

The English Connection

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Loetter: Cultural bias in coursebooks
Tempest: A speaking fluency-focused curriculum
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The English Connection

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To promote scholarship, disseminate information, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding among persons concerned with the teaching and learning of English in Korea.

Editorial

A Rule of Thumb

By Dr. Andrew White Editor-in-Chief, *The English Connection*

Teaching idioms and other figurative language is a great way to present higher-level students with creative and expressive aspects of English for improving fluency. Idioms bring in the cognitive aspects of the mind and connect them to language, and rely on universals in thought and understanding to get their meanings across cultures. Being prefabricated, precise, and inflexible word chunks, they can be a challenging area for teachers to actually feel like they are explaining and teaching the language, and for students to remember correctly (remember, it costs *an arm and a leg*, NOT *some arms and legs*. Using idioms is one of the few times when being creative doesn't pay.)

Other problems can arise. Firstly, teachers often don't understand the meaning themselves (and this can refer to both the literal AND the cross-over to metaphorical meaning). Studies have shown that imagery in fact interferes with figurative idiom comprehension. Secondly, the required cultural knowledge just isn't conveyed to students due to historical and cultural gaps, so they don't have the emotional understanding. And without that empathy, they frankly just can't relate.



Take for example the popular idiom *You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink*. I have never, that I can recall, led a horse anywhere, let alone to water, so I don't know if walking a 500-pound animal is the hard part, or getting it to drink is? If he's letting you pull him towards his trough, I imagine he's not going to refuse a drink when he gets there. *You can do something but you can't do something* is how this would come across to English learners, most if not all who have never touched a horse before.

There's more than one way to skin a cat is a popular idiom, which invokes images of filleting our favorite feline pets, while an alternative origin refers to catfish (and at least one way, I recall, involves a nail and a board). *To bite the bullet* is a cliché of the American old West and is what wounded soldiers had to do, as surgeons on the battlefield performed surgery without the aid of painkillers. A man would be hung by standing on a bucket, and then they would *kick the bucket*. *A rule of thumb* came about as brewers would stick their thumb down in brewing beer to test the temperature, yet an alternative origin uses the thumb as a measure of how thick a stick can be for husbands to beat the wives with. In the 19th century there was risk of coma patients being buried alive (as evidence of scratch marks on the lids of coffins), so coffins were installed with bells in the unfortunate event of someone waking up already interred, thus they could be *saved by the bell*. You might think *a dead ringer* refers to the same lucky soul, but actually is a last minute look alike stand-in in a horse race.

What are we actually conveying with such masochistic language? How did these slip through the social censors' cracks? Is the meaning of these idioms lessened, or strengthened, because we can't possibly identify with the horrors of what's going on? As language is a window into countries and cultures, encrypting the norms of a people, what are learners to think?

It's raining cats and dogs is a ubiquitous idiom from the 1600's, stirring curiosity with students for its outlandish literal imagery. Yet with Koreans and the English sharing a history of thatched roof housing (*chogajib*, in Korean), where small animals were likely to hide during rainstorms, and therefore fall out of in heavy rains, could it be that learners are already equipped with some of the cultural knowledge necessary to decipher its literal meaning?

Much of this disturbing visual imagery is caused by the historical context in which idioms have taken shape. Benjamin Franklin in the 1700's is a perfect example. With a trifecta of down-home common sense, a linguistic breaking from British English, and access to printing presses, Franklin has contributed greatly to the English language (*Poor Richard's Almanack* was one of the most popular publications in colonial America). But being the ultimate pragmatist, Franklin didn't deal with idioms, but rather clear and straightforward language (*Early to bed, early to rise... and Honesty is the best policy* need no head-shaking interpretation).

The answer, of course, is learners simply don't need to know or understand the literal meaning and origins of idioms (just as native speakers don't). The etymology of idiomatic expressions is one step removed from the actual teaching of EFL for our learners' fluency, nothing more than a chance for teachers to get sidetracked and explain about American and British history and customs. In other words, figurative meaning and correct usage are more important than word origin for students just wanting to improve their abilities. However, if language should be a direct mirror of the mind, as Chomsky suggests, and an embodiment of culture, tradition, and a unification of a community, what does that say of our literal infatuation with farm animals, colonial living, and death? If language is so dynamic and constantly changing, why are we relying on 300-year-old expressions to paint pictures to our thoughts and feelings?

We can ask ourselves to wrap our heads around confusing and archaic idioms, but why should we? More and more, they cease to be the nostalgic reminiscences of collective, homespun relatable logic and, rather, are becoming outdated – unrefined, offensive, and out of grasp to our current societies. I propose that every 100 years, language leaders put a ban on those previous generations' idioms, letting them peter out, sweeping them under the rug, wiping the slate clean (change to *erase the drive?*), to better embody the language of our culture and unify speakers. Except for *saved by the bell* – I kinda like that one.

President's Message

The (Not Quite) A to Z of Getting More Involved with KOTESOL

By Bryan Hale KOTESOL President

Several times I have used this space to encourage people to get more involved with KOTESOL. Although I think we've done an amazing job developing innovative online offerings, and at the moment we also have the excitement of (some) in-person events returning, it's no secret that we are a little short on volunteer power at the moment. So for this issue of *The English Connection*, as I could sense myself gearing up to include another message of encouragement, I wondered if I might do a better job of unpacking some of the things that "getting more involved" can mean. Volunteering, at its best, nourishes both communities and individuals in untold ways. So I offer you this list, and if there's something that sparks for you, I invite you to pursue it!



A is for "Ask"

Whenever I get the chance to have a good conversation about KOTESOL with members, I find people have really pertinent and insightful questions, or they are eager to do more and would like to know what they could do – but they seem to be waiting for permission to ask. No permission needed! If you have any query or suggestion, or would just like to let your availability to do something be known, that's something chapter officers, SIG organizers, and everybody throughout our organization wants to hear about. Just like teachers love getting pertinent questions from students. So ask!

C is for "Chapters"

You're probably aware that KOTESOL has various chapters (currently 10, including our international community). But sometimes it's too easy to overlook chapter-level possibilities. Volunteering at this level can be particularly rewarding because it's local, and it's where KOTESOL really connects with other communities in rich ways.

E is for "Elections"

Elections happen annually at various levels of our organization. Some positions have particular requirements, but in general, members have the right to run for elected positions, and I encourage you to consider this! People sometimes tell me, though, that they are interested in taking on some kind of role but feel wary of running in an election. So it's worth remembering that, as important as elected officer positions are, they are not the only starting point for deeper involvement with our organization. Our non-elected roles are vital. Your chapter or SIG might be very much in need of just what you have to offer!

M is for "Membership Benefits"

We actually have so many membership benefits, and so often new benefits are added, that I find I need to check up on them periodically. Keeping abreast of KOTESOL member benefits is also a great way to let colleagues and friends know why they should consider joining, which would make the organization richer for all of us. This is the one URL I am going to put in this article, because I so want you to go check it out: koreatesol.org/content/member-benefits

N is for "National Council"

KOTESOL's national-level organizational body may seem shrouded in mystery, but only if you've never attended a meeting! I promise, if you come to a meeting, which all members have the right to do, any sense of enigma will melt away, and you'll get to know Council as just another human, vibrant, messy, and hopeful part of the KOTESOL picture. Getting involved with Council is a fantastic way to level up your engagement. Some positions are elected, but others are appointed, and you might have the expertise that Council is looking for. But, again, you don't have to be on Council to attend the meetings! Members are most welcome. (Meeting details are announced on our website and in our online newsletter.)

P is for "Present"

Presenting looks great on your CV and gives the rest of us the benefit of your particular expertise. Presenting a full session or workshop is fantastic, but that's not the only way to start! Various chapter-level events, or even conferences, are looking for presenters to share shorter items such as activities, resources, or brief discussions. If you have an idea but don't want to make it a big presentation, ask about it!

S is for "Special Interest Group"

Our special interest groups (SIGs) offer forms of connection and professional development that go beyond the possibilities of geographically defined groups or one-off events. Our SIGs are amazing but sometimes in intense need of more volunteer power. Over my years in KOTESOL, I have observed that SIGs spawn innovations that invigorate everything else, so I highly encourage you to consider what you might contribute in this area.

T is for "The English Connection"

The publication you're reading right now is created through volunteer labor. Isn't that amazing? And it's just one of several KOTESOL publications. Not only do publications need written contributions, they need proofreading, graphic design, and more.

Z is for "Zoom" (and "Zoom Fatigue")

I'm both very grateful to have had Zoom and other online platforms throughout the pandemic, and I am also feeling worn out after two and a half years of trying to socialize through a screen. Unlike many others, my teaching has been mostly in-person, so whenever I do teach the occasional online lesson, I'm excited (if a little flustered!) to notice how much the features keep evolving. I'm hoping that as this decade continues, some of the "Zoom fatigue" fades away, throwing more light on the project of integrating online and in-person interaction, with an emphasis on the access and affordances online allows. I predict that's going to continue being an important project within KOTESOL. I hope you will be part of it.

Motivation: Every Educator's White Whale

By KC Washington

Some might say writing about student motivation and its source is an old chestnut, but I would argue it's an evergreen. Every crop of students is different; every generation has its shiny attention thieves and distractions. My generation had Ms. Packman, Must-See TV, and scavenger hunts. Today's generation has Roblox game programs on YouTube, zombie K-dramas, and Minecraft game programs on YouTube. Every crop of students varies, and every crop of teachers – freshmen and veterans alike – must assess new personalities and interests before posing the eternal question: What motivates students and who's responsible for providing said motivation?

It's a nature-versus-nurture situation, and it must be evaluated with every season, especially in the age of education denigration and in the field of TESOL, where an educator is dealing with resistant, overloaded young minds and unfamiliar cultural influences.

For good or for ill, there are those who move through the world seeking knowledge, whose curiosity is piqued by an innate desire to know or to gain a particular skill, while others must be pushed and prodded to acquire what they need to survive in an increasingly competitive world. Ormrod (2019) says, "Motivation [is] – an internal state that arouses us to action, pushes us in particular directions, and keeps us engaged in certain activities" (p. 480).

I started my teaching career working at the university level, and for the past five years, I have worked with pre-reading, elementary and middle school students in a *hagwon* setting. Throughout my sixteen years of teaching, I have noted that every level of learner struggles with motivation, but the younger populations struggle the most, which is understandable. They do not understand

the stakes of the game. They do not comprehend what they will need to make their lives *successful*. All they know is their school hours are long and many subjects difficult, with English topping the list. I am a lifelong philomath – a lover of learning – and as such, am fervently self-directed, but my teaching philosophy is simple: "Show up, show me your passions, your interests, and I will match you with mine, and we will learn together." After all, with limited time and resources, I cannot be expected to tap into every student's hidden scholar. No educator can. Students must meet us halfway.

"My teaching philosophy is simple: 'Show up, show me your passions, your interests, and I will match you with mine and we will learn together.'"

