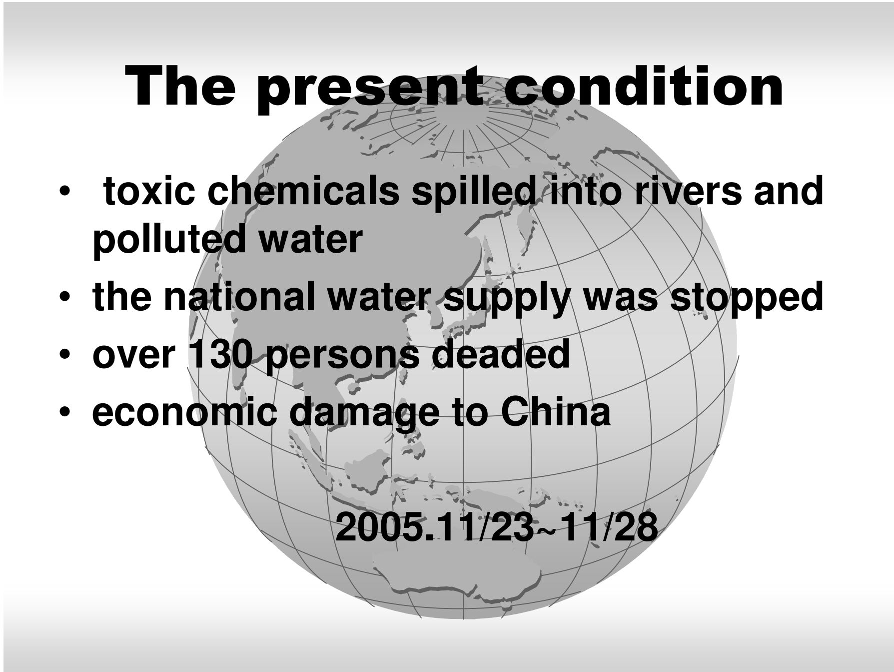


Fig 1. Microsoft Powerpoint (ppt) China 1 email attachment 14/12/2005 (Mariko)

1. Introduction

This paper will report on how L2 learners in Economics presentations often misuse similar noun phrases, 'present/current' with 'state/ state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation' in their presentations. I will show certain conventions governing the use of these phrases and how a Bank of English study can assist students in learning to make distinctions between these similar but different phrases. Following an action research procedure, frequency and grammatical patterning data are used to explore three areas of concern in respective sections: 1) Can they be used synonymously as the dictionary definition and native speaker intuition suggests? 2) Which terms are more frequent and suited to the discourse of an Economics Presentation? 3) Are there differences in semantic prosody and grammatical patterns of use? Results suggest how students can linguistically highlight the relevance of their topic when introducing up-to-date information.

1.1 Subjects and Context

I teach two ninety minute, thirteen-week courses of English for Economics Majors (each class has approximately forty third-year higher-intermediate students, age 21) at a Faculty of Economics in a private Japanese university. Most of these majors have studied English for eight years and wish to focus on Economics rather than English language per se. For motivation purposes, English tasks therefore require a clear, empowering, career-related purpose beyond acquisition of English grammar or vague standards of fluency. As a result, the course addresses English presentation, Powerpoint (ppt) and research skills in Financial and Environmental Economics.

Students prepare four team presentations: Presentation One (Financial Economics) introduces basic, linear presentation structure with introductory and closing phrases and responses to queries. Presentation Two

(Financial Economics) focuses on justifying arguments with visuals and sources, using graphs, charts and surveys. Presentation Three (Environmental Economics) highlights making presentation topics relevant, quoting up-to-date information and articles, and using rhetorical questions and repetition to make presentations interactive. The last Presentation reviews all skills, with a final emphasis on humor and persuasion.

1.2 Misuse of similar noun phrases, 'present/current' with 'state/ state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation'

In their third presentation, students introduce a current focus in topics expressly. Students are also advised to include exact data, dates and sources to highlight the up-to-date nature of topics. Therefore, in this study I focus on incipient linguistic use of terms: 'present/current' and 'state/ state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation'. For instance, in a prior Presentation Two ppt on 'Migrant Labor', a student slide heading is 'Example 1'. The ppt slide (Fig. 1) above shows how in their third presentation, 'Chinese Environment', students have begun to highlight relevance using 'present' and 'condition'. (The slide alludes to a November 13th 2005 chemical plant explosion that killed 5 people and polluted the Songhua River, China, with 100tons of benzene).

Further student attempts to highlight relevance include:

- Team A: 'Money flows to foreign countries without rotating in the United States. However, *munition industry's situation* is different….'(in a presentation on the economic benefits of war).
- Team B: 'This article is written about *the current situation of India*', (in a presentation on poverty).
- Team C: '*Circumstances of North Korea*' -ppt bullet (in a presentation on the economic situation in North Korea).
- Team D: '*At present*, infection of bird flu from a bird to a person is not confirmed.' (in a presentation on the economic effects of bird flu).

While these headings are not outright erroneous, native-speaker intuition suggests they could be improved: students seem unaware of certain conventions governing the use of these phrases which could facilitate more acceptable choices. The following corpus study clarifies how student presentations and ppts could be improved linguistically and why.

1.3 Review of the literature and methodology

The procedure for this study is an action research mode in which theory and method directs each step according to the findings. Two issues are discussed in this section: 1) how students make complex and acceptable language use approximating target discourse; 2) the shortcomings of dictionary and teacher intuition as support tools when students choose between similar noun phrases.

1.3.1 Approximating presentation register

First, how can students express the concept of up-to-date information, the here and now (relevance) appropriately in the discourse of presentations?

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), 'relevance' is a property 'which makes information worth processing for a human being' (p.46). In their pragmatic cost-benefit model, the most relevant information offers new, modifying and improving knowledge of the world at minimal processing cost. Applying this theory to newspaper headlines, Dor (2003:716) has shown how headlines optimize the relevance of their stories for the reader with three main strategies. The first, 'requiring the *minimal amount of processing effort'* (p.716), entails simplifying language, shortening text or working with known concepts. The second, 'carrying the *maximal amount of contextual effect'* (p.716) concerns making sure the information is new and interesting. The third, 'making sure the readers construct *the right context for interpretation'* (p.716) involves helping the reader position and evaluate the information in relation to prior knowledge. Dor claims that headlines aim to meet a maximum number of these strategies.

Drawing on Sperber and Wilson's (1986, 1995) theory of relevance and Dor's application may be useful when considering presentation discourse and powerpoint items. While headlines have a very particular 'selection device' (Dor 2003:719) function in newspapers, it could be argued that the pragmatic function of the presentation discourse linguistic items under consideration here are what Sperber and Wilson term 'ostension', that is 'making manifest an intention to make something manifest' (p.49). In other words, they are a linguistic pointing device functioning overtly to signal to the audience the novelty value of the information. Sperber and Wilson also point out that 'ostension comes with a tacit guarantee of relevance' (p.49) It could be said that the presentation discourse and powerpoint bullets under consideration here serve to make more ostensibly manifest the relevance benefits from listening to the presentation. Nevertheless, Dor's three relevance strategies for newspaper headlines are a useful starting point for analyzing what the students are attempting to achieve and how the teacher can use corpus analysis to help them.

Let us consider meeting the first and second strategies, minimizing processing effort and maximizing the new information. If we consult the Genius Japanese English dictionary (Konishi, T. & Minamide, K. 2003-4), we see that • *genzai (現在)* is translated from Japanese as 'now' and 'at present'. With such simple adverbials (now/at present/currently/ at this time/ at the present time and so on) and basic formulaic rhetorical question such as 'What is happening in 'Country/Industry Name' ADVERBIAL?' one might argue that the students' relevance goal of processing ease and highlighting novelty value is easily reached. At this level, the teacher can help students choose appropriate phrases studying corpus data results from Kennedy's (1998: 15) Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus research. Students could discuss frequencies of usage and the varying popularity of collocation 'at this time'; 28 tokens, 'at the present time'; 20 tokens, 'at this moment'; 8 tokens and 'at the present moment'; 1 token (Kennedy 1998:15).

However these Japanese Majors are beginning to make complex choices linking the concept of 'now' to 'situation'. As a teacher I prioritize helping students to achieve at the level of language they aim to use, in other words to support 'functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state' (Vygotsky, 1978:86). Here, student goals are acceptable presentation discourse highlighting relevance. Is complex nominalization required? Are students making their discourse less relevant by ignoring Dor's (2003) first strategy and increasing processing load?

Our following discussion suggests students are implementing a fourth strategy: strengthening confidence in the speaker. Revisiting Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), the authors suggest that the intention of a communicator (in this case, the student presentation team) is to modify 'the cognitive environment of the audience' (p.58) . They describe a paradigm of 'strength' of (audience) perception and assumptions, which depend on how they are acquired, either first-hand, or through a second party: 'Similarly, the initial strength of an assumption may depend on the way it is acquired…assumptions based on acceptance of somebody's word have a strength commensurate with one's confidence in the speaker…'(p.77). I would argue that by choosing to convey information in a more suitable academic and presentation style register, students are linguistically signaling their trustworthiness, increasing audience confidence in the speaker and strengthening the relevance of their work.

Student's choice of nominal phrase allows for a conceptual concentration of information linking 'current/present' with 'situation/circumstances/ condition/ state'. According to Halliday & Martin (1993 in Hunston 2002:162), more dense, abstract thinking involves nominalization to cope with complexity. The phrase is flexible, functioning both in adverbial position with a preposition such as 'in', and also as nominal group in subject/object position of a sentence. Moreover, the mixed written/spoken mode of Economics ppt presentation approximates a more formal style of English than casual conversation, and consequently lexical density featuring nominalization will be higher. In this way, by choosing a linguistic complexity more suited to the academic presentation register, students are signaling the academic level of their information, creating audience confidence and trust, and thus strengthening presentation relevance. Building confidence in the speaker by appropriate linguistic devices (collocational use and register sensitivity) could therefore be considered a fourth relevance strategy.

Moreover, although students may be said to be abandoning Dor's first relevance strategy of cognitive processing ease, students are maintaining the second strategy, ostensibly signaling the temporal 'new' . With a meaning-sensitive choice of target lexis, students are also implementing the third strategy, 'making sure the readers construct *the right context for interpretation'* (Dor, 2003:716). The following corpus study reveals a somewhat varied semantic prosody of target phrases, an awareness of which can help students signal particular interpretations to the listener. As such, this section concludes that encouraging acceptable use of target phrases 'the+current/present+ state/state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation' to highlight topics matches both student learning curves and maximizes discourse relevance by use of three identified strategies.

1.3.2 Shortcomings of Dictionary and Native Speaker Intuition

This brings us to the second issue: how can students make a differentiated choice between seemingly equal phrases to optimize relevance by assisting the audience in constructing the right context for interpretation? The dictionary seems to indicate that these words are synonymous, equivalent and can be used interchangeably. If we again consult the Genius (Konishi, T. & Minamide, K., 2003-4), we see

- ‘state’, ‘condition’ and ‘situation’ as translation of *joutai (状態)*
- ‘circumstances’, ‘condition’ and ‘situation’ for *jijou* (事情).

Furthermore, in the Advanced Learner’s (Hornby, A.S. & Wehmeier, S., 2000) in my Casio XD-LP9300 electronic dictionary (electronic dictionaries are widely favored by Japanese students), all definitions contain one or other of the terms (highlighted in red below) in a quasi round robin:

con•di•tion /kənˈdɪʃn/ *noun*, *verb*
■*noun*
STATE OF STH
1 [*U*, *sing.*] the state that sth is in: *to be* ***in bad / good / excellent condition***

state /steɪt/ *noun*, *adj.*, *verb*
■*noun*
CONDITION OF SB / STH
1 [*C*] the mental, emotional or physical condition that a person or thing is in: … ◇*anxieties about the state of the country’s economy…* ⇨note at CONDITION

cir•cum•stance /ˈsɜːkəmstəns; stɑːns; stæns; *NAmE* ˈsɜːrkəmstæns/ *noun*
1 [*C*, *usually pl.*] the conditions and facts that are connected with and affect a situation, an event or an action: …◇*changing social and political circumstances…* ⇨note at SITUATION

situ•ation /ˌsɪtʃuˈeɪʃn/ *noun*
1 all the circumstances and things that are happening at a particular time and in a particular place:…◇*the present* ***economic / financial / political, etc. situation***

If, as Sinclair (2004:171) argues, ‘a large proportion of the word occurrence is the result of co-selection…’ (see also Sinclair’s (1991) ‘idiom principle’), there may be evidence in corpus patterns that these words linked with ‘current’ or ‘present’ cannot be used interchangeably and have different spectrums of use and meaning. Indeed, prior lexicographic studies by Biber, Conrad & Reppen (1998;1994) on differences between ‘little’ and ‘small’, ‘certain’ and ‘sure’, and by Kennedy (1991) on ‘between’ and ‘through’, suggest that what the dictionary defines as near-synonyms do tend to have different patterns of use and shades of meaning.

How can the teacher support a differentiated choice and help students manipulate the specific patterns of meaning? A native speaker might intuitively suggest the Fig. 1 heading ‘the present condition’ be amended to ‘the current situation ’. However, native speaker choices between these words are based on accumulated exposure. Most intuition does not give access to reasons for making decisions, and has no clear list of possible patterns to guide a third party (Sinclair, 1997). Even as a highly educated native speaker, I would not have been able to explain the data nuances this research reveals. Odlin (1994: 286-7) recommends: ‘More advanced learners can and should receive detailed information about acceptability…To a large extent, the problem requires knowing the goals of the student writers.' Here, the goals have been clarified: to help students make use of linguistic ostension to maximize the relevance of presentations in a way which will not only signal novelty, but also indicate the trustworthiness of the speaker when constructing particular contexts for interpretation. This paper suggests a corpus study may bridge the gap between dictionary data, which does not offer advice tailored specifically to highlighting relevance in Economics presentations.

2. Corpus study of the Bank of English sub-corpora

The following section examines 1) the suitability of the corpus (and in particular three sub-corpora) to the presentation query 2) the distribution of 'current/present' with 'state/ state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation' across the Bank of English sub-corpora and 2) frequencies in selected BBC, NPR and Economist (Econ) sub-corpora. It determines which target phrases may be most acceptable to help students manifest relevance in presentation discourse.

2.1 Determining a suitable corpus

To determine target phrases best suited to presentation discourse, I decided to investigate corpus-based frequencies. Hunston & Laviosa (2000:85) suggest that 'the individual teacher …should use the largest corpus practicably available.' As a University of Birmingham MA student, I conveniently have telnet access to the 450 million word Bank of English. This corpus is designed as a resource for dictionary and reference book writers (Hunston, 2002), which purpose matches the paradigm of this lexico-grammatical study. However, Stubbs (2002:67) warns against bias errors due to corpus composition, which he terms 'raw first-order data'. Indeed, Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1994)'s corpus-based dimensional model of linguistic register variation of 10 spoken and written registers suggests specific linguistic and lexical parameters to register. As Hunston (2002: 154) observes, 'within a particular register, or within a particular language function, a paradigm may come into or out of existence in a way that is not true for the language as a whole.'

I therefore focus my study on concordance lines and frequencies from sub-corpora closest matching parameters of Economic presentations: formal reporting-style spoken discourse, coupled with Economic content. Unfortunately there are no specialized presentation corpora available to consult. Nevertheless, since Economics Presentations are informational rather than involved, and abstract rather than non-abstract, they could be situated between Broadcasts and Scientific prose in Biber, Conrad and Reppen's (1994:182) model. 3 sub-corpora were therefore selected: 1) BBC sub-corpus of 3 million words with 23 texts from 1990-91 with daily transcripts from broadcasts of the BBC World Service, London, including news, current affairs and general interest programs; 2) NPR sub-corpus of 3 million words with 103 texts from 1990-93 with daily transcripts from broadcasts of National Public Radio, Washington, USA, including news, current affairs and general interest programs; 3) The Economist sub-corpus, with written texts from the specialized Economist magazine.

2.2 Distribution of ‘the +current/present +state/ state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation’ in Bank of English sub-corpora

An analysis of occurrence and frequency of target phrases was performed to confirm the suitability of the chosen corpora. Appendix 1 offers a data-table showing distribution of target lexical phrases across Bank of English sub-corpora. The top 3 heaviest-user sub-corpora are listed with number of raw occurrence and frequency per million words. The top three user sub-corpora reveal that target phrases are indeed representative of and most frequently used in broadcasting. Usage in the BBC sub-corpus of ‘the current/present state’, ‘the current/present state of affairs’, ‘the current/present circumstances’ and ‘ the current/present situation’ ranks consistently top or appear in second place.

Moreover, whereas the NPR sub-corpus never enters the top three for frequency of ‘present’ with ‘state’ etc., it has a consistent top three ranking entry for ‘the current state of affairs’, ‘the current circumstances’, ‘the current condition’ and ‘the current situation’. There is evidence that contrary to British broadcasting where either choice is acceptable, for US broadcasting and consequently a US audience, ‘current’ is a preferable adjectival choice over ‘present’ with ‘state/state of affairs/ circumstances/condition’ to highlight relevance. Students can therefore be advised to choose ‘current’ over ‘present’ to meet discourse expectations for audiences both sides of the Atlantic.

Incidentally, the only target lexical combination with which the Economist sub-corpus enters the top three heavy users in the Bank of English is ‘the present state of affairs’. Instances of ‘the present state of affairs’ could thus be further examined for possible specific meanings or semantic prosodies.

3. Observations of Frequency data results

This section first examines issues arising from frequency data of BBC, NPR and Econ. sub-corpora. Collocation picture (sorted by t-score and MI score) and concordance lines then provide further insight into frequency data results.

3.1 Target phrase frequency usage in 3 sub-corpora

Table 1 below shows frequencies per million words of target phrases in the three sub-corpora. (For comparison purposes frequency per million words is provided, rather than raw number of occurrences, since corpora sizes are different.)

Table 1. Frequencies per million words of target phrases in 3 subcorpora

	BBC	Econ	NPR
the current state	2.3	0.6	1.1
the present state	1.9	0.6	0.3
the current state of affairs	0.3	0.1	0.2
the present state of affairs	0.5	0.1	0.1
the current circumstances	0.3	0.1	0.2
the present circumstances	1.4	0	0.4
the current condition	0	0	0.2
the present condition	0	0.1	0.1
the current situation	4	0.3	2.5
the present situation	4.9	0.2	0.5

As can easily be seen from this data reformatted in graph format (Fig. 2; p.15), not all combinations are equally popular. It follows that the most authentic phrases to recommend to students are those which peak for all three sub-corpora. In other words, students can safely choose ‘the current state’ and ‘the current situation’ with a higher probability of strengthening relevance by sounding acceptable.

A further point of interest is that where British corpora show zero usage of ‘the current condition’, this phrase seems popular in NPR. Corpus-based studies by Tottie (1991b in Kennedy 1998: 193) have highlighted pragmatic differences in US and UK usage of backchannel feedback, and Kennedy (1998:193) mentions corpus evidence for British and American English linguistic differences. The graph below (Fig.2) offers students a visual representation of such geographical lexical difference. In this case Bank of English evidence suggests the (British) BBC and The Economist avoid ‘the current condition’, since there is no occurrence in these sub-corpora.

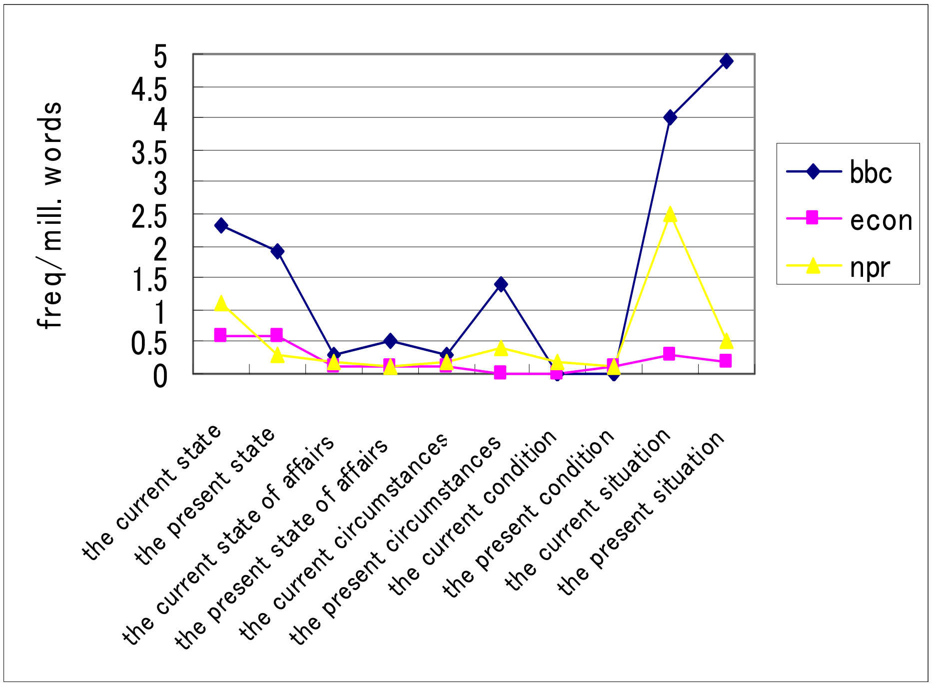


Fig. 2: Frequencies/million words of target phrases in 3 subcorpora

Actual concordance lines of 'the current condition' in the NPR sub-corpus are examined in section 3.2.4 and suggest that there are indeed US culture-specific Economics-related meanings or usages involved. Examining such frequency data may lead students to deeper awareness of cultural linguistic nuance, and how to exploit culture-specific linguistic patterns for relevance purposes. Coupled with frequency data, such awareness offers students a platform to choose which type of language they aim to use and study.

In summary, examining in sub-corpora frequency data per million words of 'the+current +state', 'the+present+state', 'the+current+state+of+affairs','the+present+state+of+affairs', the+present+circumstances','the+current+condition', 'the+present+condition', 'the+current+situation' and 'the+present+situation' has given evidence that 1) all phrases are possible as the dictionary definition suggests, 2) all phrases are likely in a broadcasting or Economics context and therefore suitable to the presentation medium, 3) not all are equally often used, suggesting a possible safety choice where three sub-corpora peak, 4) there are geographical nuances, noticeably differences in British and US preference for the word 'current' and phrase 'the current condition', 5) As we have argued in the previous section 1, particular semantic meanings help 'making sure the readers construct *the right context for interpretation*' (Dor, 2003:716) and thus function as relevance optimizers. Clearly further examination of detailed and sorted corpus examples is necessary to explore finer parameters of use and possible shades of meanings. This fifth issue will be addressed in the following section.

3.2 Observation of collocation picture and concordance data

This section analyzes collocation 'pictures' to offer students teacher-created starter phrases, and identifies authentic question patterns in concordance lines. It notes patterns, such as 'the current situation in + Country

Name', 'the current state of + Topic', and diagnoses the pragmatic hedging function of 'in the current circumstances'. A specific US economic use of 'the current condition' is detected. On the basis of each finding, relevance-oriented suggestions for amendments to student powerpoint phrases are made.

3.2.1 Collocation picture data for 'the+current/present+situation'

At the outset, analysis of a whole Bank of English corpus collocate picture providing t-score and Mutual Information (MI) score may reveal nuances of 'semantic prosody' (Stubbs, 1996) and usage. MI scores provide information on 'fixed' co-occurrences of lexical behavior and t-scores confirm the reliability of the collocation (Hunston, 2002:71). T-scores of 2 or higher and MI scores of 3 or higher can be taken to be significant (Hunston, 2002; Potter, 1999). Significant data scores will be offered with t-score followed by MI score rounded to the second decimal: (t; MI) thus 'assessment' (1.99; 8.03).