Both motivation and cognitive engagement can involve everything from a student's socio-affective filter (Salgado, 2020a) to their self-efficacy and their classroom environment. Education researchers Auyeung et al. (2020) write about the neurological aspect of cognition and how external rewards and positive stimuli act on a child's cognitive development. On the other hand, Carvalho et al. (2017) argue that teacher enthusiasm does not a memory make:



One might assume that the importance of enthusiasm, as assessed by expert teachers and students alike, would be supported by strong evidence of its relationship to student learning. However, in contrast to these strong intuitions, research results are mixed. Even while enthusiastic teaching reliably correlates with student interest, involvement, and enjoyment (reviewed in [12]; c.f. [13]), a clear connection between enthusiasm and student achievement (test performance, course grades, etc.) has not been identified. (para. 2)



As a teacher who routinely ends my class dripping in sweat, exhausted from trying to keep my students engaged, I found the above study extremely interesting. I initially approached the idea of student motivation and cognition as two separate entities, but current theorists say they are inextricably intertwined and may in fact be the same thing. Interest promotes cognitive processing, which becomes behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement (Ormrod, 2019).

Although I agree with Auyeung et al. (2020) that inspiring teachers and involved parents are important, perhaps even invaluable, I fall firmly in Ormrod's internal motivation camp. On the long road of life and education, a student will spend more time alone navigating what they know and don't know than they will with a guide holding their hand and walking them through potential knowledge. It is incumbent upon the learner – the younger the better – to understand this and lay the foundation of internal motivation early. Every teacher won't be witty, every teacher won't be insightful, not all parents will be around or have the energy or understanding, so it

is imperative that nascent learners understand how to motivate themselves and to find the nugget of interest or of practicality that will serve them in each lesson, in each classroom, or out in the world.

From speaking with others in the education field, many concur that over the past fifteen to twenty years, an ugly phenomenon has sprung up where students expect to be entertained, and if they are not, it's their right to tune out. It is not. I run student-centered classes and stress from Day 1 that it is a team effort. I encourage the students to share their interests and then build lessons around those interests. This is not always easy, given many students' socio-affective filters and the cultural norms of South Korean students reared in the organizing principles of Neo-Confucianism (Clayton, 2020), but I do what I can to instill that the class is only as good as their participation and what they put in is what they get out.

As noted above, every student is different, every class dynamic varies, but I have always found it helpful to make an informal canvas within the first few days of the beginning of a session. Asking general like/dislike questions and, depending on the speaking and comfort level of the students, having them "interview" each other and then present their findings. I draw a Venn diagram on the board and show the similarities and differences between myself and the students, and among the students themselves. This gives us common ground to build from or new avenues to explore. One class once had a very lively conversation about pineapple as a pizza topping, which led to a solid seven minutes of spontaneous speaking. If the level or speaking confidence is low, drawing and sharing pictures also leads to discoveries.

I build on this by pairing or grouping students by likes and dislikes, and having them offer the merits or demerits of their choices. Information culled from the Venn diagram

"It is imperative that nascent learners understand how to motivate themselves and to find the nugget of interest or of practicality that will serve them in each lesson, in each classroom, or out in the world."



or pictures can be used to design mini lessons. Giving the student credit for the lesson creates ownership and can encourage others to share their own ideas.

Older students may understand they need English to attend the university they want to get a good job, but they often need motivation as well. The simple approaches above work with older students who learn when likes and dislikes are swapped for future plans and skills needed to obtain the dreams they have for themselves.

There are many approaches to center students and, with luck, increase motivation, but unfortunately, I find that because public school teachers and administrators, hagwon directors, and even parents do not always sufficiently explain what is expected of the student or why they are attending the class. Obviously, explanations may be lost on seven- and eight-year-olds, but even older students are often mystified and then quickly bored by yet another afterschool program. Most methods or games are no match for this lack of understanding.

I believe the *mythical scourge* of motivation – the white whale of teaching – is a combination of (a) engaging a student’s attention through lessons that they have a personal connection to (Salgado, 2020a), (b) providing a clear understanding of why the lesson or course is valuable, an understanding that, while every lesson isn’t necessarily going to be entertaining, it will be useful, and (c) applying a student-centered development approach that emphasizes personal responsibility. Essentially, to learn and to get something out of a program, a student must have skin in the game.

Sadly, many contemporary societies, South Korea included, see education as a means to an end and not the goal itself. Therefore, creating classrooms where learning is powered by students and joy is found in the knowing is difficult, but it is not impossible. It requires a reframing and an honest conversation about why we are all in the classroom in the first place. It’s a conversation worth having, long overdue, and one I relish having.

With every classroom, with every semester, I strive to demonstrate my own love of learning, my willingness to make mistakes in the pursuit of knowledge, and to instill the same in my students. I empathize with their long hours and endless academics, and attempt to alleviate their frustration by showing the connection between the ability to speak English and learning more about their favorite soccer player or team (it is inevitably Son and Tottenham). I make connections between the

improvement of their English language skills and the sharpening of their *League of Legends* skills. It’s not a perfect application, but it helps. Instead of getting tangled in the line of their own exhaustion and disbelief that they can achieve English proficiency, and like Ahab, sink to the murky depths, it often leads to what renowned bilingual education authority Professor Jim Cummins calls “BICS.”

“BICS are Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills; these are the ‘surface’ skills of listening and speaking, which are typically acquired quickly by many students” (Cummins, 2000, as cited in Salgado, 2020b, p. 1). Acquiring BICS via the connections I outlined builds speaking confidence and, in turn, serves to highlight the usefulness of English language acquisition in a student’s everyday life and their future.

Pedagogy is a skill. When afforded the time and space to truly educate, to instill knowledge, with students who understand why they are in the classroom and are open and excited about the possibilities, pedagogy can be an art. The water will often be rough, our goal slipping in and out of the waves, racing farther and farther ahead, but it is a whale of a journey and one worth taking.

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Cultural Bias in ESL Coursebooks and Assessment

By Geoge Loetter

Introduction

Separating language from culture is a very difficult task, as it can be said that language learning also necessitates the learning of the culture tied to that language. When it comes to English, however, we need to see things differently: The language is a lingua franca – usually learned out of necessity rather than interest, and within a multitude of cultural contexts. There are many types of English, the language is constantly evolving, and its speakers are diverse. Therefore, as ESL instructors, we must be careful in our classrooms that assessments do not hold students back due to cultural bias. The majority of studies on bias seem to be focused on general education and course materials, and not specifically on ESL assessment. Even so, the findings of these studies still help to paint a picture of the presence of cultural bias in ESL assessment, or at least what to look out for and how to adjust accordingly.

Bias in Testing

Bias in testing is identified when learners from different social groups, but the same level of ability, perform differently on test items (receptive or productive) with one of the groups having an advantage due to their social background (Djiwandono, 2006). The bias can be due to gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, personality, upbringing, and culture – all interrelated, with culture taking the main focus here.

As an example, a Western instructor may do a formative assessment of a quiet, reserved Chinese student in the classroom and conclude that they lack in speaking ability, when the reality could be that the student is adhering

to Chinese educational norms of not asking questions or commenting until invited to do so (Freiberger, n.d.). A lack of cross-cultural understanding would lead to a lower performance score and would perhaps make it difficult for the instructor to approach the situation and help the student to find a balance between the conflicting cultural norms. It could even be that the instructor sees a more active and livelier student as a good student, and a more reserved student as a bad student, thus introducing bias caused by the personal perceptions and background of the instructor.

Language acquisition researchers often take inspiration from the way that children learn, and there is a lesson to be learned here, too, when considering the impact that misidentification has on a child. If a child from a minority cultural background is perceived as having lower abilities than other children due to cultural misunderstandings, they will be linked to lower expectations, deprived of opportunities to interact with potential role models, and less likely to be motivated, which means their future performance may decrease (Leaders Project, 2013). In the same way, misidentification due to cultural bias when doing assessments can also negatively impact a language learner's journey of acquisition (or therefore, non-acquisition).

In terms of written tests, if items on the test require an understanding of a specific culture to complete, it is in direct opposition to what the Educational Testing Service (2000) defines as a fair test. As an extreme example, if a test question had the following prompt,



Julie: My family is going to church tomorrow for Christmas, but my brother said he is going on a date instead. I couldn't believe it.

with the question "How does Julie feel and why?" a Western English speaker may understand that Christmas is a time for family, and she is upset as her brother should not choose that time to go on a date. A Korean test taker may think that Julie is happy for her brother for getting a date, as Christmas is a commercial holiday for couples to date in Korea. A Chinese student may be uncertain and take a guess at family time being important, or in some groups where religion is seen unfavorably, Julie might even be seen as jealous because she doesn't want to go to church, and the brother gets to have fun. Even if this were an open test question, a Western or religious instructor could mark some of these answers as incorrect due to content, which could be seen as punishment for moral disagreement, also falling within the realm of cultural bias.

Bias in Coursebooks

Assessments of all types are of course tightly linked to what is being taught. Therefore, a good starting point for identifying cultural bias in assessment is not necessarily how test questions are designed but if bias is present within coursebooks and content.

In a study on Pakistani ESL learners, Ahmed and Narcy-Combes (2011) found that the students' only window into the foreign culture was the textbook, which presented a large gap between the two cultures. What's more, textbooks geared for the local market sometimes promoted stereotypes, were perceived as culturally insensitive, and required decision-making processes unfamiliar to the local students. As an example, an illustration on the

"Even trying to eliminate bias is *bias* sometimes.... ESL textbooks should not aim to represent the ideal perception of the target student but provide neutral topics and important grammar points so that the students can choose how to represent themselves."

cover of *New Oxford Modern English* seemed to portray a traditional, rural scene, but to local students, the scene represented extreme poverty and was not how they wished to be perceived. In terms of content, examples were found in sentences in *English Alive* of Pakistani families preferring to have many children, and in *Oxford Progressive English* of females working as housewives while male characters always have more professional jobs, when modern educated families do not subscribe to these viewpoints.

Similar representations were found by Sherman (2010) when analyzing conversations in a few popular ESL

textbooks (*Person to Person 2*, *World Link 2*, *Top Notch 2*, *Interchange 2*), with unequal gender roles being found by the author along with the portrayal of English native speakers in more professional and dominant roles than non-native speakers. It is important that native speakers are not portrayed as the ideal, nor as socially or economically superior, as they are all ridiculous notions in the face of world Englishes and can damage a language learner's self-esteem (Gok, 2020). It must be said that the target market for these books are learners who want to learn from native speakers of English and want clear British and American examples, so the prevalence of native speakers as characters is an obvious choice, and the perceived gender bias and social problems could be projection on the part of Sherman. Also, it seems a step too far to say that an ESL coursebook will socialize students in such a way that they are empty vessels ready to be manipulated by biased Western ideas.

Nevertheless, I include this example to illustrate how even trying to eliminate bias is *bias* sometimes, and these types of studies are approached from a moral and political perspective subscribed to by the author, when the ideal, *representative* textbook a Western researcher may have in mind is not what the target student really cares about. The topic has shifted towards politics and away from language, and the bias present is not ESL assessment bias, but rather something else. ESL textbooks should not aim to represent the ideal *perception* of the target student, but provide neutral topics and important grammar points so that the students can choose how to represent themselves. As a result, ongoing assessment can be linked to what they choose to produce.