Based on frequency information, I begin by looking at the strongest data peak, 'the+current+SITUATION'. The phrase (see Appendix 2) collocates strongly with neutral conceptual words such as 'assessment' (1.99; 8.03), 'analysis'(1.72; 6.75), 'view' (1.68; 5.05), 'described' (1.94; 6.2), 'assess' (1.72; 8.67), and with less significant scores 'clarify', 'reviewed', identify' and 'describe'. In first column to the left, 'of' (6.5; 2.23) has the strongest t-score, and, in first column to the right, 'in' (8.17; 3.2), followed in second place by country names such as 'the (gulf)' (2.43; 7.29), 'tibet', 'south (africa)', 'rwanda', 'yugoslavia', and iraq'. Furthermore, in sixth column to the right, 'environmental', 'financial', 'economic', 'political' and 'infrastructure' suggest parameters related to the Economics focus of my students.

Teacher-contrived sample starters such as:

- 'Our analysis/assessment/description of the current situation in China (from an environmental economic perspective) reveals/identifies/clarifies that…'

could reasonably be offered to students. Moreover, 'the current situation' seems to be used frequently at the head of a sentence and paragraph as first-left column information <p> (2.61; 1.52) suggests, or in sentence and paragraph final position, first right column <p> (4.24; 2.33). This indicates it may be ideal for a powerpoint header or item.

In contrast, analytical collocates are not found with 'the+present+SITUATION', which noticeably features personal evaluative words such as 'factor' (1.99; 7.96), 'fears' (1.99; 3.12), 'dangers' (1.72; 9.05), 'responsibility' (1.72; 6.8) in second column to the left, and in other left columns 'gloomy', 'worrying', 'feeling' and 'difficult'. These suggest a bias toward casual conversation, which is further strengthened by patterns of numerous personal pronouns and direct address in columns to the right: four instances of 'we', with first right strongest at (2.61; 2.94), 'you', 'our', 'I', 'me', 'our', 'own' (1.64; 3.74), 'Tim', and verbs of making suggestions such as 'need' (1.92; 4.67), 'let', and 'seem' (1.7; 5.85). The evidence suggests that this phrase might be more authentically used in Economics discussions, rather than in a more formal presentation.

However, Hunston and Laviosa (2000:57) signal caution when interpreting 'picture' data since: '(c)ollocation lists and 'picture(s)' work on individual word forms, and because of this they can make fixed phrases seem more important than they are.' They suggest that apparently important phrases may in fact not 'dominate the phraseology'. In light of these warnings, examining usage patterns of the four target words in actual concordance lines with 'current' and 'present' seemed indispensable. The following section thus examines concordance lines from the three target sub-corpora to confirm or disconfirm the collocation 'picture' findings.

3.2.2. Concordance lines: 'the+current/present+ situation'

A search for 'the+current+situation' in target sub-corpora delivers 135 concordance lines. Further sorting 2 left of the node CURRENT shows the expected strong adverbial pattern of use with 'in' (22 examples out of 135, or 16.3%),

- 'in the current situation +Description/ Recommendation/Projection'.
  Example: s main discretionary powers. In the current situation the President is being

Moreover there is a noticeable pattern (28 examples or 20.7%) of

- 'Person/organization +reported speech (say/argue/stress/call/refer to/compare to/describe as) +[that (optional)] +the current situation +[in + country name (optional)]+ Evaluation/Comparison
  Example: a joint statement saying that the current situation in Kosovo raises a grave
- (For further examples see Appendix 3)

The main prosody of the word seems both acute and problematic, with evaluative adjectives such as 'sensitive', 'precarious', 'illegal' and 'unacceptable'. However, a similar pattern of reported speech is evident with 'the+ present+ situation', where of 106 examples 8.5% or nine examples have similar prosody (adjectives 'critical', 'unstable', 'calm', 'untenable') and pattern,

- 'Person/organization+ reported speech (say/contrast/describe as) + the present situation + [in+ country name (15examples or 14%)] +Evaluation/Comparison.

Since 'the present situation' offers more examples of direct speech, and of two direct questions,

- 'Can you just explain to me what the present situation is in Albania?'
- 'How serious is the present situation?',

these can also be usefully employed in presentations (although 'just' and 'to me' might be edited to make it less colloquial). Clearly earlier 'picture' distinctions of formal presentation or casual discussion are fuzzy and not necessarily binding, as noted by Hunston and Laviosa (2000:57). It would seem that in the target sub-corpora 'the current situation' and 'the present situation' have a flexible, wide and overlapping spectrum of usage. In other words both items can safely and correctly be employed in suggested patterns above with country name and as a presentation heading to signal immediacy and concern. Nevertheless, since frequency data points to 'current' in this register, students can be guided to this preference. With Dor's (2003) strategy of optimizing relevance coupled with these collected data, the teacher can offer clear justification for a rewritten bullet to presentation team C to read: '(The) Current Situation in North Korea'.

3.2.3. Concordance lines: ‘the+current/present+ state’

Comparison analysis of the second frequency peak in the data, ‘the current/present state’ reveals differences to ‘the current/present situation’. There are a total of 67 concordance lines for ‘the+current+state’ in the three sub-corpora (after deletion of 7 items referring to government as state), and 44 examples of ‘the +present+ state’ (See Appendix 4). Contrary to ‘situation’, ‘state’ is more often followed by ‘of’ plus a topic rather than a country. Twelve concordance lines (19.4%) refer explicitly to ‘the current state of the economy’, and 3 (6.8%) to ‘the present state of the economy’. Further neutral topics shared by both are ‘of the world/of foreign policy/of debt/of our trade balance/of AIDS research’. Topics signaling concern are also in evidence: ‘of labour unrest/ of violence/ of emergency/ of tension’. In this way, ‘state’ seems to have more neutral parameters than ‘situation’, although negative prosody is also in evidence. On balance ‘situation’ seems more related to countries in crisis, and ‘state’ to introduce a particular topic area, in particular the economic topics under concern in this paper. On the basis of this corpus evidence, the teacher can validate a rewrite to team B to read: ‘This article assesses the current state of poverty in India’ (since their presentation focus is poverty, rather than the country). Furthermore for team D the bullet would read: ‘The current state of bird-flu research has not confirmed infection from bird to human.’

3.2.4 Concordance lines: ‘the+current/present+ condition’

Moving to the next item, ‘the+ current/present+ condition’, further insights are gained. All concordance lines from the NPR corpus show a tendency for ‘the current/present condition’ to be used in US broadcasting as a synonym for ‘the current/present state’ used specifically in an *economic* context: five of six examples (83.3%) have clear economic parameters, as cited below:

do not consider the current condition of the economy when buying or
When you consider the current condition of Eritrea's resources, its rain-
of consumers by simply the current condition of the economy. You have to put
many Americans believe the present condition of the economy is bad, bad all
is a temptation in the present condition to sell technology, and there is

Presentation team A can thus rewrite their ppt text concerning US trade as: ‘However, the current condition of the munitions industry is different.’ Nevertheless, since the number of examples from the NPR corpus is limited, this suggestion can be only tentative.

3.2.5 Concordance lines: ‘the+current/present+ circumstances’

In BBC, NPR and Econ. sub-corpora, 8 out of 12 or 66% of concordance lines for ‘the+current+circumstances’ feature adverbial use following ‘in’ or ‘under’. The remainder follow ‘due to’, ‘in light of’ and ‘because of’. Equally for ‘the+present+circumstances’, 28 out of 32 examples follow ‘in’, ‘under’ or ‘given’. This matches patterns from the complete corpus, where ‘in’(4.63; 4.85), ‘under’ (3.15; 8.58) collocate with ‘the current circumstances’, and ‘in’ (8.82; 5.25), ‘under’ (4.78; 8.35) with ‘the present circumstances’. These phrases seem more limited in grammatical use than ‘the present/current situation/state/ state of affairs/condition', being preferably used in adverbial position with a preposition.

Notably a meaning pattern emerges suggesting the phrases may be specifically used as a caveat, justification or excuse for not taking action, and signal unwillingness or inability to change. This pragmatic function as a hedge to justify non-action is illustrated in selected concordance lines below:

but is unlikely in the current circumstances. It would go against the policy
that his departure in the current circumstances would mean chaos and more
of the blockage in the present circumstances would be the crippling of
I don't think that in the present circumstances it would be possible to
what I'm afraid, in the present circumstances, the--the investment will be
our population. Under the current circumstances, that time I don't think is
country which under the present circumstances they cannot send any

The predominantly adverbial usage may be the reason why 'in the current/present circumstances' is less frequent than 'state' or 'situation', which as I noted earlier, have wider and more flexible prosodies. This restricted adverbial usage and pragmatic hedging function are worth highlighting for students. With this knowledge they may choose to achieve two relevance strategies: first, to achieve more natural 'pattern flow', strengthening audience confidence in the speaker, and second, exploiting semantic meaning to help the audience to construct the right context (Dor's third strategy).

3.2.6 Concordance lines: 'the+current/present+ state+ of+ affairs'

The final item, 'state of affairs' (a strong collocate of 'state'), is particularly popular with 'The Economist', showing third most frequent use compared to other sub-corpora (Appendix 1). The sub-corpora concordance lines provide a further authentic question format useful for presentation rhetoric:

- 'How did the present state of affairs come about?'

However, the sub-corpora examples show similar parameters in *negative* semantic prosody to 'situation' or 'state', minus the specific country or topic area. If the presenter's aim is to project a neutral and objective academic stance, this prosody could be regarded as less useful for Economics students.

This section studied frequency phenomena using collocation 'pictures' and concordance lines from the bbc, npr and econ sub-corpora. Useful starter phrase and question patterns were noted, together with patterned shades of meaning for each phrase linked to spectrums of usage, such as 'the current situation in + Country Name', 'the current state of + Topic', or the pragmatic hedging function of 'in the current circumstances'. A specific Economic use of 'the current condition' was noted for the US sub-corpus. On the basis of these findings, suggestions for how to amend student powerpoint phrases were made.

4. Conclusions

This paper has reported on how L2 learners could highlight presentation topic relevance using similar but different phrases 'present/current' with 'state/ state of affairs/ circumstances/ condition/ situation'. Having described the pragmatic function of such language as 'ostension' (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995), the study used Dor's framework of relevance strategies to explain how the students can achieve relevance using specific phrases in their powerpoint presentations. A fourth relevance strategy, building audience confidence, is suggested. The study suggests that with clearer understanding of frequency, collocation and semantic prosody, students can maximize relevance goals. A Bank of English study showed that 'the current situation in + country' and 'the current state of +topic' are most suited to Economics presentation discourse. In particular students can learn to exploit differences in semantic prosody and meaning noted in the study (for example: 'in the current circumstances') to construct *the right context for interpretation* (Dor, 2003) . 'Present' and 'current' were found to be synonymous but used differently by British and Americans, suggesting students can mirror audience cultural expectations to build confidence in the speaker.

Areas which merit further research are the pragmatic function of 'ostension' in powerpoint presentations briefly outlined in this paper. Moreover linguistic cultural specifics concerning 'current' and 'the current condition' merit further research from a diachronic perspective. Are they gaining ground? Alternatively, from a pedagogical perspective it may be interesting to research which kind of corpus data students find most useful, frequency graphs, picture or concordance.

Knowing that lexical choice is about meeting communication goals (in this instance, highlighting relevance) and involves an awareness of frequency, form-meaning patterns and register may have consequential benefits of liberating Japanese students from examination trauma of right/wrong. Moreover providing students with teacher-mediated selected and concentrated exposure to real data may build a fast track to native speaker-level insight. Willis (2003), Johns (1991, 1994), Stevens (1991) and Barlow (1996) among others offer concrete advice on introducing corpus data in classrooms. I also have previous experience of successfully using concordance data and data-driven learning with these students (Suzuki, 2004). However, their interest focuses on content over linguistics and my course time is limited. In the current circumstances, I would favor integrating the above data results into a handout to become an item of lecturing prior to the 3rd presentation.

The author would like to acknowledge the editorial assistance of Dr. Karen Garcia, Massachusetts, USA.

References

Barlow, M. (1996) 'Corpora for theory and practice'. In *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics,* Vol.1, (1), pp.1-37 John Benjamins.

Biber, D., Conrad, S. & Reppen, R. (1994) 'Corpus-based approaches to issues in applied linguistics'. In *Applied Linguistics, 15*, pp. 169-189.

Biber, D., Conrad, S. & Reppen, R. (1998) *Corpus Linguistics: Investigating Language Structure and Use.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dor, D. (2003) 'On newspaper headlines as relevance optimizers.' *Journal of Pragmatics* 35: pp.695-721.

Hornby, A.S. & Wehmeier, S. (eds.) (2000) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 6th ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hunston, S. & Laviosa, S. (2000) *Corpus Linguistics*. Birmingham: Centre for English Language Studies, The University of Birmingham.

Hunston, S. (2002) *Corpora in Applied Linguistics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Johns, T. (1991) 'Should You Be Persuaded: Two Samples of Data-Driven Learning Materials'. *English Language Research Journal* Vol. 4: pp.1-16. English Language Research, University of Birmingham.
Johns, T. (1994) 'From printout to handout: Grammar and vocabulary teaching in the context of Data-driven Learning'. In Odlin, T. (ed.) *Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 293-313).
Kennedy, G.. (1991) '*Between* and *through:* The company they keep and the functions they serve'. In Aijmer, K. & Altenberg, B. (eds.) *English Corpus Linguistics.* London: Longman. (pp. 95-110).
Kennedy, G.. (1998) *An Introduction to Corpus Linguistics*. London: Longman.
Konishi, T. & Minamide, K. (eds.) (2003-4) *Unabridged Genius Japanese-English Dictionary*. Tokyo, Taishukan.
Odlin, T. (1994) 'The Introspective Hierarchy: A comparison of intuitions of linguists, teachers and learners'. In Odlin, T. (ed.) *Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp.271-292).
Potter, L. (1999) *A Guide to Using the CobuildDirect Corpus.* Centre for English Language Studies, The University of Birmingham.
Sinclair, J. (1991) *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Sinclair, J. (1997) 'Corpus Evidence in Language Description'. In Wichmann, A., Fliglestone, S., McEnery, T. & Knowles, G..(eds.) *Teaching and Language Corpora.* London: Longman. (pp.27-39).
Sinclair, J. (2004) *Trust the text: Language, corpus and discourse.* London: Routledge.
Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1986,1995) *Relevance: communication and cognition. 2nd ed.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Stevens, V. (1991) 'Concordance-based Vocabulary Exercises: A Viable Alternative to Gap-Fillers'. In Johns, T. & King, P. (eds.) *English Language Research Journal* Vol. 4, University of Birmingham, pp.47-61
Stubbs, M. (1996) *Text and Corpus Analysis.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Stubbs, M. (2002) *Words and Phrases.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Suzuki, R. (2004) *An Economic Application of C-R.* Unpublished paper submitted 30/11/2004 to the Centre for English Language Studies, University of Birmingham.
Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.*
Wichmann, A., Fliglestone, S., McEnery, T. & Knowles, G.. (1997) *Teaching and Language Corpora.* London: Longman.
Willis, D. (2003) *Rules, Patterns and Words.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix 1: Corpus frequencies for target phrases

Top 3 Usages	the…state		the…state of affairs		the…circumstances		the…condition		the…situation	
	current	present	current	present	current	present	current	present	current	present
1	bbc 43; 2.3	bbc 36; 1.9	usspok 1; 0.5	bbc 10; 0.5	bbc 5; 0.3	bbc 26; 1.4	npr 4; 0.2	usacad 2; 0.3	usspok 9; 4.4	bbc 92; 4.9
2	usspok 4; 2.0	newsci 10; 1.3	bbc 5; 0.3.	strathy 3; 0.2	npr 5; 0.2	usspok 1 0.5	brmags 3; 0.1	strathy 5; 0.3	bbc 74; 4.0	brbks 51; 1.2
3	newsci 15; 1.9	usbks 32; 1.0	npr 5; 0.2	econ 2; 0.1	indy 6; 0.2	brbks 20 0.5	usbooks 2; 0.1	usnews 3; 0.3	npr 56; 2.5	indy 33; 1.2
	econ 10; 0.6	econ 9; 0.6	econ 1; 0.1		econ 2; 0.1			econ 2; 0.1	econ 5; 0.3	econ 3; 0.2
	npr 25; 1.1	npr 6; 0.3		npr 2; 0.1		npr 8; 0.4		npr 2; 0.1		npr 11; 0.5
No Occurrences							bbc	bbc		
						econ	econ			
							strathy			
				newsci	newsci	newsci	newsci	newsci		
				usacad	usacad		usacad			
			usnews	usnews			usnews			
			oznews				oznews			
							guard			
							indy	indy		
							sunnow	sunnow		
			wbe	wbe		wbe	wbe	wbe		
		usspok		usspok	usspok		usspok	usspok		usspok
			brspok	brspok			brspok	brspok		
			usephem	usephem	usephem	usephem	usephem	usephem		usephem
			brephem	brephem	brephem	brephem	brephem	brephem		
				brmags	usbooks	brmags		brmags		
Total No. of	0 sub-corpora	1 sub-corpus	6 sub-corpora	9sub-corpora	6 sub-corpora	6 sub-corpora	15sub-corpora	10sub-corpora	0 sub-corpora	2 sub-corpora
Non-occurrence										

Appendix 2:Bank of English Collocation Picture (accessed 07/02/2006)

- **'the+ current+situation'**

this brief what of the current NODE in the gulf being that
britain
to attempt to in NODE is not country among has is
be film whatsoever that NODE <p> that is family series
the
is not assessment with NODE and are royal film there
that
are be leading about NODE where which are east some
have
he take led is NODE we we tendencies country are
environmen
p frightenin light on NODE was tibet spokesman what an
leadership
approving an deal to NODE continues said africa very many
pressure
habitat m him <p> NODE but south

"gulf". Tot freq:34187. Freq as coll:6. t-sc:2.4338. MI:7.2906.

- **'the+ present+situation'**

mr the factor in the present NODE is which soviet king to
one

what to fears of	NODE	in that they union no serbia
the be do that	NODE	where the what you of of
that important dangers with	NODE	we not as seem well is
are not reality about	NODE	<p> need if it we british
stern any responsibl for	NODE	and addition way cooke opportunit good
divorced an election described	NODE	would is we stern prime don
impossible adapting view to	NODE	as far facto is difficult we
explain rankings believe what	NODE	there can albania

"one". Tot freq:1212438. Freq as coll:5. t-sc:1.8081. MI:2.3856.

Appendix 3: BBC, NPR & Econ Sub-corpora:

- **20 selected lines from 'the+ current+situation' sorted two to the left of the node (25/03/2006)**

the region this week. He says the current situation makes it more difficult
soundly assess, and take the current situation seriously. Mr Mubarak
magazine, L'Expresse, that the current situation in which others are
<p> Daws: How do you think that the current situation, and particularly the
peacekeepers. He said that the current situation, which has seen low-
Hopkins University says that the current situation in Kabul is a test of
of Moscow in 1812, adding that the current situation did not comport with the
the Cambodian issue, adding that the current situation was moving in a
They expressed fears that the current situation could lead to violent
democratic nation. It added that the current situation demanded the speedy
a joint statement saying that the current situation in Kosovo raises a grave
Reports say he argued that the current situation highlights Saudi Arabia'
events showed once again that the current situation in the occupied
parliament, for example, that the current situation in his country is not
However, he has stressed that the current situation in the Gulf cannot be
told Mr Sobchak's office that the current situation was illegal.
Mr Taro Nakayama, has said that the current situation does not permit Japan to
Civil War analogy appropriate to the current situation because she feels both
t know what the alternative to the current situation is politically,
appeared to be a reference to the current situation in Somalia, the Pope
dos Santos was referring to the current situation as a state of undeclared

- **20 randomly selected lines from 'the +present+situation' sorted two to the left of the node (28/03/2006)**

between the 1979 debacle and the present situation are very striking. In
the BBC Eastern Service looks at the present situation in Punjab, and the
twelve say they are concerned by the present situation in Hungary and express
been exceedingly cautious. The present situation seems to reverse the
as he put it - `to dilute the present situation on the ground". `By no
protect the environment and end the present situation under which most of the
a packed news conference: `If the present situation continues, we will have
today, and right now. In the present situation, nobody is safe, and no-
the situation. Of course, in the present situation, each side is trying to
not be supporting any party in the present situation. Mr Advani said he still
Community also agreed that in the present situation, it would not recognise
Serbs - an important factor in the present situation. In addition, the King
in their consequences. In the present situation, Sarajevo, which
this is something which is in the present situation more than ever before--
emphasising the instability of the present situation in Europe, while others

be implemented. The paradox of the present situation is that the farmers of
in Albania? STERN) Well, I think the present situation is one of a good deal of
debate will be the trickiest. The present situation might seem to provide
The Observer looks at the way the present situation built up. Colin Smith,
and with imagination whether the present situation offers an opportunity as

Appendix 4: BBC, NPR & Econ Sub-corpora:

- **20 randomly selected lines from 'the+ current+state' (28/03/2006)**

gainst this background, what is the current state of the so-called special
The Afhan authorities say the current state of emergency which began
War has continued to dominate the current state visit to Japan by the South
details have also emerged about the current state of security around the
merican business perspective on the current state of the Soviet economy? Maria
University of Michigan looks at the current state of Chinese foreign policy.
under the Communists - since the current state of affairs was, if you like,
areas today the toll in the current state of violence at Indore rose
would be huge. A glance at the current state of China's economy might
The US is unhappy with the current state of democratic freedoms and
BC Far Eastern Service looks at the current state of relations between Hanoi
be $60 billion or more. Given the current state of the budget, the money
seems to encapsulate the current state of AIDS research. The
SSP), which will replace the current state earnings-related pension
with blacks and whites about the current state of race relations. In his
begins with this assessment of the current state of the economy. <p> Robert
or bill that was worthless in the current state of affairs, 90 percent of
that he was frightened by the current state of the economy and said mass
failure to get re-elected that the current State Department team has lost a
heir prison funds. They believe the current state prison system doesn't

- **20 randomly selected lines from 'the+ present+state' (28/03/2006)**

expressed public concern about the present state of the international oil
for the hostages and to assess the present state of the kidnappers
by which they can understand the present state of the world. That too, says
business of the nation during the present state of constitutional
the task ahead: My attitude to the present state of affairs is very matter of
there could be no question of the present state of affairs being allowed to
Cambodians are unhappy about the present state of affairs in the country is
the five leading officials of the present state are simultaneously leading
Israel is clearly taking the present state of its relations with the
Jacques Bekaert. BEKAERT: If the present state of war continued, the Khmer
E.D.&F. Man Sugar) Ltd. How did the present state of affairs come about? DUR:
rising prices, or to stay with the present state-run-industry and central-
contains. This assessment of the present state and future prospects of the
will begin by assessing the present state of affairs, pooling their
are now having a go themselves. The present state government has an absurd 74
s star-wars programme, where the present state of the art was developed. It
director at the IMF), was on the present state of the art. <p> The
that most discussion of the present state of the parties ends up by
re going to examine what led to the present state of affairs, a report on the
<p> Simon: Let me ask you about the present state of the Mideast peace talks,

The Asian ESP Journal

Using Descriptive Assessment Rubrics as Teaching and Learning Tools.

David F. Dalton. MA. App Ling; Dip Ed; Dip TESOL
Senior Communications Lecturer, Petroleum Institute, Abu Dhabi, UAE

The author is a senior lecturer in Communications at the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi. He has sixteen years experience of teaching language and communications at universities in the UK, Spain, Mexico and the UAE. He also has extensive experience of curriculum design and educational management. His current work focuses on teaching a range of practical, synthesized communications and research skills to students who will later work in the oil and gas industry as engineers, managers and administrators.
Current research interests are:
1 Core concepts in learning in the context of engineering, communications and language.
2 Discoures (features) analysis of written and oral texts in the context of engineering degree programmes and the oil and gas industry.
E-mail: ddalton@pi.ac.ae

Abstract

The concept of learning outcomes is probably as old as learning itself. It has been accepted practice in education in some areas for at least the last three decades and was previously referred to as 'vocational education', with the National Vocational Qualifications in the UK being one of the prime examples.