If books are targeted at a specific region, then it is clear, as Ahmed and Narcy-Combes (2011) suggest, that they should be created by those with an understanding of the local culture (or at least in close collaboration with those from the target culture). Even then, if possible, extreme political correctness and attempts at forcing cultural perceptions (from both extremes – as a stereotype or as a type of overly positive propaganda) should be avoided; no textbook can sum up the experiences and truths of every student. ESL coursebooks are vehicles for language and supplementary tools, not cultural or ideological guidebooks, and assessments should be focused on what these tools help students to personally produce.

If anything, contentious topics and representations can be seen as good opportunities for discussion and to build awareness, which is a realistic approach to language rather than trying to represent *correct*, universal social views that do not exist. Real discussions involving strong opinions may be just what are needed to motivate a class and provide extra opportunity for the assessment of natural speech.

Finally, and also linked to natural speech, it would be wise to include content in courses that is not from the usual samples of American and British English, as many ESL students may predominantly speak to other non-native speakers, and assessments including only exposure to *native* accents may not be accurate assessments of true ability. Major et al. (2002) found that ESL student scores dropped significantly when tested on content presented with non-native accents – the type of accents they would actually be exposed to the most in real life. This is an important indicator that content and assessments must be made relevant to students on a case-by-case basis.

Solutions

Djiwandono (2006) offers a quick summary of item response theory (IRT) analysis, Mantel-Haenszel odds ratio, and the presence of differential item functioning (DIF), and how these statistical approaches can be used to identify unfair test items that need to be replaced. For the average ESL teacher, however, such technical and complicated procedures are not necessary.

A more useful approach may be to (a) get to know students and learn about the social context in which they are taught, (b) analyze coursebooks and use what is useful and relevant to students on a case-by-case basis, (c) create supplementary materials when necessary, and (d) actively engage students in discussions that they have the opportunity to control so that their interests, needs, and beliefs can be understood. Doing all of this, a teacher should then be able to modify and create language assessments that are relevant and useful to students.

Kim and Zabelina (2015) point out that standardized tests are based on the intelligence, knowledge, and values of the majority group, and to even the playing field and make testing relevant on an individual basis, creativity testing should be used. The authors are not talking about ESL assessment and creative language use, but the idea applies equally, as adding creativity to ESL assessment is necessary. Language is not a static, testable concept such as math or science but is deeply linked to creativity, and this should form a part of assessments. Creativity is producing something novel and useful (Runco & Jaeger, 2012, as cited in Kim & Zabelina, 2015), and this is what ESL students should be required to do: produce something novel, as it is personal and useful to them. Put even more simply: They should not be tested on what they have been told to say but on what they want to say. This isn't 100% possible on every type of test, but with knowledge about the target students and culture, it can be incorporated, and assessments can be made more relevant and authentic.

Conclusion: Perspectives as an ESL Teacher

As the section on solutions provided a summary of key takeaways and personal views stemming from the research done for this investigation, the conclusion will be used to add a few personal points on how the content above has impacted my own views on teaching.

I am more aware than ever of my own potential biases in the classroom, as well as when doing assessments. It is vital to see each student as a language learner and not as a representation of what I think a learner *should* be, of how a language learner should think and behave, or of any form of *ideal* when it comes to content produced, personality, opinions, and ways of thinking. This of course doesn't mean that any form of student behavior is acceptable, but it does mean that focus is firmly on the student as an independent language learner with a unique cultural and social background.

I also have a new appreciation for the importance of supplementary materials and have reinforced my belief that any decent textbook will do, as it is just a guide for grammar points that must be used alongside content and discussions that are relevant to each group of students. Of course, there is no harm in having good supplementary materials and a great textbook, and I will be more aware of potential cultural bias next time I'm given the opportunity

"They should not be tested on what they have been told to say but on what they want to say."

to select a coursebook for one of my classes. I won't be focusing on just the topics, but also on how adaptable the book will be to my students and on how well suited it is to various forms of assessment.

When assessing students, be it a level test, an in-classroom formative assessment, or a required exam, it is imperative that I make these as authentic as possible and focus on the skills and content that will be useful to students in their own context. Language learning is a unique and dynamic process, my students are unique and dynamic, and assessments should be unique, dynamic, and relevant to the realities of language acquisition.

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A Speaking Fluency-Focused Curriculum

By Christopher Tempest

Introduction

In the current context of the Japanese education system, there is much emphasis placed on grammar and reading skills, with very little attention paid to conversation skills. The primary focus for junior high and high school students is to pass entrance examinations to enter desired high schools and eventually universities. As such, less time is spent on developing conversation skills and more time is spent on grammar, vocabulary drills, and reading comprehension. In recent years, the Japanese government has made moves to improve English education in schools (MEXT, 2015). Students now have introductory English communication classes from the third grade of elementary school, and high school English teachers are required to use English as the form of instruction, just to name a couple. These are positive changes. However, through my own experience of teaching, elementary school teachers often lack support and confidence in their language skills to give instruction effectively, and high school teachers still rely heavily on Japanese for teaching English. This lack of opportunity for students to practice speaking skills results in students entering university with underdeveloped conversation skills (Rowberry, 2012). Here, I will outline an experimental fluency-focused curriculum that sought to act as an intervention to this problem. The curriculum aimed to do the following:

1. Develop conversation skills.
2. Provide measurable data on student progress.
3. Encourage teacher collaboration on materials development.

The curriculum was trialed at a private university in Japan with approximately 800 first-year students enrolled in a compulsory English course. Student average proficiency levels were in the A2 range on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2009). Since the curriculum was focused on conversation skills,

there was little to no explicit grammar instruction, and fluency was deemed more of a priority over accuracy.

The Curriculum

The experimental curriculum initially lasted one semester, split into seven topics (Family, Hobbies, Hometown, Music, Sport, Movies, and School). These topics were chosen, as they were deemed relevant to students' lives and familiar enough that they could talk about them without too much difficulty. These topics were then further split into a three-lesson cycle focused on each theme of preparation, practice, and, most importantly, performance.

Lesson 1: Preparation


The focus of the preparation class was to expose students to essential vocabulary and phrases relevant to the topic. Students engaged with necessary vocabulary items via a blended learning environment using both digital and paper-based materials. One digital platform heavily utilized was Quizlet, an online flashcard program. Using Quizlet, students were expected to learn or review a set of vocabulary items before the preparation lesson of a topic. These sets included direct translations and contextual sentences for the target vocabulary. For the remainder of the 90-minute class, students would engage with various other vocabulary-orientated activities created by the curriculum team. These were comprised of pair-work activities with example dialogues, interviews, guessing games, riddles, Find Someone Who... activities, etc.

Lesson 2: Practice

In Lesson 2 of the cycle, students focused on increasing their fluency, developing their conversation skills, and reinforcing the target items from the previous lesson. A useful and popular activity was a paired reading and retention task named Read Twice. Students were given a monologue about the topic divided into four or five shorter chunks. Partner A would read a shortened passage to Partner B twice. They then asked their partner comprehension questions about what they just read

aloud and similar questions about their partner (see Figure 1). Students would then change and repeat until their entire monologues were exhausted. Teachers perceived this to be an effective task, as the activity reflected a conversational situation where students had to listen and retain information from their partner. It also gave them practice answering questions about themselves using model sentences from the monologue. As the monologue sections became slightly more difficult with each section, students enjoyed the challenge of trying to retain the information either by using higher vocabulary or making the monologue sections longer.

Figure 1. Read Twice

Name: _____		Number: _____	
			
Hobbies and Interests			
1) Read each sentence twice (2 times), and then ask your partner the questions.			
READ TWICE: I'm Sara. I love to play video games in my free time. I'm crazy about <i>Dragon Quest</i>.			
ASK	1. Is Sara crazy about music? <i>no</i>	4. What are you crazy about?	
	2. Is she crazy about video games? <i>yes</i>	5. What does she love to do? <i>play video games</i>	
	3. Are you crazy about video games?	6. What do you love to do?	
READ TWICE: I think <i>Dragon Quest</i> is a lot of fun because it is exciting and really cool. I don't really like <i>Puzzle and Dragons</i>, and I can't stand sports games!			
ASK	1. Does she think it's boring? <i>no</i>	5. What do you think is really cool?	
	2. Does she like <i>Puzzle and Dragons</i> ? <i>no</i>	6. What can't Sara stand? <i>sports games</i>	
	3. Do you like <i>Puzzle and Dragons</i> ?	7. What can't you stand?	
	4. Why does she like it? <i>because it is exciting and really cool</i>		

Following this, students engaged in a rapid-fire interview activity, Dice Game. With a grid of 36 topic questions, students would roll a die and ask their partner a question from the grid, the first roll corresponding to the box number and the second to the question number within that box (see Figure 2). This was repeated several times with different partners. The randomness of questioning exposed students to various related questions, encouraged them to think quickly about their answers, and raised awareness of gaps in knowledge.

Figure 2. Dice Game

A

Movies

Genres

- Do you like romantic comedies?
- Are you into sci-fi?
- Do you like scary movies?
- Are you into musicals?
- Do you like action films?
- How do you feel about animation?

Kinds...
horror, suspense, western, mystery

How often?

- How often do you go to the movie theater?
- How often do you borrow DVDs?
- How often do you download movies?
- How often do you buy movie DVDs?
- How often do you watch movies online?
- Do you often buy food/drinks at the theater?

Times...
every day, once a week, twice a month, never

Have you ever...?

- Have you ever seen a really scary film?
- Have you ever fallen asleep in the theater?
- Have you ever cried during a movie?
- Have you ever watched a musical?
- Have you ever gone to a matinee?
- Have you ever watch a movie with subtitles?

Follow-up...
What? Where? When? Who?

What's hot?

- What movie would you really like to see?
- What is the most popular movie right now?
- What was the best film of last year?
- Where is the best place to watch a movie?
- What is the most popular animated movie?
- Who is the most popular actor right now?

Popular
~is really popular right now!, ~is all the rage!

Tell me...

- What was the first movie you watched?
- Who do you usually watch movies with?
- What food do you like to eat at the theater?
- Tell me about a movie that made you sad.
- What is the worst movie you have ever seen?
- What movie have you watched many times?

Movie food
popcorn, soda, chocolate, licorice

Favorites

- Who is your favorite actor?
- What is your favorite movie?
- What is your favorite comedy?
- Who is your favorite actress?
- What is your favorite movie genre?
- What is your favorite place to watch movies?

Like or Love...
I'm really into ~, I'm crazy about ~, I love ~

+ 1 **Who ~ ?** **What ~ ?** **When ~ ?** **Where ~ ?** **Why ~ ?**

sci-fi (SF) scary (怖い) adventure (冒険) matinee (マチネー) borrow (借りて) subtitles (字幕) popular (人気がある) all the rage (とても流行っている)

In the later stages of this lesson, students created a scaffolded "cheat sheet" for the next and final part of the lesson cycle. This allowed students to write down essential or difficult-to-remember words or questions. Students could also write keywords and phrases relevant to their own context (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Cheat Sheet

Hobbies and Interests... Name: _____
Number: _____

Cheat Sheet for PCHAT

Questions to ASK:					
About your interests:	What?				
	Who with?				
	How often?				
	Where?				
	When?				
Words to remember:	Why?				

Lesson 3: Performance

In the final lesson, students primarily engaged in conversation practice. Students participated in a speed-dating style speaking activity where they would use the scaffolded "cheat sheets" (or the previous Dice Game

questions for extra support) to help them maintain a conversation for about three to four minutes. Once a few instances of this had occurred, students turned over their "cheat sheets" and repeated the same process refraining from looking at their sheets. After the students practiced several times, they recorded conversations with other students before reflecting on their performance.