Apart from the initial difficulty of effectively articulating the outcomes, there are often specific issues when it comes to assessment. Common concerns are:

- Teacher learning curve (professional development)
- Design of effective rubrics
- Increase in assessment load and feedback time
- Student buy in

The writer believes that outcomes are not universally appropriate but context -determined and that some contexts lend themselves more naturally to learning outcomes than others. The PI being an engineering institute preparing graduates to work in the oil and gas industry has a well-defined context. Clarity of context makes dealing with some of the concerns indicated above, much easier. This thesis will be explained by looking at outcomes assessment as teaching and learning in the context of the Communications Program offered at the Petroleum Institute. There will be specific reference to assessment as learning; its value as a teaching and repair tool; issues of transparency and learner buy-in.

Introduction.

The program context.
The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) operates in all areas of the oil and gas industry. It was established in 1971 and has steadily widened its endeavors through its subsidiaries, establishing an integrated oil and gas industry in Abu Dhabi. The Company manages and oversees oil production of over two million barrels a day and is among the top ten oil and gas companies in the world. It has substantial and impressive upstream and downstream operations in transportation, shipping, marketing and distribution.

Five years ago ADNOC announced the establishment of The Petroleum Institute, in Abu Dhabi. The decree, establishing the Petroleum Institute, provides for an entity that will bring together the best from education and industry to create a world class regional center for engineering, applied science and research.

The Institute offers five baccalaureate degree programs: chemical engineering, petroleum engineering, petroleum geosciences engineering, mechanical engineering and electrical engineering. As the undergraduate programs mature, the PI will eventually evolve into a fully-fledged research and educational institution providing programs leading to Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Planning is now underway for graduate and research programs.

For some time now there has been a growing concern in our industry to ensure a range of skills and competencies amongst prospective employees that go well beyond the content-specific knowledge base appropriate for a particular field. Today there is more of an emphasis on the whole person, exemplified by concerns that students exiting institutes such as ours should be able to call upon a range of competencies of a more behavioral nature. Our teaching focus here is guided by ADNOC's Competence Assurance Management System. Section D of this extensive document relates explicitly to the behavioral competencies (so-called soft skills) delivered through the Communications Programme.
Recognizing that the most immediate and dominant product of the Petroleum Institute will be baccalaureate graduates, the institutional educational goals for baccalaureate degrees identify attributes that reflect this whole-person development of the graduating student. This is stated in our graduate profile which includes the following description:

- The graduating student will appreciate the critical role played by verbal, written and graphical communications in engineering practice and project management, and will have the corresponding skills to communicate with a range of audiences, and the skills to employ information technologies where appropriate.
- The graduating student should acknowledge that technologies, economies and societies are in a continuous state of evolution, and should therefore have the flexibility to manage a career path that changes over time, and that is supported by life-long learning, critical thinking, teamwork, leadership and the ability to span several disciplines.
- The graduating student should understand the global nature of modern engineering and business, and in order to succeed in this international arena the student should have an awareness of customary practices in different countries and the influence of diverse cultures.

The programmme.

To facilitate and nurture the development of such skills, students also choose from a growing range of electives of a more social sciences/humanities nature such as history, economics, political science, German and Islamic studies, as well as being required to complete a two-part Communications Programme which includes most of the behavioral competencies and project management skills identified above.

Through qualitative and quantitative research projects and presentations, the students learn and apply a range of communication and project management skills, the mastery of which becomes essential to their success on the programme as well as being transferable to other areas of study and life. These include:

- Time management and planning
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Effective oral and written communication
- Teamwork and collaborative learning
- Leadership
- Cultural awareness
- Technology and media awareness

The program is learning outcomes based. The concept of learning outcomes is probably as old as learning itself. It has been accepted practice in education for at least three decades and was previously referred to as 'vocational education', with the National Vocational Qualifications in the UK being one of the prime examples.

Universities throughout the world have increasingly come to favour a learning outcomes approach to their educational programmes. This has come about as a consequence of an increased interest from end users in what learners are really able to do, rather than what programmes and educators state as objectives. Employers in the oil and gas industry (ADNOC, SHELL, BP, and TOTALFINAELF) increasingly express explicit interest in skills, competencies and performance. Accrediting bodies (ABET,) want to know about levels, standards, outcomes and assessment. Government and the broader society have similar interests. The learning outcomes approach developed as a response to and analysis of this range of needs, emphasizing the application of knowledge and the integration of competencies in the context of performance.

We have the luxury of a clear context for student learning and we know:

- What (communication) skills students need to be successful in undergraduate study in our institute
- What client courses require of the students
- What (communication) skills student will require in the workplace

This has allowed the expression of learning outcomes with a very practical and real world focus. This makes it easier to dialogue with students about the value of the program and the skills they will be learning as they are able to see that these are practical, life-long and transferable.

Because we are dealing with the development of skills and competencies, assessment needs to de descriptive and formative. For example, assessing grammar with a multiple choice test may give us limited information about a learner's knowledge of elements of the system of grammar, but tells us nothing about their ability to apply that knowledge in different settings, for different purposes with different participants and audiences. There is thus no synthesis or integration. It is likely that if testing occurs in this way, then so does teaching. What then of learning? We view assessment as the basis of a dialogue with the learner about their development. In order for this to be effective we need documents 'to talk from'. These are the descriptive rubrics we use for feedback. In this section I will discuss the use of a set of in-house writing descriptors (page 5) used for assessing and responding to technical report writing.

Table 1: writing indicator.

Indicator 1.	Enabling skills	Evidence	Criteria	Standard
Communicates in writing, academic, scientific and technical observations, ideas, and arguments.	Narrowing a topic; Articulating a thesis statement; Planning; Gathering relevant information; Synthesizing information; Producing an organized, cohesive and coherent written text.	Outline & notes. A variety of written academic scientific and technical texts (proposal, report, etc.) using appropriate rhetorical functions	Communicative competence Content Relevance Organization Structural & Lexical Range and Accuracy Conventions	In-house banding

What follows is a description of how such rubrics are introduced to the students and applied. The overarching learning outcome of the program is: *A PI student who successfully completes this course will have the critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills to be able to successfully function in an academic environment at the undergraduate level.*

The course therefore prepares the students to be able to do this. We use indicators as in Table 1 to describe how students make progress towards meeting the outcome in different skill areas. In the context of writing, the following indicator is expressed: The 'written text' referred to under enabling skills can be of a number of genres. Descriptive rubrics are then used to assess these indicators, in this case using the bands referred to under 'Standard' above. The rubric on page five is used in the assessment of technical reports such as the research report mentioned above .We utilize such rubrics (albeit text specific) for every piece of oral or written communication our students produce. These rubrics are hyperlinked to our electronic course syllabus and students are instructed to download them at the beginning of the semester.

The course outline is used as a critical reading text during the first week of each semester. The concept of learning outcomes and skills and competencies is worked with in the classroom. Our approach to assessment (purpose, rational and process) is discussed and questioned and the students are introduced to the concept of descriptive rubrics and how they are applied. In this way the assessment is initially approached as a teaching/learning dynamic. This is something new for our students. Since we believe that it is very important, rather than being approached as a component, it is dealt with as a theme and dynamic within the program and is therefore frequently returned to as a learning focus. It is also integrated into the description and approach to each assignment.

Assessment rubrics in teaching and learning.

An obvious starter question for the students is: "If you know exactly how you are going to be assessed, how can this help you when framing and planning a deliverable (assignment)?" The rubric below is used in the assessment of a basic research report and other forms of technical writing.

Table 2: Report writing descriptors

		Purpose	Organization	Content	Language
Exceeds expectations	A	Objective clearly stated. Report has a strong central focus which demonstrates a strong awareness of: Context Issues Implications Assumptions Consequences, etc	Clear structure or pattern engages the reader. Whole report is extremely, clear, cohesive and coherent. Excellent paragraph transitions All Tables/Figures are highly relevant, have headings and are referred to in the text.	Information is relevant and accurate. Statements / opinions are well supported and explained. All sources are identified and referenced appropriately in the body.	Style and expression highly developed and engaging. Excellent grammar, spelling and punctuation. Evidence of proof reading. Professional appearance of Report, Figures/Tables/ References.
Meets expectations	B C	Objective adequately stated. Central focus clear Some awareness of main ideas / awareness of some of the main ideas.	Adequate structure or pattern guides the reader. Most of the report is adequately clear, cohesive and coherent. Paragraph transitions are adequate. Tables/Figures generally relevant, labeled adequately and referred to.	Information is generally relevant and accurate though may not always be well supported or explained. Most sources are identified and referenced appropriately in the body.	Fluent. Style and expression meet reader expectation. Occasional errors in grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation do not interfere with comprehension. Acceptable appearance of Report, Figures/Tables/ References,
Needs improvement	D F	Objective not clearly stated. Lacks central focus. Limited/No awareness of main ideas.	Poor organization and structure loses the reader. Whole report lacks clarity, coherence and cohesion. Paragraph transitions are non- existent. Tables/Figures often missing, irrelevant, poorly labeled, and/or not referred to.	Information may not be relevant or accurate. Statements /opinions lack support Sources are not identified nor referenced appropriately in the body.	Inadequate. Frequent errors in grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation interfere with comprehension and readability. Unprofessional appearance of Report, Figures/Tables/ References.

The rubric above is simply a text, in that it is a piece of communication used for a specific purpose and delivering information to an identified audience. As such it can be used as a reading text allowing exploration of concepts, content and lexicogrammar. All of these, of course, are elements of the texts students will produce.

Thus before the assessment process begins, the tool which will be applied to make 'judgements' about quality of writing is front-loaded as a teaching/learning tool. A number of writers (e.g. Osborne, 2005; Walvrood, 1998) have addressed the value of this. The text is analysed in terms of the concepts it contains. This may relate to some of the titular vocabulary such as ‘purpose’ and ‘organization’ and it also relates to the descriptive and conceptual language such as ‘assumption’ and ‘implication’. Notions of what constitutes a ‘clear structure or pattern’ and ‘style and expression’ can be explored and discussed resulting in common understanding and agreement.

Elements of lexicogrammar (this writer agrees with Lewis, 1993 page V1, that the “Grammar/ vocabulary dichotomy is invalid”) can be explored and explicitly focussed on as a significant feature of successful writing and as a focus for future teaching. Collocation is an obvious focus here and there are many such as ‘acceptable appearance’, ‘generally relevant’ which can be worked with in the context of the rubric and then generalized to other texts. Exploring such elements also helps develop the students’ language awareness.

Content can begin to be looked at in terms of deciding on relevance of the information contained in the text and how one might decide what is relevant in the context of different types of writing. Prior experience of students can be drawn on here. Questions and discussion can be generated by examining what is meant by supporting and explaining opinions. Our students are generally effective when it comes to description but perhaps not always so developed when it comes to higher order notions such as clear exemplification and the differences between description and explanation.

Schema can be referred to by discussion focussing on what is already known about the text from previous writing experience. Students generally have the idea that any text is written for a purpose with a particular audience in mind. They may not know how this should affect their choice of text language or organization. What is partially known and what is unknown can also be worked with. The ‘threat’ of new information can then be explored and allow the students to individually prioritize learning objectives and which knowledge they need to further develop to have a better understanding of the rubric and therefore a better schema for producing their own texts. Starting with what the learner already knows (constructivism) allows the learner a degree of security and familiarity with what can be rather complex documents or concepts

One of the useful wash back effects of this is approach is that the focus is taken away from writing as pure ‘product’ and through discussion, analysis it becomes established that writing is obviously a process beginning with a purpose and with an audience in mind. This is particularly important for our students as they have largely been exposed to a ‘model/reproduce’ approach with very little interest in why and how to write. It is also critical reading with a clear instrumental purpose for the reader- an improved grade!

Feedback and professional development

The first contact the student has with the assessment rubric is therefore not post-production, but pre-production, not reactive but proactive. It is consequently seen as a formative tool which can be worked with as the student is involved in the process of producing a text. It can guide the development of that text and be used to proofread and edit the text before submission.

During the feedback sessions, the rubric is then used to focus the discussion between the instructor and the student as to the qualitative description of the text and the resulting quantitative grade. Again the process has a teaching/learning focus as discussion inevitably highlights points of weakness that need development to improve subsequent text products. Students are able to compare text development and thus chart their own development as writers.