Recordings and Reflections

The key focus of the final lesson was recording student conversations. Students were placed into groups of three to encourage collaboration and peer support

when conversing, especially for the less proficient students. The conversations were set to a length of five minutes about that lesson's topic. Recordings were uploaded to Moodle, a learning management system (LMS). However, using student smartphones was also an available option. Students listened to their conversation again and answered questions reflecting on their performance. They would revisit these reflections in the following classes to prompt them to think about what they could

improve for the next recording (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Uploading a Recording

New entry

All about family...

Write your partners' names here:
パートナーの名前を記入してください。

00:00:00

Record Play Upload

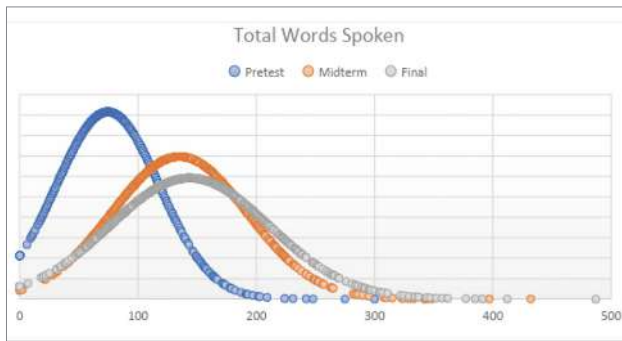
Please speak for 5 minutes about family.
家族について5分間会話しましょう。

Measurable Progress

As part of the curriculum, there needed to be some form of measurable assessment for both teachers and students. Three identical tests were administered throughout the semester: pre-, mid, and post-tests. Students were grouped into similar proficiency levels according to their placement test results. In groups of three, the students had to maintain and record an extended conversation for 10 minutes. Students often struggled in the pre-test as they had little to no practice with extended conversations. However, this allowed students to be aware of any weaknesses in their conversation skills, knowledge gaps, etc. The mid and post-tests aimed to demonstrate student progress over the semester. Metrics for this progress came from student transcriptions. Upon completing each

of the 10-minute recordings, students listened again and transcribed all the words they themselves said during the conversation, separating out each turn. From these transcripts, three metrics could be determined (total words spoken, total turns taken, and average words per turn), and these formed the basis of how students could measure their progress over the semester (see Figure 5) (Kirchmeyer 2020, p. 44). Teachers used metrics from the mid and post-tests and a rubric to attribute scores as part of assessments.

Figure 5. Comparison of Student Progress (Total Words Spoken)



Feedback and Current Iteration

Results from a simple survey of 748 students show that the vast majority of students felt that their speaking, vocabulary, motivation, and collaboration skills had increased as a result of the curriculum (see Table 1).

Table 1. Student Feedback

After taking this course, ...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my speaking improved.	28.48%	41.31%	26.74%	1.87%	0.94%	0.67%
my vocabulary improved.	27.81%	35.96%	28.88%	5.48%	1.07%	0.80%
my ability to collaborate improved.	44.92%	38.64%	14.30%	1.64%	0.40%	0.40%
my motivation to study English increased.	40.91%	32.22%	22.06%	3.34%	0.80%	0.67%

Due to the overwhelming positivity from students and student performance, this once-experimental curriculum is now the official curriculum for all first-year students. Since the first iteration, there have been some changes to the curriculum.

Materials have been refined over many semesters, and many new ones have been created. Teacher collaboration has played a key role in material creation, and there is now a wide variety of different materials focusing on speaking and listening skills, as well as conversation strategies.

To improve student recordings, transcriptions, and reflections, the university was successful in securing

government funding to develop an online plugin for Moodle (www.p-chat.com). In this plugin, students record their conversation as before, but they listen and type their transcripts immediately after recording. The recording and transcript are then processed and compared with Amazon's Transcribe, a cloud computing speech-to-text service. Students are then given various metrics instantly about their conversation including an accuracy score (Kirchmeyer, 2020).

Another major change is the number of topics, which were reduced to four due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students only attend one face-to-face class a week rather than two and have an online class that is on demand. As such, the lesson cycle was expanded to include four lessons instead of three. Placement tests, pre-tests, and orientations further impacted the number of topics that could be covered.

Conclusion

Students need to practice all skills when learning a language, simply focusing on a select few is not sufficient. Whilst test preparation is the primary focus for the Japanese education system, students should not be deprived of practicing what they learn, especially when it comes to conversation skills. When students first enter our university, they may often be overwhelmed with the amount of English they are required to use in class, but by the end of the semester, they can see the benefits of such practice. The majority of students do eventually feel comfortable holding an extended conversation, and results show that their fluency does increase. Furthermore, students themselves are aware of the progress they make, and it has had a positive effect on students in the English classroom.

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Exploration of Linguistic Landscapes and Implications for Building Intercultural Competence in ELT

By Hazem Osman, Sun Young Park, and Kara Mac Donald

English is widely found in public spaces, on streets, and on tourist signs throughout Korea; in tourist and foreign districts for functional purposes; and in areas associated with glocalization, affluence, and pop culture as a form of sociolinguistic leverage. Such linguistic landscapes in Korea have been rapidly changing in the past four-plus decades as a predominantly mono-ethnic society has continued to become more diverse, and with it, linguistic landscapes across the country reflect a more heterogeneous population (Lim, 2017) with the presence of non-English and non-Chinese signage in public spaces. Arabic and other languages now appear on signs in neighborhoods with such immigrant populations, foreign tourist populations, or overseas business markets.

These linguistic landscapes of increasingly multicultural Korea can be used to develop Korean EFL students' intercultural competence (ICC) level, while fostering their English proficiency for multicultural Korea and beyond. With world readiness standards in mind, a description of linguistic landscapes is provided, followed by a summary of three ICC frameworks that are accompanied by an instructional example on how Korean EFL teachers can use linguistic landscapes to build the students' ICC.

Linguistic Landscapes

Linguistic landscapes (LL) encompass the presence of language(s) and semiotics within a particular location. A comprehensive, often-referenced description is "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). The purpose of the field is to understand the impact of the presence of particular languages, their realms of use, and associated vitality or marginalization based on their configuration within a designated space or territory. The value of LL studies, which draw from various fields such as sociology, semiotics, and linguistics, is that they uncover and describe the motives, functions, and ideologies behind language varieties used in one public space and inform an understanding of social, political, educational, and commercial policies and practices.

Byram's, Deardoff's, & Borghetti's ICC Frameworks

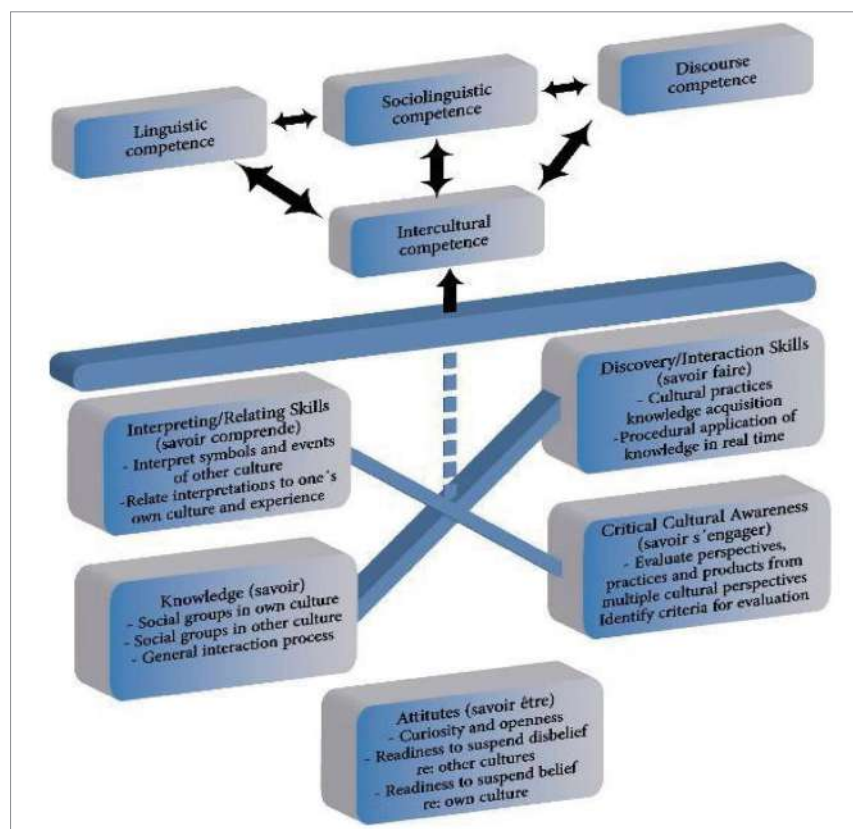
ICC is an individual's ability to shift their cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences (Leung et al., 2014). It is also an essential capability for not only study abroad and international commerce but also for multicultural interactions within a country. Individuals can have

various forms of multicultural face-to-face interactions as well as online interactions on social media platforms and other online venues. Therefore, instruction needs to go beyond ICC for inner circle English-speaking countries and also address the importance of fostering ICC that understands English interactions among individuals from diverse and multicultural contexts. Although communication may occur in English, adjustments in behavior and communication may need to be made.

Although there is one broad definition of ICC that focuses on an individual's knowledge, skills, and attitude, thus permitting them to shift behavior appropriately for cultural differences, there are different lenses through which to understand ICC. Byram (1997), Deardoff (2006), and Borgetti (2011) created three principal models, but each conceptualizes ICC slightly differently.

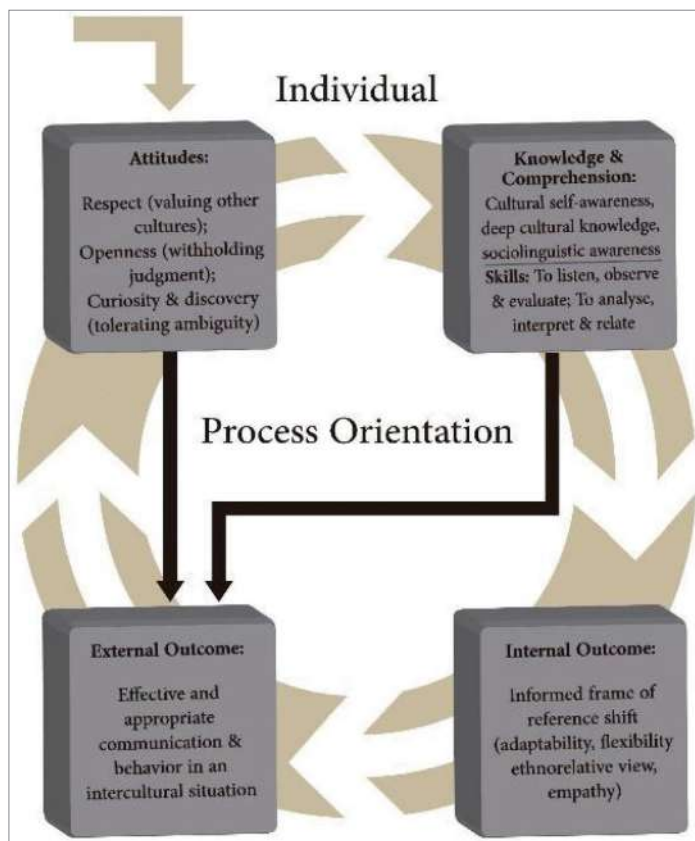
The first intercultural model presented is Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence. It is broken down into four main factors: *knowledge* about the students' own culture as well as the target culture; *skills* and know-how of interpreting and relating skills of interaction and discovery; *attitude*, which addresses affective aspects such as openness, curiosity, and readiness to withhold one's disbelief about others' cultures and beliefs about one's own; and *critical cultural awareness/political education* to critically evaluate perspectives, practices, and products of one's own culture and the other's cultures.