All too often such rubrics are simply handed out at the start of a course, (or not at all) filed away by the learner and never returned to. Sadly, this is a lost opportunity for learning (for both teachers and students) of a kind which has a direct instrumental benefit for the student and therefore results in a generally high buy-in. As I have identified above, much useful cognitive and language work can take place here. The examples I have given are only a few of the rich possibilities.

Such detailed descriptions of texts (these can be either written or spoken) and performance also requires us to reflect on our approach to the concept of text per se and the reading of individual scripts produced by our students. Even as a team of experienced teachers we still meet to calibrate and norm our grading of student papers and therefore continue to develop our understanding of written discourse.

For the teacher, the use of the rubric also serves as a professional development tool. Initial familiarization with the content and process of working with the rubrics may take time (as any new learning does) but as Stevens and Levi have clearly pointed out, once mastered, the effective use of rubrics saves the teacher time.
This is doubly useful for newer team members who may not be familiar with the use of assessment rubrics and helps them move forward on what can sometimes be a daunting learning curve.

Further, as Osborne (2005, page 1) has stated, assessment "becomes less subjective and therefore more consistent, reliable and valid from person to person". In my experience, this helps foster collegiality and trust within the teaching team. Further, as stated above, the informed feedback resulting from this generates improved learning and gives us class material for teaching thereby saving time on other teacher tasks.
For example, the rubric can be returned to in the class and exemplification of problematic areas and features can be elicited from student texts in the light of growing experience as writers. Discussion informed by the rubric can then focus on how improvement and development of the text can be achieved. Elements of the rubric can be used as students develop new texts to guide their proof reading. They can also be used for critical peer editing and feedback. By definition, and with a slight paradigm shift, this also permits us to be more focused on learning and learners.

My own experience has shown me that effective incorporation of descriptive rubrics into teaching can reduce my workload.

Teaching and transparency

A major component of our program is delivering information through presentations. These range from short oral progress reports to lengthy (40 min) multi-media presentations involving substantial and lengthy planning. The rubric on the following page is one applied to presentations and again is utilized as a learning tool. The rubric can also be cognitively and linguistically cross-referenced to the written report rubric, thereby allowing the teacher to demonstrate the connectedness of skills we are teaching and the transferability of knowledge across areas of learner activity.

Our students sometimes have a tendency to see what they are learning as useful in only one context, this approach helps them think outside the box and become accustomed to using similar skills in different environments for (apparently) different purposes. Certain elements are used as milestones to focus the students on strategic elements of the presentation. The notion and skills of narrowing a topic for example is worked with in the context of the written research report. Here students can see their transference to a slightly different environment. Guiding vocabulary such as appropriate, logical, focussed and interesting can be worked with in the context of developing the presentation.

Concepts of relevance and appropriateness re appear (see Pages 5 and 9). The competency description on page 8 (currently being expanded) allows discussion with the students of the notion of an 'acceptable' presentation. It also begs the (learning) question: 'If this is acceptable, how would descriptions of 'unacceptable' and 'excellent' look?' The linguistic and cognitive benefits of such an approach do not need to be laboured on, but one obvious advantage is that it makes explicit the sometimes abstract concept of critical thinking (problem solving for a purpose?).

For example, students have a piece of evidence (the description) and then need to be able to realistically generalize from that, make assumptions and educated guesses to arrive at some decision which demonstrates some evidence of logical relationship, hierarchy and gradation as they develop criteria for the categories mentioned above. These are considered higher order thinking and language skills and require the student to be able to describe and justify the criteria used to reach these decisions. This is a very useful language and cognitive exercise and process. I t also make the assessment of the presentation completely transparent and in a sense, enfranchises the learner. Further, for those learners who are able and desirous, there is a shift from the 'you gave me a C attitude', to accepting personal responsibility for the grade by being able to evaluate their own performance because the student has internalized the description. Once internalized, students are also able to see at what degree of proficiency the requisite skills need to be expressed in order to get that elusive 'A'.

The table on the following page lays out these descriptors.

Table 3: Oral presentation descriptors

Freshman Communication		Presentation Assessment Guide				
Topic:		Outstanding	Exceeds expectations	Meets expectations	Below expectations	Weak/poor
Team members:						
Content		10	9 - 8	7	6 - 5	4 - 0
Topic is appropriate, narrowed, focused & interesting. Audience and purpose clearly considered.						
Information is relevant, well researched, supported and explained.						
Team handles audience dialogue appropriately						
Organization						
Introduction and conclusion provide clear overviews						
Main ideas and transitions guide audience easily through presentation logically and sequentially						
Delivery (x1.5)						
Presenters are confident, enthusiastic & knowledgeable,						
Presenters speak clearly and fluently.						
Range and accuracy of language appropriate to task						
Presenters speak to audience, use eye contact , gestures and are not immobile						
Use of Presentation Media						
Choice of media is appropriate and enhances presentation rather than distracts from it						
Slides are readable, standardized / consistent & error free						
Slides/images are synchronized with speaker						
Total						

The following description of competence is attached to the rubric to aid the students and again as a focus for classroom work.

Table 4: Presentation competence description

A presentation which meets expectations shows reasonable understanding of the task – an uninitiated observer should be able to understand the objectives and purpose. Such understanding may not be instantaneous.
It will have an identifiable structure (sequence of ideas and information flow) but may loose the viewer once or twice (through ineffective transitions, for example). Overall understanding will not be impaired.
Information will be generally relevant and accurate, though may not always be effectively supported and explained.
Presenters may not at all times appear fully prepared and knowledgeable. Fluency and pronunciation errors will be evident but not impair understanding. Lexical range will sometimes be limited, occasionally leading to lack of development and limited complexity of ideas.
Presenters may not at all times show awareness of their relationship with the audience (dialogue, eye contact, body language, gesture).

Some media may not appear appropriate or may distract from the presentation. Standardization of slides may be occasionally inconsistent. May contain occasional spelling and grammar errors. Images may not be consistently synchronized.

Again, the rubrics should make the skills to be assessed explicit and give a description of performance and level. In this way the rubrics capture the skills to be learned and later expressed by the students and assessed by the teacher. They also allow the learner to become involved in a discussion with the teacher about the latter's response to performance. Seventy five percent on an exam does not leave the learner much to go on while a description of why the grade was given permits an informed discussion of the teachers' assessment and the grade. The learners are therefore much more informed and have information useful to their development and improvement. They also have levels of performance which can be compared and reviewed. Without this it is often difficult for a learner to measure in what ways they have developed and improved.

Much of what we know about our current state is based on an ability to describe and measure past performance. The application of rubrics as learning and assessment tools clearly assists in developing this awareness.

It is important to mention that rubrics are constantly being fine-tuned. They are never 'finished'. Indeed, the two examples above are currently being reworked to make the criteria more comprehensive and specific. They are also being linked to show elements of similarity between oral and written text and reformatted to have a more similar physical appearance. They will replace existing rubrics and be used this coming semester. This is part of our on-going professional and program development. Further, this kind of continual program modification is a feature we discuss with our students. This, plus the inclusion of assessment in teaching, the feedback and negotiation process and overall transparency lead to a very high learner buy in reflected in consistently positive comments and perceptions of the program expressed in the course survey we administer to students at the end of each semester. For example, below is a snapshot from our survey from last semester.

From a sample of 120 respondents on a five point scale

63.32% indicated their motivation was 'a lot or somewhat higher'*	* compared with
75.82% indicated their work rate was 'a lot or somewhat higher'	other courses
77.1% indicated their level of independent work was 'a lot or somewhat higher'	

Overall feedback on the improvement of language skills was reassuringly positive. Feedback from client courses reinforces this. We believe that the approach to assessment used in our program and the application of the rubrics in the fashion described in the paper, is a strong affective factor in this highly positive perception.

References

1 Osborne. N.M. (2001).*Rubrics for Elementary Assessment.* Osborne Press. Mich. USA.
2 Lewis.M. (1993) *The Lexical Approach*. LTP. Hove. England.

3 Stevens.D and Levi .A. (2004) *An Introduction to Rubrics:An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback and Promote Student Learning*. Stylus Publishing.USA.

4 Walvrood.B.E. and Anderson.V.J. (1998) *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment* Jossey-Bass. San Fransisco.USA.

5 Weimer. M. (2002) *Learner Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. Jossey-Bass. San Fransisco.USA

The Asian ESP Journal

Teaching English to Students of Medicine: A Student-Centered Approach

Dr. Ahmad Sabouri Kashani, Dr. Soraya Soheili, & Dr. Zinat Nadia Hatmi
Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), Iran kashani45@yahoo.com

Dr. Zinat Nadia Hatmi, MD, is an associate professor at the Department of Community Medicine in Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS). She is an epidemiologist who successfully passed a fellowship on cardiovascular disease. She is also interested in evidence-based medical practice and medical education (EBM). She is actively involved in staff-enablement workshops offered at the Educational Development Center (EDC) of TUMS.

Dr. Soraya Soheili is an assistant professor at (TUMS) Department of Community Medicine. She received her PhD in Health management and she is interested in demographic research with health management orientation. She is also very keen on Education. At the present, she is in charge of the teacher training unit at EDC.

Dr. Ahmad Sabouri Kashani is an assistant professor in charge of curriculum unit at EDC. His primary interest, however, has been testing, measurement, and evaluation. He produced the first standardized English tests at TUMS language center which he founded in 1992 and headed for 6 years. He has a PhD in TEFL, an MA in TEFL and another MA in general linguistics. He has had language education experience with children at Nursery, Primary school, High school, college level students, and armed forces. He has trained English teachers for about 30 years. His other interests are human psychology, philosophy, ethnography, politics and translation.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the achievement levels of the majority of the applicants to our medical school at Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS) in the academic year 2002-2003 with that of a smaller group of the same population. The former group received instruction based on the established syllabus, but for the latter group a new student-centered approach to teaching English was designed. Participants were screened and then grouped into homogeneous classes on the basis of their English language proficiency levels. After receiving instruction based on the newly-developed student-centered approach for five consecutive semesters, they sat for the National Comprehensive Exam of Basic Sciences. Performance of the two groups on the English subtest of this exam was then correlated. Students covering the university established syllabus, it was observed, did better on the English subtest. Careful monitoring of the university Language Center's educational program seemed to be an effective mechanism to motivate students to do their best.

Key words: student-centered curriculum development, student-centeredness, ESP, medical English, evaluation and wash-back effect.

Introduction

Paying a visit to TESL-EJ Forum on "Student-Centered Learning: What does it really mean?" we found the concept of student-centeredness rather controversial (cf. TESL-EJ Forum, 2001). In this forum, David Ross, from Houston Community College, finds the essence of student-centeredness in the change in the role of the teacher as a facilitator of students' learning and no more as a resourceful authority. Lola Katz, the cross cultural communication consultant from Israel, emphasizes the appropriateness of the tasks and activities to the level and learning style of the learners and their knowledge, at all times, of the reasons for what they are doing. Casy Peltier from George Mason University Language Institute, however, claims that younger students rarely know what is good for their language development, thus limits student-centeredness to older ones. Jim Williams, academic coordinator from Pacific Rim Language Institute, sees student-centeredness primarily as a process of customizing and constantly updating traditional policies and tried-and-true applications. John Harbord from Central European University in Hungary sums up the gist of student-centeredness as teachers' professional judgment to decide what is the best they can do while they may sometimes make concessions regarding the students' demands only not to give them the impression that they have been totally ignored. According to Anthea Tillyer, from City University of New York, there is so much disagreement on the meaning and implementation of the student-centered classroom. To her, what really matters is the fact that learning and the needs of the learners should determine our teaching objectives. Finally, Bill Snyder declares that a student-centered educational program is not one in which the students run the show or one in which their every whim is catered to. Rather, it is one run for the benefit of them, where the focus of all participants is on helping students acquire what is needed based on a consideration of all viewpoints. Therefore, in this perspective, the views of students are taken into account, but they are balanced against others' perceptions. Snyder continues to say that ignoring student's wants, even when they do not contribute to their primary objectives, may lead to resentment and lack of motivation. It is only when the students are not considered or included in the process, and not informed about why they are doing what they are doing that curricular decision-making becomes administrative fiat.