Figure 1. The ICC Model (adapted from Byram, 1997)



The second model is Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence (IC). Deardorff's model places all intercultural elements in a cyclical manner that starts with *attitude* and moves to *knowledge and comprehension*, i.e., skills, then to a *desired internal outcome* and concludes with a *desired external outcome*. According to Deardorff, shortcuts can be used in this model by dropping a desired internal outcome focus to proceed directly to a desired external outcome, but this may negatively impact the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of understanding of and/or conveying a message.

Figure 2. The Process Model of Intercultural Competence (adapted from Deardorff, 2006)



The third model is Borgetti's (2011) ICC model, which consists of four elements or processes: (a) cognitive process, mainly concerned with building students' knowledge about foreign and students' culture; (b) the affective processes, which include the involvement of one's sensations and emotions such as accepting and tolerating different values and concepts to interpret intercultural concepts; (c) awareness of the impact of one's culture and other cultures on values, behaviors, and attitudes of a society (i.e., cultural, intercultural); and (d) self-awareness (metacognition) of one's limits, preferences, and skills that come into play in an intercultural situation.

Again, each model conceptualizes ICC distinctly, but they all emphasize intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude to enable learners to think and act interculturally. At one level, the three models represent a development and expansion of an understanding of what constitutes ICC over time, but this does not suggest that Byram's model is currently less informative than the most recent model offered by Borgetti. Based on the specific objective and scope of ICC required by students, one may be more appropriate for a lens through which to design ICC activities and assess students' competencies. Additionally, the three models can work in tandem to offer a broader, encompassing understanding of ICC.

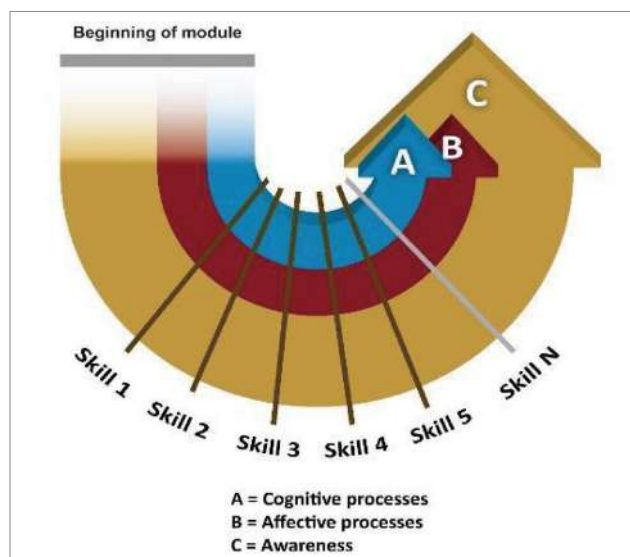
Sample Korean Linguistic Landscape

An example of a linguistic landscape from a restaurant storefront in Seoul (see Figure 4) was chosen to model how authentic language use in public spaces can be used to foster Korean EFL students' ICC. The English, Arabic, and romanized Arabic/Malay words on the sign offer a rich text for students to explore and build their ICC. Although not all Korean EFL learners may encounter such business signs in their neighborhoods, they may very well interact with Arabic speakers of English on campus as international students, on online social media platforms, or in the workplace. Additionally, they may interact with Muslim Arabic speakers of English in the above contexts, and it is important to understand the customs and practices of such individuals, while also knowing that not all Arabic speakers are Muslims and that not all Muslims speak Arabic.

There has been an increasing Muslim population in Korea due to international businesses, immigration, international students, tourism, and Koreans themselves converting (Kwon, 2014). Yet Islam is not new to Korea; it first came to the Korean peninsula through trade with Arab and Persian merchants, with records in the ninth century during the Goryeo Kingdom (Marino, 2015). There was a decline in the population during the Joseon Dynasty of the thirteenth century (Marino, 2015), with a reintroduction starting again during the Korean War when Turkish service members assisted the South (Diaconu & Tacet, 2017). However, many may not be familiar with the culture, customs, and religion of Islamic countries, as the Muslim population in Korea is only 0.3 percent (Marino, 2015).

The next section describes how the selected restaurant storefront signage, as one model of physical representation of multiculturalism in Korea, can be used to build intercultural competence and higher-level English proficiency, while fostering a broader understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the Korean context and beyond. The idea is that students can learn a lot about the increasingly multicultural Korean context, as well as other multicultural contexts, by developing their understanding of other cultures through using English to explore these cultures via linguistic landscapes as a base for classroom activities and/or projects.

Figure 3. The Dynamic Model of ICC (adapted from Borghetti, 2011)



Classroom Applications

Before describing possible activities that can be conducted based on the sample linguistic landscape below, some key terms and/or concepts are explained that are used in the activity description (see Table 1). This provides readers with a shared understanding of the terms used by the authors.

Table 1. Key Terms and Concepts Used in the Activity Description

Term / Concept	Meaning
Schemata Activation	Stimulating students' relevant prior knowledge so that new unfamiliar content can be connected to it to facilitate learning.
Salient Items	Words or images in a text in an image, written text, or audio file that are prominent, and therefore, most noticeable and/or important.
Project-Based Learning (PBL)	Students engage with content knowledge using language skills to understand or address a real-world issue.
Group Research	When two or more students work together to investigate a topic, discuss a question or issue, or collaborate to support each other in negotiation of understanding and meaning.
Providing Scaffolding	Breaking up learning into manageable chunks for learners through pre-teaching vocabulary or topic-related concepts, truncating or adapting authentic material, or other means of making language accessible to learners.
Information Gap	An activity where learners are missing pieces of information that they need to complete a task and need to interact to put all components of information together to complete the task.
Jigsaw Activity	A type of information gap activity where students serve as "experts" on a specific topic and then share that content with another group of students to create a broader understanding as part of a task.
Reporting Back	The process of sharing information within group deliberations to give value to an aspect of the topic (i.e., information gap / jigsaw activity).
Teaching Peers	Consists of one or more learners teaching other classmates on a particular topic.

The value of these processes incorporated in the linguistic landscape activity is founded on communicative language teaching (CLT) principles and task-based instruction (TBI), where learners are placed at the center of classroom instruction and engage in meaningful real-world language use and exploration.

Next, possibly unfamiliar terminology in the example linguistic landscape (Table 2) is defined for readers. In a similar fashion, a teacher can provide scaffolding for learners prior to an activity, if the selected linguistic landscape has unfamiliar terms or topics.

Table 2. Restaurant Storefront Sign Specific Terminology

Term	Meaning
Hajj	In Arabic, it is the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that takes place in the last month of the Islamic year. All Muslims who can afford it are expected to do at least one in their life.
Halal	In Arabic, it means "permissible." Halal food is that which adheres to Islamic law regarding the slaughtering of animals or poultry.
Makkah (Mecca)	A city in Saudi Arabia that Muslims consider to be a holy city in Islam.
Mubah	In Urdu and Arabic, it means "permitted," which informs actions based on Islamic law.
Lezat	In Malay, it means "good" or "delicious."
Inbu Sina	Known in the West as Avicenna; Was a Persian of wide-ranging knowledge and regarded as one of the fathers of early modern medicine.

With activity description terminology and key vocabulary for the sample linguistic landscape established, the authors present a sample activity.

First, the teacher will need to do a brief schemata activation activity, possibly by showing various public signs in Korea that have the familiar Korean, Chinese, and English translations

and asking students why they think the signs are in the three languages. With students introduced to multilingual public signs in Korea, the teacher can show the image of the storefront in Figure 4, and ask students if they have seen similar signs and if they know or can guess what languages, countries, and cultures are represented. Next, relevant vocabulary can be taught (see Table 2), and a class discussion of what students may know about the terms can be initiated. Then in pairs, students can share what elements stand out to them in the picture purely from a visual standpoint.

Afterwards, a whole class discussion can offer a consolidation of the most salient elements mentioned. For example, students may mention the prominent banner, "Special Hajj Package from Korea by Makkah Travel." Some learners may note that the "k" in *Korea* is not capitalized and would appear to be an error. This can be a point of discussion to consider possible reasons for the use of the lowercase letter, but in fact, there is no reason with regard to Arabic language transfer into English. It is purely an error. So, maybe students can consider why the error wasn't corrected. Also, the teachers may guide students to consider why a tour package advertisement is displayed over a restaurant. Students can consider the connection between the clientele of the restaurant and the clientele the tour company is trying to reach. Even though they may not be able to read the Arabic script, students may point out the large emblem with Arabic script on the storefront window [حلال: hala, permissible] or the large red writing in the middle of the standing yellow sign [حج: hajj, pilgrimage]. Some may mention the partially identifiable words in the Roman alphabet (mubah: permitted; lezat: good), the partially hidden name of the restaurant (Emirates Restaurant), and/or the round red-and-white sign (Inbu Sina: Avicenna, a philosopher and physician). In addition, they may mention the pictures of Korean/Asian food dishes on one sign and pictures of Middle Eastern dishes on the sign above the restaurant's name. As a closure to this segment of the activity, the teacher can identify what the words in Arabic script in the photo mean, so students can connect them to vocabulary items previously presented. An outcome of this segment of the lesson is students' heightened awareness of the religious, dietary, and social practices of a community with increasing presence in South Korean society beyond the observable artifacts and customs by exploring the beliefs and values behind them.

Figure 4. Seoul Restaurant Storefront (in Ady, 2015). Link in references for larger view.



In the next segment of the lesson, which can be done in another class session, students can be put into small groups

and asked, or assigned, one or two of the linguistic elements from the class compiled list (i.e., reflecting the vocabulary presented) to explore online to find out more about the meaning and significance in that culture. Then, the groups report back to the whole class so that the class gains a deeper understanding of what is present in this linguistic landscape. In a sense, this is an information gap / jigsaw activity built off an image. Depending on the age and level of the students, the teacher may need to provide some additional scaffolding for low-frequency terms and concepts. Nonetheless, at the end of this segment of the activity, students can understand some principle concepts of Muslims in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries. They would have identified that Mekkah (Mecca) Travel is named for the cradle of Islam and is home to the Great Mosque, while also learning about the practice of the hajj (Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca) and the custom of only eating halal ("permissible," for food preparation in Islam). In addition, they may identify that the restaurant is named for the United Arab Emirates, and they may predict that the shop to the left of the restaurant is possibly a pharmacy named after the Muslim peripatetic philosopher and physician.