Faced with such discrepancies, we may find it useful to have a closer look at some of the concepts contributing to the development of a student-centered educational approach to teaching English as a foreign language. After all, Lea *et al.* (2003) suggest many institutions and educators claim to practice student-centered education, but in reality they do not.

Student-Centered Education

The notion of student-centeredness may have been derived from the concept of child-centered education supported by the work of the prominent Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, who believed that the teacher should not interfere with the process of maturation, but act as a guide (see Lavatelli, 1973). Similar emphasis on the learner may be found in "Democracy and Education" by John Dewey, the American major leader in "progressive movement" in education. Dewey (1916) sought social change through child-centered education. His pragmatism, in fact, includes many elements of student-centeredness. Another concept which seems to have influenced the notion was "individual differences." Even as far back as 1916, the subject seemed a major focus of concern in the realm of foreign language teaching (see Deihl, 1916). This concern was, of course, not peculiar to foreign language classrooms. In fact, in the 24th yearbook of the national Society for the study of Education (1925) a part is devoted to "applying the schools to individual differences" (cf. **Whipple,** 1925).

In 1973, Gerald Logan introduces the idea of the "open classroom" as a type of classroom management closely associated with individualized learning which provides the conditions that allow much individual freedom of choice in the learning process. Logan believes that two premises are involved in this "open" approach to learning:

(1) Students become more responsible by exercising responsibility in ever-increasing degree.

(2) Desirable forms of behavior are much more likely to result.

The teacher should make sure, however, that learning tasks are "clear" and "realistic" and that the student gets all the assistance s/he needs. Learners should not waste a great deal of time waiting to be evaluated in order to go on to the next assignment and the program should be as interesting as possible to the students (see **Logan,** 1973).

Moffet and Wagner (1992) note that a student-centered curriculum teaches each learner to select and sequence his own activities and materials (individualization), arranges for students to center on and teach each other (interaction); and interweaves all symbolized and symbolizing subjects so that the student can effectively synthesize knowledge structures in his own mind (integration). Race (1995), nonetheless, claims that open learning is mostly based on learner-centered learning materials which are meant to be studied alone.

McCombs and Whisler (1997) believe learning will be heightened when individuals are in respectful and caring relations with others who see their potential, genuinely appreciate their unique talents and accept them as individuals. They consider learning an active, volitional, and internally mediated process of discovering and constructing meaning from information and experience filtered through the learners' unique perceptions, thoughts, and feelings and facilitated by social interactions and communication with others in flexible, diverse, and adaptive instructional settings. To them, learner-centered learning is a perspective that couples a focus on individual learners (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs) with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs). It is the teaching practice that is most effective in cultivating the highest levels of motivation, learning and achievement for all learners.

Burnard (1999), sums up Rogers' ideas of student-centered classroom as a learning situation where students might not only choose what to study, but how and why that topic might be an interesting one to study. Reflecting the viewpoint that knowledge is constructed by students, and that the lecturer is a facilitator of learning rather than a presenter of information, Burnard emphasizes the concept of students having a “choice” in their learning. Yet, McCombs believes that a “learner-centered” perspective contends that education must concern itself with how to provide the most supportive learning context for diverse students— a context created primarily when teachers value and understand individual student’s needs.

Calder (2000) claims that in mid-1980s, such authorities as Lewis, Rumple, Scriven, Robinson and Carr attempted to disentangle what was meant by the term “open” learning. He continues that the term “flexible” learning bears a distinct resemblance to the concept of open learning by virtue of extended access to learning through the removal of barriers, and a philosophy of learner-centered provision where learner choice is the key. The same thoughts about open learning as a student-centered approach and active removal of all study barriers have widely emerged in the literature on educational science.

In so far as assessment in a student-centered classroom is concerned, there seems to be more formative assessment which emphasizes feedback to students and enhance their learning, which does not necessarily add to the end of the course mark. So we come across diaries, logbooks, journals, portfolios, projects, group work, profiles, peer assessments learning contracts, and negotiated assessment in the literature, all of which might be considered as essential activities contributing to Black’s (1999) concern of helping students take responsibility for their own learning; therefore, self-assessment is often emphasized in this strategy. Knight (2002) considers contracts as goals set by the student, depending on their learning gaps, which are, in turn, negotiated with the lecturer. Black (1999) and Knight (2002) both show how the students would like to be assessed in order to demonstrate that they have reached the goals, hence adding ‘choice’ in what to study as well as ‘choice' in how the student will be assessed. This very concept of negotiation addresses a dramatic change in relationship between teacher and student. In this way the student can suggest self-assessment grades and negotiate self-assessment or peer-assessment goals.

Carol Bliss (2006), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of sociability and human connections. She holds that authentic connection in a student-centered classroom will remove fears of failure, ridicule, family problems, the feeling of outcomes not fitting in identity issues which can prevent students from deeper learning. In a similar line, E. R. Melander (2002), Professor Emeritus at Pennsylvania State University, maintains that student-centered education becomes focused on coaching the student toward the development of attitudes, skills, and behaviors as a learner, decision maker, and community participant, with success measured in terms of learner outcomes. He also holds that the syllabus and learning resources should guide the student’s discovery, understanding, and decision-making abilities regarding learning and development in the formal curriculum. In the long run, this approach should shape the student’s own capacities for self-assessing learning strengths and development needs identifying opportunities for learning growth and development, planning learning and development strategies, deciding on learning and development actions, reflecting on learning and development experiences, and initiating adjustments in learning and development strategies.

The Study

It is clear then that there is a great deal of controversy surrounding whether student-centeredness is an orientation towards learning centered or customer service, i.e., learner centered. However, student-centeredness seems to be the main basic principle of open and flexible courses, i.e., taking into consideration the fact that there is no standard student; that all students are individuals with individual needs, student-centeredness can be increased with individualization, which can mean, for example, taking into consideration different learning styles and personal life situations: work, family, hobbies and accessibility. This, in turn, can mean the opportunity to participate in the activities regardless of age, status of employment, engagements of everyday life, economical resources or previous studies or without certainty of regularity of studies. Other criteria could be the educational background, study methods, contents, evaluation, and support services.

Very much in this line, this study first set out to explore the achievement levels of the English language knowledge of the majority of the applicants to TUMS medical school in the academic year 2002-2003 who received instruction based on the established syllabus. Secondly, an attempt was made to compare the performance levels of this large group of students with that of a smaller group of the same population who received instruction based on a newly-developed student-centered approach to teaching English, i.e., the students did not follow a particular textbook, they ignored the established criteria for English courses at the School of Medicine, they did not take any objective tests, and they negotiated their final grades on the final essay-type tests with their young tutors who were specially trained for the project.

Method

The participants consisted of 107 medical students out of the total applicants (219) to the medical school in September 2002 who had been able to successfully cover all their courses for the basic science section of the medical curriculum in five semesters. In March 2005, they sat for the National Comprehensive Examination of Basic Sciences— a local nation-wide exam administered by the Ministry of Health as a prerequisite for the next stage on Iranian medical curriculum. The initial performance of the participants on a screening English proficiency test administered in September 2002 clearly demonstrated that they had to start their English program at three different levels of P_1 (a beginner's level of English), P_2 (an elementary level), and I^+ (a pre-intermediate level of English knowledge or above). This test is a 34-item reading comprehension test measuring the students' ability to read English texts as short as 10 words up to simple passages comprising 150 words. Since 1995 it has been successfully administered to applicants to place them in rather homogeneous learning groups for their English courses (Mean= 25.48; Range= 2-34; SD= 6.83; r = 0.93).

Furthermore, these 107 students belonged to two different groups on the basis of their English syllabus. Group I (N = 49) had received a student-centered English program. The university language center was instructed to provide these students with any services they demanded to the best of its ability but was not allowed to monitor them in any way lest it might cause unnecessary stress! Their teaching-learning materials consisted of clippings and extracts from different books or internet duplicated at the language center and distributed as handouts for each session. Games and computer instructions on preparing PowerPoint slides for English lectures were two significant activities throughout a period of two and half years. The teaching texts were general English in the first phase, but later texts on medical topics aiming at public reader (general English with a medical veneer) were also offered.

Group II (N = 58), never the less, had followed the established university English syllabus, *Reading and thinking in English Series*, Book I and Book II, by John Moore *et al*. (1986) published by Oxford University Press for the beginners and elementary levels complemented by some extracts from *Interactions I* by Elaine Kirn and Pamela Hartmann (2002) published by McGrawHill. Some exercises on English sounds and stress patterns produced at TUMS Language Center, and A.A. Hill's (1980) *Steps to Understanding Passages* were also presented later.

As for the I^+ level students, *Reading and Thinking in English*, Book III by Moore *et al.* (1986), and *Interactions II* by Elaine Kirn and Pamela Hartmann (2002) for general English courses, and *Medical English* by James Vaughan (1989) for EMP Course I, and *Medical English* by Tahririan (1997) for EMP Course II were used.

The performances of both groups of students on two tests (a) the English subtest of the National Comprehensive Examination for Medical students (NCME) and (b) the early screening English proficiency test administered at the time of their admission was then matched to explore the differences.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 below shows the number of students who were divided into beginners-elementary and intermediate or higher proficiency levels in the two groups. In **Group II**, there were two levels: Beginners/lower-elementary level consisted of 22 students with a mean of 21.04 on the screening test, being placed at the beginner's level, and pre-intermediate and intermediate students consisted of 36 students with a mean of 30.36.

In **Group I**, 26 students with a significantly higher mean of 24.50 were placed at the elementary level of English and 22 students at the intermediate level with a mean of 30.32.

Table 1
Test Results for the Student-centered G1 and established syllabus G2

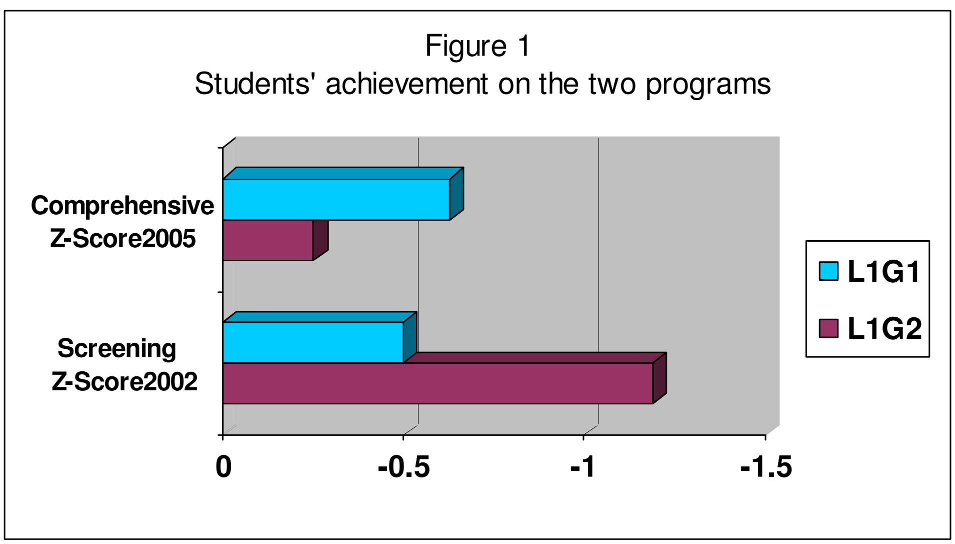
	Screening Test Raw score	Z-score	Comprehensive Exam Raw score	Z-score
L1G1 (S-C) N=26	24.5	-.4970	7.96	-.6265
L1G2 (E-C) N=22	21.04	-1.1893	8.82	-.2508
L2G1 (S-C) N=22	30.32	.67	10.54	.50
L2G2 (E-C) N=36	30.36	.68	10.08	.30

L1G1=Elementary level students on student-centered course
L2G1=Intermediate level students on student-centered course
L1G2=Beginners level students on TUMS established course

L2G2=Intermediate level students on TUMS established course

It should be noted here that the results for one student who was transferred from the Elementary to the Intermediate level merely on the student's request were not included in the data pool as the poor performance of this student was primarily the result of violations of the screening test results not the syllabus and its inclusion could thus confound the results of this experimentation.

Figure 1 below compares the performance of students in the two groups on the English subtest of the National Comprehensive Exam of March 2005 and the screening test of September 2002.



Finally, Table 2 below presents the correlation indices at p<.01 level of significance in most cases and p<.05 in the case of Medical English 2 in order to demonstrate the degree of go-togetherness between the results of I^+ level students' performance on the screening test and on the English subtest of the comprehensive exam, and the achievement test scores for Group II on the established course.

TABLE 2
Correlations between screening and NCME results and different final scores for I^+ level in Group 2 (N=36) and Group 1 (N=22)

EXAMINATIONS	Screening test	NCME	General English	Medical English 1	Medical English 2
Screening Test					
G2 (N=36)	1				
G1 (N=22)	1				
NCME					
G2 (N=36)	.427**	1			
G1 (N=22)	.561**	1			
General English					
G2 (N=36)	.570**	.447**	1		
G1 (N=22)	.375	.123	1		
Medical English 1					
G2 (N=36)	.483**	.459**	.764**	1	
G1 (N=22)	.056	.152	.634**	1	
Medical English 2					
G2 (N=36)	.417**	.416*	.634**	.585**	1
G1 (N=22)	.169	.311	.282	.187	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1 above clearly indicates that those 26 elementary level students in Group I with a mean of -0.4970 started their studies at a significantly higher level of English proficiency as compared with the lower mean of -1.1893 on the standard score (Z distribution) gained by the 22 beginners in Group II. Yet, their lower Z score of -.6265 on NCME at the end of the fifth semester compared with the higher mean score of -.2508 for Group II is quite revealing. It seems to us that students at the lower end of the proficiency continuum would benefit more from the established curriculum with its regular monitoring and objective evaluation system but would be obviously harmed in a costly, though lenient, student-centered approach employing younger facilitators and/or teachers.

However, the performance of the two groups at I^+ level (an intermediate level of English proficiency) showed no significant differences between the mean scores of 0.67 for the 22 students in Group I and 0.68 for the 36 students in Group II. A difference of 0.2 in the mean scores on English subtest of the National Comprehensive Examination of Basic Science (NCME) also proved insignificant. It appears then that these students, being interested in English language and enjoying a fairly good knowledge of it, seem to be mature enough to take responsibility for their learning and, being so, they might benefit from any English program regardless of how well-structured such programs might be.

Yet, considering the fact that Group I enjoyed a special budget which could buy the better ones various motivating rewards on different occasions or buy everybody pastry and fruit to be served in class sessions every now and then, and enabled their tutors, who were paid for the extra hours they spent, to bring about a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, and considering the fact that this Group used two well-equipped classrooms especially designed for EFL teaching and had no stress for exams, one might then suggest a study of cost-effectiveness to find out what was gained for the extra budget allocated to Group I. Table I clearly shows that the mean scores for intermediate students in groups I&II on both the standardized screening test (30.32 and 30.36 respectively) and the English subtest of National Comprehensive Examination of Basic Sciences (10.54 and 10.08) were insignificant. While intermediate student in Group I showed no better achievement than their counterparts in Group II, the elementary students in Group I were practically harmed (see Fig.1).

To us, there also seems to be a misconception about the notion of student-centeredness. The student-centered approach places students, it appears, in the center of the learning process and expects them to be active participants in their learning process both in and out of the classroom. Students set the pace and use their own preferred learning strategies. This means that they are more intrinsically than extrinsically oriented. Learning is more individualized than standardized and students are more open to new ideas. They take responsibility for their own actions and accept related consequences. However, taking responsibility and following this pace, it seems to us, requires some maturity on the side of the students; otherwise, it may drive some of the sociability out of the learning process if care is not taken to emphasize the importance of peers.

Stevenson and Sander (2002) found that first year medical students somehow rejected the value of student-centered learning methods. Very much in line with this, this study also showed that our novice Iranian English learners at the school of medicine not only failed to make much out of this approach but they were actually harmed. A student-centered approach requires the learner to accept responsibility for their learning, but taking responsibility can be expected from only mature learners. Furthermore, student-centeredness may be in contrast with limited resources available in developing countries and, despite Edwards' (2001) claim that it reduces "waste in human and educational resources" our study seems to prove the opposite. In addition, as a teaching-learning approach, student-centeredness, as we experienced it here in our context, does not allow program developers to substitute a certain category of student's self-evaluation for a standardized evaluation system. Neither a formative evaluation system could be substituted for a summative evaluation of achievement or proficiency judgments. In our Iranian version of student-centeredness, Black's (1999) concern of helping students take responsibility for their own learning through formative assessment, or Knight's (2002) idea of negotiation aiming at promoting self-learning, self-assessment and self-assessing development needs and learning strengths were seemingly misinterpreted to approximate a state which might be a version of student lawlessness.

Finally, there is also some concern here for the washback effect of such measures which could be equally damaging to the students, teachers and, in the long run, to the whole educational system., That is to say, the mean scores for the students on the English courses which were based on essay type questions and teacher-students negotiations ranged from 16.84 to 19.04 (out of 20), whereas the average mean scores for the students on the established course ranged from 11.7 to 13.03. This apparently shows that students in Group I have highly overestimated themselves. While this internal evaluation shows a rise of more than 25% in the abilities of Group I over Group II, external evaluations; i.e., the screening and the NCME results proved the reverse.

In order to get some idea about the subjective evaluation system practiced by the tutors in Group I in comparison with the standardized objective tests for the established course, correlations were calculated between final scores on the three English courses which the students at this level had passed, namely, general English, Medical English I and Medical English II with the students' performance on the standardized screening test of September 2002 on the one hand, and the English test presented to them by the Ministry of Health in March 2005 on the other. While the mean scores for the I^+ level in the student-centered group ranged from 17.1 to 18.68 on a scale of 20, and that of their counterparts on the established syllable ranged from 12 to 13.71, we found significant correlations between both the screening test and NCME results at $p<.01$ for general English and Medical English I and at $p<.05$ for Medical English II for the latter group. The absence of significant correlations between the students' final course scores and their scores on either the screening test or the NCME run by the Ministry of Health for the former (see Table 2 above) may manifest the unreasonable subjectivity of evaluation on this project. This may also indicate that the established syllabus made use of a solid evaluation system distinct from the subjective evaluation for Group I.

However, considering the importance of Grade Point Average for the students of medicine and the way it affects their future lives, the washback effect of an unreliable evaluation system would leave certain issues about such experimentations at stake. Therefore, it should be pointed out here that what student-centeredness may present to the field of evaluation is a more active part on the student's side, in order not to do the evaluation, but to accept responsibility for providing the evaluator(s) with more detailed and comprehensive evidence to enhance precision in evaluation. Portfolio is, therefore, a good example. While experts on evaluation of students' performance emphasize that evaluation should be carefully done by adopting multiple-sources of information which leads to positive wash-back effect (see Brown and Hudson, 1998) there is no room for such misconceptions that objective tests cause stress, therefore, they are not good tools for measuring student's achievement. Such pretexts led to the rejection of objective tests and substitution of subjective essay-type exams and student-teacher negotiation (read bargaining) for course final scores. The proponents of such ideas forget that tension and stress are integral parts of any education and evaluation system. In fact, the brilliant performance of elementary students in Group II on the English subtest of NCME, who were evaluated by standardized objective tests with a low range of scores and high risks of failure which would practically lead to repeating the course, and suffering its consequences, compared with the poor performance of their counterparts on the student-centered group, who were assured there would be no failure and all were rated 'good' on their course final essay-type exams may lead us to claim that tension caused by objective tests in a well-developed evaluation system is a kind of stress which may be called **eu**stress which can contribute to further learning and should be differentiated from tension that **di**stresses the learners; a claim obviously calling for further research.

Concluding Remarks

Careful monitoring and a highly developed evaluation system seem to us to be an effective mechanism to motivate students, teachers, and/or all those involved in a teaching/learning program to do their best. Thus, supervision should not be rejected merely as a stressful agent from the very beginning. Besides, students at the lower levels of English proficiency seem not to benefit so much from the so-called 'student-centered' approach with non-expert facilitators as from an expert EFL teacher. This simply implies that teaching approaches are to be tested for different proficiency levels and that the same approach might not be equally useful to different learning groups. It also appears that students at different learning levels might benefit more from different level-specific evaluation systems. This could be the subject of a further study, of course. Finally, administrators would serve the university more effectively; it seems to us, if they apply research findings for the betterment of the educational plan of action in all departments.

REFERENCES

Black, P. (1999). Assessment, learning theories and testing systems. In P. Murphy (ed.), *Learners, learning and assessment.* London: Open University Press, (pp. 118 -134).

Bliss C. (2006). Integrating meaning and purpose: The student-centered college classroom. *Journal of College and Character*, Vol.7, No.1.

Brown J. D. and Hudson T. (1998). The alternatives in language assessment. *TESOL Quarterly,* 32(4). 653-673.

Burnard, P. (1999). Carol Rogers and postmodernism: Challenges in nursing and health services. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, 1, 241-247.

Calder, J. (2000). Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 1, 1.

Deihl, J. D. (1916). Individual differences and note-book work in modern foreign languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 1, 52-59.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to philosophy of education*. New York: Free Press.

Edwards R. (2001). Meeting individual learner needs: Power, subject, subjection. In C. Paechter, M. Preedy, D. Scott and J. Soler (eds.), *Knowledge, power, and learning*. London: Sage Publications.

Hill, A.A. (1980). *Steps to understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ioannidis J. P. A. (2005). Contradicted and initially stronger effects in highly cited clinical research. *JAMA*, 294, 218-228.

Kirn, E. and Hartmann, P. (2002). *Interactions I*. U.S.: McGraw-Hill/Contemporary.

Kirn, E. and Hartmann, P. (2002). *Interactions II*. U.S.: McGraw-Hill/Contemporary.

Knight, P. (2002). *Learning contracts in assessment for learning in higher education*. Birmingham: SEDA series.

Kunihiku M, Nobutaro B, Shunichi F, Takuro S, Hiroshi K, Seigo N, Naoki N, Toshio F, and Tsuguya F. (2004). Poor English skills as a barrier for Japanese health care professionals in learning and practicing EBM. *Medical Education*, 38, 1204.

Lavatelli, C. (1973). *Piaget's theory applied to an early childhood curriculum.* Boston: American Science and Engineering, Inc.

Lea S. J. D., Stephenson D., and Troy J. (2003). Higher education students' attitudes to student-centered learning: Beyond 'educational bulimia'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(3), 321-334.

Logan, G. E. (1973). *Individualized foreign language learning: An organic process*. Rowley: Newburry House Publishers.

McComb, B. L. and Whisler, J. S. (1997). *The learner-centered classroom and school*. SanFrancisco: Jossey-Bass.

McCombs B. (2001). What do we know about learners and learning? The learner-centered framework: Bringing the educational system into balance. *Educational Horizons*.

Melander ER. (2002). The meaning of "student-centered" advising: Challenges to the advising learning community. *The Mentor,* Nov. 27, 2002,WWW.psu.edu/edu/dus/mentor/.

Moffett, J and Wagner, BJ. (1992). *Student-centered language arts, K-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Boyonton/Cook Publishers Heinemann.

Moore, J., D. B. de Salgado, L. F. de Knight, A. E. de Tamayo, & T. Mune´var (1986). *Reading and thinking in English II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moore, J., D. B. de Salgado, L. F. de Knight, A. E. de Tamayo, & T. Mune´var (1986). *Reading and thinking in English III*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moore, J., D. B. de Salgado, L. F. de Knight, A. E. de Tamayo, & T. Mune´var (1986). *Reading and thinking in English IV*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Race, P. (1995). *The open learning handbook: Promoting quality in designing and delivering flexible learning*. 2nd edition. London: Kogan Page.

Stevenson K and Sander P. (2002). Medical students are from Mars- business and psychology students are from Venus- University teachers are from Pluto? *Medical Teacher,* 24(1), 27-31.

Tahririan, M. H. (1997). *English for the students of medicine III*, Tehran: SAMT (the Center for Studying and Compiling University Textbooks in Humanities).

Whipple, G. M. (1925). *Adapting the schools to individual differences.* 24th yearbook [Part II], National Society for the study of education. Bloomington, Ill.: Public School Publishing Committee.