As a follow up, students can do a research project on one of the identified socio-cultural components represented in the photo to gain a deeper understanding of tangible artifacts, visible practices, observable customs, and underlying beliefs and values connected to the chosen socio-cultural component. As appropriate for the age group, students can also be asked to focus beyond the newly acquired knowledge, understanding, and awareness and consider affective changes within themselves and/or in acceptance and tolerance of cultural differences. For example, students can be asked to highlight one new understanding that shifted the way they see themselves and/or Korean socio-cultural practices. A tangible outcome of the research projects can be a socio-cultural e-poster showcase where students present their work and teach one another more about another culture using English.

In this process of participating in all segments of the activity, the students will increase their knowledge and comprehension, and gain openness in their attitudes through the process of exploring similarities and differences among cultures, as represented in Bryam's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) ICC models. They will also obtain a sense of expected practices and etiquette, a shift in how they see the other culture and their own, and its influence on how they see the world, as represented in Deardorff's (2006) and Borgethetti's (2011) ICC models.

Physical representation of multiculturalism in the form of linguistic landscapes in Korea serves as a rich resource to build students' ICC and foster higher English proficiency. The activity presented is just one way teachers can utilize linguistic landscapes in the classroom. Each landscape offers a wealth of linguistic and socio-cultural information, and teachers can harness what they find most meaningful for their students and their learning objectives. The language and culture to focus on can be based on students' interests, what is most common in their neighborhoods, or what is not present. Additionally, the teacher does not always have to be the one who presents the selected linguistic landscape. Students can be asked to take pictures of multilingual signs they find interesting in their community or to select such images off the internet. In sum, the authenticity of linguistic landscapes serves as a base for developing in-depth activities and/or projects to foster students' ICC.

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Why Student Conversations Are So Formulaic and What Teachers Can Do About It

By Cameron Romney and John Campbell-Larsen

We often hear from teachers that they struggle to get their students to talk, and when they do talk, it's often short, awkward, and perfunctory. Of course, there are various reasons for this, but we believe that part of the issue is a lack of understanding, both from teachers and students, about what oral communication is and how it works.

When it comes to oral communication, there are a number of theories, communication models, and ways to describe the process. One of the simplest ways to think about oral communication is to make a simple binary distinction between what we might call transactional communication and phatic communication. Transactional communication is information exchange. One person has some information that another person does not. The first person tells the second person, and the information is transacted. Phatic communication is communicating for social purposes. Information may be exchanged, but the purpose is not the exchange. Transactional speaking seeks to achieve some practical outcome, and on the other hand, phatic communication, or social communication, is speaking for social purposes.

Many transactional goals are concrete and readily identifiable. Finding out what time a train departs,

explaining the reason for absence from class, and ordering food in a restaurant are all things that people "do" with language. On the other hand, in the case of phatic interaction, the goals are not as concrete or identifiable; the participants are engaging in talk for the primary purpose of being social. They are using language to create, maintain, and develop social connections with their interlocutors. These purposes are generally not taught to students and is one of the reasons for a lack of oral communicative ability.

Far from being a minor side issue of language use, it may be the case that this social talk is the central function of spoken language in all cultures. Despite the pejorative or trivial connotations that often apply to notions of small talk, chit chat, gossip, and the like, the ability to engage in phatic interaction is a vital ability that language learners need to add to their repertoire of L2 skills. After all, when interacting in English, a second language user won't primarily be judged on their ability to write clear and concise emails, but on their ability to engage in social communication with others.

We think that it is a mistake to assume that this kind of interactional social skill will emerge naturally once a certain amount of lexis and grammar knowledge are in



place. It doesn't automatically piggyback on more general language instruction. Rather, we think that students need focused teaching on, and extensive practice of, social talk.

How to Teach Phatic Communication

One of the more common interactional patterns found in EFL teaching, and one that causes a great amount of awkward communication, is the question-and-answer pattern. That is, one student asks a question and the other student answers it; it is the cornerstone of the communicative method. The problem is that this pattern often creates very awkward and strange interactions – at best, these are interviews; at worst, they are police interrogations. A typical student exchange might look something like this:

- A: What did you do on the weekend?
B: I went downtown.
A: Who did you go with?
B: My friends.
A: What did you do?
B: Ate dinner.

What makes this series of questions and answers uncomfortable is that these are purely transactional interactions with only a basic exchange of information. They completely lack the social/phatic elements that make up conversation. Many teachers recognize the awkwardness of these interactions and try to have students fix them by asking follow-up questions, but this usually is unsuccessful because all it does is add more questions and answers. It doesn't address any of the real issues such as a lack of discourse marking, a lack of reciprocal self-disclosure, a lack of reactions, and a lack of expansive answers.

the students a social/phatic pattern for an interaction and then have the students apply that pattern to an example conversation. A very simple, single-turn pattern is this:

- A: Pre-question statement + QUESTION
B: ANSWER + extra information
A: I like cheesecake. What kind of sweets do you like?
B: I like ice cream. Mint chocolate chip is my favorite.

Students can apply the pattern to the example with some simple instructions such as (a) underline the pre-question statement, (b) draw a box around the question, (c) draw a circle around the answer, and (d) double underline the extra information.

After analyzing the example, teachers can have the students write their own conversations following the pattern (with or without a template they can fill in) and then move on to use the pattern without preplanning.

This is just one example. Of course, the first step is that teachers need to know the phatic/social elements of oral communication in English. It is completely beyond our ability to list, let alone describe, all the elements here. Teachers will need to seek out this information on their own. Fortunately, a number of new textbooks are emerging that have this information and make it accessible to both teachers and students. A good place to start is with the Touchstone series of textbooks by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, and Helen Sandiford published by Cambridge University Press.

Creating a Space for Interaction

The typical view of a language lesson is that the teacher uses the class time to teach some knowledge of the L2

“Transactional speaking seeks to achieve some practical outcome, and on the other hand, phatic communication, or social communication, is speaking for social purposes.”

One way to break students out of this pattern, and to help them realize the difference, is to have the students analyze some example conversations, both good and bad. Teachers can start with a typical student conversation (like the one above) and then write a more natural version (like the one below):

- A: I was so busy this weekend studying. What did you do?
B: Actually, I went downtown and hung out with my friends.
A: Oh yeah? What'd you do?
B: We had dinner at that new American-style diner. You know, the one that just opened? It was pretty good.

Teachers will usually need to guide the students in their analysis with some questions like “Which conversation do you like better?” “Why do you like it?” “What is the biggest difference between the two?”

For students at a lower level, a more simplified and structured approach is useful. Teachers can begin by giving

to students, and the students engage in teacher-directed activities to practice the taught language or in some way demonstrate successful understanding. Underlying this is the notion that what happens in a lesson must follow an institutional agenda and that transfer of knowledge, focused practice, and subsequent testing of what has been taught are the only legitimate uses of class time. However, speaking to an externally imposed agenda is fundamentally at odds with the notion of phatic conversation, which is, and must be, primarily student based. The agenda of any truly phatic talk must be one that emerges from the students themselves. In order to facilitate this, and to get away from the more normal kinds of structured student speaking that characterizes most classroom talk, we think that teachers should set aside a period of class time during each lesson for the students to engage in free conversation with each other. We call this “student talk time” (STT). There are several things to consider when establishing STT as a regular part of class time.

Firstly, the students must be very clear on what the purpose of STT is. That is, they must be aware that this

“...we think that teachers should set aside a period of class time during each lesson for the students to engage in free conversation with each other. We call this ‘student talk time’ (STT).”

activity will be developing more naturalistic interactional skills like topic nomination, turn-taking and repair procedures, and managing participation frameworks and the like, rather than practicing certain grammatical or lexical items for their own sake.

Secondly, the STT must be extensive. Two or three minutes of talk are insufficient for moving beyond the kinds of uncomfortable student interactions described above. Extended interactions mean that participants have to be proactive in things like topic management and maintenance, sustaining progressivity, making sure that everyone is included, and other interactional matters. Of course, STT will be inappropriate for absolute beginners or small children, but can, we think, be instituted quite early in any L2 teaching program. Depending on level, STT should be instituted to last at least 15 minutes. For more advanced students, STT may be much longer.

Thirdly, STT must be repeated, rather than a one-and-done or intermittent activity. We suggest that STT is incorporated into every class as a core lesson phase instead of being sandwiched in when time allows or seen as some kind of “bonus” activity that is a mere add-on to the more important and prestigious business of grammar and lexical work.

In addition to these points, the teachers must be aware of the likely nature of STT as it unfolds over the duration of the semester or course. In the beginning, there will likely be some confusion from the students and uncertainty as to how to proceed. In these early stages, there are likely to be long silences and reversion to L1 as the students struggle to adapt to an unfamiliar classroom experience. Even once STT has become established (and this may take quite some time), there are still likely to be instances of reversion to L1, especially in cases where all learners are from the same L1 background. Teachers should not expect 100% use of the L2 or criticize any use of the L1. The orientation to using the L2 should be primarily student generated. That is, it should be viewed as an opportunity for students to use whatever L2 abilities they have at hand to achieve their own interactional goals rather than pleasing the teacher.

Teachers must also be prepared for the fact that development of a more extensive repertoire of interactional skills may not trend upward continuously. In some weeks, students may be less inclined, for whatever reason, to engage in a fully proactive manner, and the conversation may be desultory, bland, and unenthusiastic in comparison to conversations in previous lessons. This is to be expected.

In short, interactional skills are seen as emerging across time and as a result of both focused instruction and the

simple action of “doing” interaction on a regular basis. Clarity of purpose, mutually agreed on goals, patience, understanding, and encouragement are the key factors underlying this approach. In our experience, most students come to enjoy the use of class time for STT. Over weeks and months, students become more confident in their language abilities, more willing to take risks and experiment, and to change their identities from an institutional role of language learners to a social role as language users.

Our two suggestions here are not magic bullets that will suddenly and drastically improve a student’s oral communication ability. However, we have both had success with giving students realistic models to analyze and emulate, and then giving them space to talk freely and practice their social communication.

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Creating Activities and Publishing Teacher Resources: An Interview with Hall Houston

Hall Houston is an ELT author, as well as a presenter and teacher trainer. He has published half a dozen books, the most recent being 101 EFL Activities for Teaching University Students (iTDi, 2022). Hall has worked as a full-time lecturer at universities in Taiwan and Hong Kong for over two decades. He currently teaches undergraduate students at National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences. The English Connection's editor-in-chief recently reached out to Hall to ask him about his passion for creating and publishing teacher resource books. — Ed.

The English Connection (TEC): First of all, Hall, thank you for taking the time to do this interview and share your work and thoughts with TEC readers.

Hall Houston: Well, thank you! It's quite an honor to be interviewed for your publication.

TEC: Would you like to start off by introducing your time in Asia and your work experience?

Hall: My first experience of teaching English was at language centers in Taiwan in the mid-90s I taught some children's classes but mostly taught adults. Later, I returned to the U.S. and did a master's degree in foreign language education. Then, I went to Taiwan again, initially teaching at language centers, then gradually started working at universities. I feel most successful as a teacher at universities, and I prefer it over teaching at language schools.

TEC: Why is that?

Hall: I think largely it's because I have more years of experience of teaching at universities, and I prefer the environment of a university campus.

TEC: You're the author of several books about language teaching. Can you briefly describe your publishing history to our readers?

Hall: My first published article was a collection of teaching ideas that appeared in *The Internet TESL Journal* in 1999. That was followed by a short article about teaching English in Taiwan published in *It's for Teachers* magazine. One of my proudest achievements was winning the One Stop English Lesson Share competition, which I have won several times. It's a competition held by the One Stop English website, where teachers submit a lesson plan, and judges decide which lesson plan is the best submission. For the past few years, I have published around 10 articles each year. Some of these articles are book reviews, but many of them are practical articles with activities for teachers to use in class.

The first two books I wrote, *The Creative Classroom* (Lynx, 2007) and *Provoking Thought* (Booksurge, 2009), focused on thinking skills (memory, creativity, and critical thinking). As far as I know, my books were the first to explore these themes in relation to ELT. I spent a lot of time reading about memory, creativity, and critical thinking. Those two books were an attempt to link these themes to teaching English, with the aim of showing how students can develop their cognitive skills as they learn a new language.

After that, I wrote *The ELT Daily Journal*, (CreateSpace, 2013), which is a journal for new teachers. It's ideal for teachers who want to keep a journal on their progress as teachers. It features an introduction by Rose Senior, along with teaching tips from some famous ELT authors

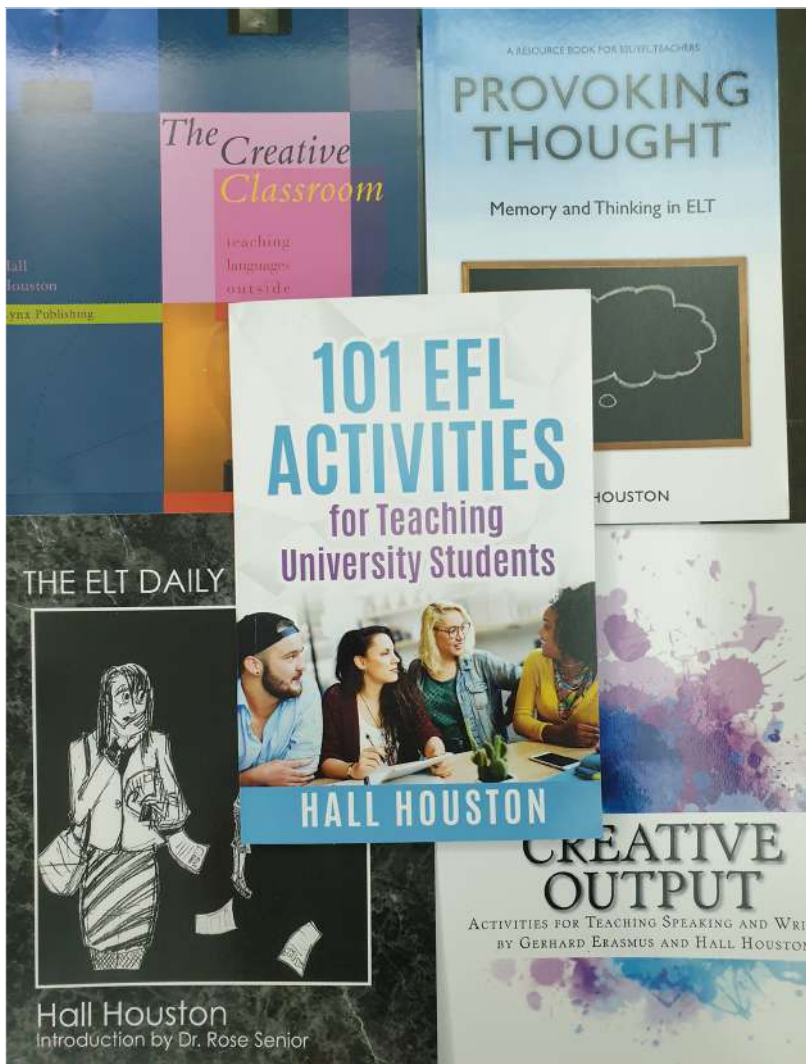


▲ Hall Houston with his most recent teachers' resource book.

such as Andrew Wright, Scott Thornbury, and Chia Suan Chong. That book had more mixed reviews than any other book I've written. It received some high praise, but also some critics thought the book was too simple, and others couldn't accept the blank page format of the journal. Afterwards, I collaborated with Gerhard Erasmus on two titles, *Brainstorming* (The Round, 2016) and *Creative Output* (CreateSpace, 2017). It was a great experience co-authoring both books, especially with a brilliant collaborator such as Gerhard.

TEC: What do you think were some of the driving forces that made you want to become such a prolific writer and designer of ELT classroom activities?

Hall: I was inspired by the early resource books for teachers published by Cambridge University Press, such as *Five Minute Activities* (Cambridge, 1992), along with magazines such as *It's for Teachers* and *English Teaching Professional*. The books of Natalie Hess, Mario Rinvolucri, and Chaz Pugliese have been very influential. Even though I use coursebooks in my lessons, I like to supplement them with my own activities, and I love creating activities for my



▲ A selection of Hall's ELT publications.

own students and observing their reactions to the activities. It's an incredibly rewarding experience to write an activity and then see it come to life in the classroom!

TEC: You've talked about activities "coming to life" and the active role students should take. Can you describe as a writer/designer what comprises a successful classroom activity, and then as a teacher how you like to see your students engaging in that activity?

Hall: Some qualities that make a good classroom activity are a clear teaching aim (or aims), personalization (students can draw on their own life experiences and thoughts to participate in the activity), interaction (students communicate with each other and share ideas), creativity (the activity encourages students to play and experiment with language), and movement (students get out of their seats and move around the classroom). However, not all successful activities would include all of those qualities. I hope to see students attentively listening to the instructions for the activity and enthusiastically participating in the activity afterwards.

TEC: How can a collection of EFL activities be utilized by university instructors that are perhaps required to use a coursebook in a course? On the other hand, how can a collection of EFL activities be implemented in a clear sequential way as the singular course material over a semester?

Hall: I think activities should be chosen judiciously. I feel that activities are great for adding a little variety to a lesson, as well as giving students additional opportunities to review and practice bits of language from the book. Using activities instead of a coursebook is certainly another way to teach a course, but the activities should be organized in a logical manner and should follow clear lesson aims.

TEC: In terms of practical classroom procedure, when you say activities should be used, do you mean photocopied and passed out to students, worked through sequentially from a book, explained by the teacher at the board, or some other way? What about time management issues?

Hall: Most of the activities I have written are not intended to be photocopied and distributed. Therefore, teachers need to explain the activity before it begins.

Time management is often a tricky issue with most language learning activities, as some classes might use more time to finish an activity than others. It's a good idea to think about one's lesson plan in advance and decide which parts of the lesson are the most important and which parts can be left out, if necessary. This is beneficial when an activity runs longer than expected or ends much quicker than expected. Furthermore, during a lesson, a teacher can set a strict time limit for pairs or groups to finish an activity. When time's up, the teacher can check with

"It's an incredibly rewarding experience to write an activity and then see it come to life in the classroom!"

the students on their progress. If several pairs or groups indicate that they need more time, teachers can give them a few more minutes.

TEC: Being published through iTDi (International Teacher Development Institute) puts you in a professional community of world class English language educators (including Scott Thornbury, Stephen Krashen, and John F. Fanselow). That's quite a group of colleagues.

Hall: Yes, it's a great privilege to work with iTDi. As you mentioned, there are so many talented people associated with this organization. During the past couple of years, I've worked together with Steven Herder and Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto, who have helped with editing and promoting the book. They also assisted me in creating the book cover. They gave me a lot of excellent feedback on my manuscript. It's been a marvelous experience working with Barbara and Steven.

TEC: Your most recent teachers' resource book, *101 EFL Activities for Teaching University Students* (iTDi, 2022),

contains activities that relate to three major themes: the context of the university environment, group dynamics (the stages of a group), and active learning. What can teachers using your book expect with themes such as these?

Hall: The first theme relates to the notion that students should have some opportunities to practice language in the context most relevant to them, their school or university. There are many activities in my book where students can describe their campus, as well as talk about problems and situations often faced by university students.

The second theme provides the structure of the book, covering the beginning, middle, and end of a semester. The first section of the book has lots of activities to help students learn each other's names and get to know each other, both of which are important in the first few weeks of class. In the middle of the semester, teachers should probably add a wider range of teaching activities, along with some review of material from the start of the course, and the second part of the book features a large number of these types of activities. The final section of the book contains activities to end the semester smoothly and looks back over the highlights of the course.

The third theme, active learning, appears throughout the book. It's now quite common practice in university courses for professors to ask students to take an active role in their learning through group work or writing instead of spending an entire lesson listening to a non-stop lecture. The book

“... I'm strongly influenced by task-based teaching and learning, the communicative approach, and teaching unplugged (Dogme).”

has an abundance of activities for reviewing vocabulary and content from a course in an active way.

TEC: Would you say your activities follow a task-based methodology, perhaps focused on peer learning and collaboration? Or more towards individual learners? Or something else?

Hall: My activities don't follow a specific method or approach, but I'm strongly influenced by task-based teaching and learning, the communicative approach, and teaching unplugged (Dogme).

TEC: Has the last two-plus years of COVID-19-induced video technology, Zoom, and non-F2F formats given you pause to reassess your teaching methodology?

Hall: Yes, it has. Over a short period of time, I've had to learn how to teach online and become familiar with the technology needed to teach online. This period of time has made me reexamine how I present input (audio and video) and how I use my voice during lessons. I took a course, Teaching English Online, which was created by Cambridge University Press and Assessment and is available on FutureLearn. I highly recommend it!

TEC: I suspect most experienced teachers over the years have acquired what works and doesn't work for them, in addition to amassed binders of lessons and activities. What advice would you give to an aspiring writer wanting to gather all that up and form it into some kind of coursebook or activity resource book?

Hall: As there are already countless resource books available, my advice is to try to find a unique angle for one's book, and avoid just repeating the same activities that appear in many other books. If a teacher wants to include a very common teaching activity, I think it's wise to give it an original twist or add a few variations. Also, I recommend finding someone to proofread and edit your manuscript, ideally someone with a background in ELT that will be able to give you some valuable feedback. Another good idea is to ask other teachers to read over your manuscript and offer their thoughts. Moreover, I suggest that teachers read more about materials development and perhaps even take a course on the subject, such as Course Materials: Design, Selection and Use (iTDi) and Materials Development for Language Teaching (Nile ELT).

TEC: Thank you, Hall, for sharing your experience and advice with our readers. Wishing you continued successes in your teaching and publishing endeavors.

Hall: Thank you for this opportunity to connect with the readers of *The English Connection*. It's been a pleasure!

Interviewed by Andrew White.



▲ Students doing a task activity.

Member Spotlight: John Breckenfeld

While the pandemic has had a decelerating effect on so many aspects of our lives, that does not seem to be the case for one of our KOTESOL members. The name "John Breckenfeld" just keeps popping up as a presenter at chapter events and as both a presenter and a Zoom session host at this year's international conference. The English Connection thought it was about time we caught up with this person to see what makes him tick, or should we say "buzz." Here is our interview. — Ed.

TEC: Thank you, John, for allowing *The English Connection* to shine its spotlight on you for this issue. To begin with, would you tell us who John Breckenfeld was and what he did before coming to Korea? And also, what were the circumstances that brought you to Korea?



▲ **John was very excited to learn that he was joining the Foreign Language Education Center (FLEC) at HUFUS in 2019.**

John: Thank you for contacting me about the interview. I am very happy to share a bit about me with the KOTESOL network. After receiving my BA in global studies in 2005, for a few years after college, I was living in Los Angeles and exploring career paths in the nonprofit sector. Before long, a clear pattern emerged where I found myself doing education-related work. So, I applied and was accepted to the UCLA Teacher Education Program, which I began in the fall of 2009. After receiving my preliminary teaching credential in the spring of 2010, the next few years included the following career and life developments: first, a one-year teaching experience at a small, rural elementary school in Gangneung, Gangwon-do, where I met my girlfriend who would become my future wife; next, a two-year stint working at a small private K-8 school back in LA while I completed my MEd at the UCLA TEP (as we continued our relationship long-distance); and finally a return to Gangneung to reunite with my then-girlfriend and continue my career in education.

TEC: How would you describe your current work situation?

John: I have been teaching at HUFUS (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul campus) for the past three and a half years, which included two pre-pandemic semesters in 2019. I expect the fall semester (2022) will continue to function as a transition period back toward a more "normal" on campus experience for college students and faculty. I typically teach four class sections of the same communicative English course,

with around 120 students each semester. My time at HUFUS has given me consistent opportunities to work on classroom practices, pedagogy, and syllabus development that ideally align with my educational philosophy and future career goals. I couldn't imagine a better workplace to pursue these efforts.

TEC: Would you share your teaching philosophy with us?

John: I am very passionate about education functioning as space for student empowerment and self-determination. As I teach communicative English classes, I am discovering that cultivating student voice and expression (i.e., communication fluency) may activate huge potential in these areas. I also care deeply about making my classes as useful as possible for students and doing what I can to help students understand how they could use or would prefer to use English in their future.

TEC: How did you originally find out about KOTESOL, and how long have you been a member?

John: My first introduction to KOTESOL was attending a Gangwon Chapter event in 2014. Then, my wife – who is a public elementary school teacher in Gangwon-do – shared very high praise describing her experiences with KOTESOL as a college student at the Kangwon National University of Education a few years earlier. Later, in the spring of 2015, I was accepted to present at the upcoming KOTESOL International Conference, and at a Jeju-do Chapter event that summer, which served as a highly effective "warm-up" to the 2015 IC. These experiences got me hooked on the annual KOTESOL conference circuit. Finally, becoming a lifetime KOTESOL member in 2015 was easily one of the best decisions I have ever made in regard to my ongoing professional development.

TEC: You seem to be quite active as a presenter during the pandemic, being an invited presenter at a variety of online chapter workshops. But after doing a little research I discovered that you've been presenting all along at KOTESOL events and conferences. How did you catch the presenter bug and still manage to keep a low profile for so long?

John: As I mentioned, for most years since 2015, it has been very rewarding to present at a few KOTESOL conferences and events each year. Every time I attend a KOTESOL International or National Conference, I am greatly inspired by other presenters and/or keynote speakers I hear. So, I apply to present at conferences with two goals in mind: First, I hope to give something back – however small – to the wider KOTESOL network, and second, to further develop and improve my own classroom practices. Additionally, it is valuable to do supplementary research in preparation for a conference presenter application or a conference event.

As for keeping a low profile, I am not entirely sure, but I assume that my early years as a KOTESOL member were largely developmental for me as both an instructor and presenter. Then, as time has passed, my presentation

proposals – and the related work I do with students in the classroom – have improved just enough to make my presentations more useful to the wider KOTESOL audience in general. Without a doubt, it has been a huge advantage for me to increase and/or enhance the relationships I have developed over time with KOTESOL colleagues, especially through online events while social distancing during the pandemic.

TEC: You have presented and written on a variety of topics – from music and movies and podcasts to debate, critical analysis of writing, goal setting, economics-driven content, and Krashen’s compelling content. What are your present main interests in the field of EFL or in education in general?

John: Going back to my time in teacher training, and even the years before I started my credential program in 2009, I have felt most passionate about the potential of education to serve as a transformative force that equips and empowers students to seek out their fullest potential in life – to pursue their ideal self. More concretely, I am continually inspired by Paulo Freire’s problem-posing education theory. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) argues that “in problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). Wherever each student may seek to go, I am truly inspired by the potential that exists within our classrooms to direct students toward transformation – on individual, societal or even global levels.

“Becoming a lifetime KOTESOL member in 2015 was easily one of the best decisions I have ever made in regard to professional development.”

Through the compelling input hypothesis, Stephen Krashen (2011) argues that “compelling input appears to eliminate the need for motivation, a conscious desire to improve. When you get compelling input, you acquire, whether you are interested in improving or not” (p. IC1). While Krashen argues that written text – either read by or read to the student – is the best medium to make the most of compelling input, I have typically sought to inspire students through compelling English audio content, which also includes transcripts so that students may develop listening and reading fluency concurrently. Over the past few years, many students have expressed highly positive feedback to audio content we have used, both anecdotally and through written reflections. My wish is that the content I share with students will also inspire and equip them in their own life journeys during and beyond university. If Freire’s and Krashen’s aims are met in combination to the fullest extent, students may acquire language automatically while receiving compelling content that, in turn, causes transformation – perhaps even compelling them to take life-changing action.

Here is one recent example: This spring, my students worked in small groups to create team presentations focused on one of the following three topic areas: (a) The Future of Education, (b) The Future of Food, (c) The Future of Travel. Through a problem-posing lens, the “food” and “travel” themes in particular challenged students to analyze individual and societal impacts our lifestyles have on the natural environment, and then to consider the changes that must be



▲ John with teammates at the 2022 Oxfam Trailwalker event in Inje-gun last June.

made to work toward a more sustainable future. These types of activities and student engagement in the classroom keep the wheels of my mind spinning throughout the day.

TEC: What would you like to see KOTESOL do as it comes out of the throes of the pandemic?

John: It will be wonderful to join ELT colleagues again at hybrid and in-person KOTESOL events and conferences, hopefully in the near future. Additionally, on personal and professional levels, I am highly interested in sharing resources and collaborating with others around research-focused efforts. While I am not currently enrolled in a formal academic research degree program (i.e., PhD), I hope to further explore how the KOTESOL network may enhance the academic research efforts of its members, myself included.

TEC: What do you do when you’re not teaching or preparing for classes?

John: In my free time, I love catching up on reading, music, and movies. Also, my life in general is much better – and more productive – when I can get outside often to go running, hiking, or cycling. But my greatest joy is spending time with my son, Junhee, who will turn four this December.

TEC: What do you see John Breckenfeld doing in the next three to five years? And beyond? Will KOTESOL and Korea be part of those plans?

John: I would be thrilled to continue working at Hufs for at least the next five or ten years, and I plan to live in Korea indefinitely (...Gangneung City!). I am sure that KOTESOL will continue to be a major source of inspiration and support in my professional development, and I would be thrilled to increase my participation in KOTESOL as my time and abilities best allow.

TEC: Well, John, we wish you the best in your KOTESOL, professional, and educational pursuits, and hope that your much-loved Gangneung develops into a thriving metropolis!

References

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Interviewed by David Shaffer.

The Classroom Connection

Dogme & I

By Peter Thwaites

In 2005, just a year after my CELTA course had taught me how to teach perfectly reproducible lessons, I discovered a small online chat group dedicated to discussing a wildly different approach. The group aimed to, according to Scott Thornbury at the TESOL International Convention (2022) in Pittsburgh, “look for ways of exploiting the learning opportunities offered by the raw materials of the classroom; that is, the language that emerges from the needs, interests, concerns, and desires of the people in the room.” In other words, it sought methods for teaching languages through interaction and genuine communication. Its members shared descriptions of classroom activities and discussions of theoretical touchstones, which together hinted at a way of escaping from standardized teaching practices and, instead, building both individual lessons and wider curriculum content out of learners’ voices.

I was captivated. It had taken only a couple of months of CELTA-style teaching – of presenting, practicing, and producing – for me to start feeling unfulfilled. I felt that by going into class with pre-selected content, I was assigning a passive role to my students, and thereby missing opportunities to let their needs guide our classes. True, my pre-CELTA teaching had been chaotic, but by starting from where the students were, it had made them feel involved and valued. It had pushed me to develop skills – an ability to create rapport, a capacity to address learner needs on the fly – which felt redundant in delivering teacher-centered PPP classes. The chat group exhilarated me because it made me believe that I could bring genuine interaction back to my classes without sacrificing educational gain.

Besides, it was just so exciting following the discussion. The group’s first 600-odd posts communicated not only a new vision of language teaching but also the thrill of people finding their place. I feasted on the joy, respect, and togetherness that the group embodied, and it wasn’t long before I was posting my own classroom descriptions and making contributions. Inherent in the group’s appeal was its gently counter-cultural orientation. Since they viewed genuinely communicative classes as being unrepeatable, the group’s members argued against standardization in all its forms, from the textbook-dominated classrooms to the dominance of on-rails methodologies in teacher training programs. It’s not hard to see why this chimed with me: Having spent the preceding months feeling that the quality of my teaching depended on perfecting precisely that standardized approach, I felt freed. The year or so that followed were the most exciting of my career: Every time I stepped into the classroom, a sense of possibility came with me. And because I could share my experience with the chat group, I felt that it was not only my own students who could benefit but also a wider community who were shaking our profession up.

To be fair, I wasn’t the only person in the world to be swept along by an online chat group in 2005. In fact, half the world probably felt the way I did. It was the height of Web 2.0, the period in which user-generated content began to alter the structure of the internet, and just under a year after, I discovered the ELT Dogme Yahoo group. Time magazine would declare “You” to be its person of the year in acknowledgement of the way that online activity was changing human interaction. In years since then, much of the infrastructure that initially enabled these online communities to emerge has disappeared (Yahoo Groups closed in 2020), replaced by larger but less coherent communities on Twitter or on the blogs and websites of star contributors. The ELT dogme movement fragmented in much the same way: Though its insights spread into classrooms all over the world, as a movement it became less collaborative, less coherent than during its heady beginnings. Ironically, given the importance that dogme attaches to the voices of individuals, the stories of its individual teachers became harder to discern.

As the dogme chat group fragmented, my efforts to develop a more communicative style of teaching became more solitary. As my career progressed, I took jobs in increasingly professional institutions who saw standardization as a means of establishing or protecting their reputations. Facing a need to “deliver” pre-determined content, and to prepare students for standardized achievement tests, spontaneity got pushed to the peripherals. Combined with the increases in teaching and administrative loads that come at higher pay grades, it often felt easier just to do the textbook stuff. Dogme started to become a fringe activity in my classes: We could pursue learners’ needs and interests, but only after we’d completed Activity C on page 12. Although my own approach to dogme continued to evolve, I gradually lost track of the wider movement; In truth, I started to assume that the movement had, like me, lost momentum as its lofty ambitions hit up against day-to-day realities.

So, I was both surprised and excited to see Scott Thornbury (one of the founding fathers of the ELT dogme movement, and still its global figurehead) recently give a presentation to the TESOL International conference arguing that dogme had “come of age.” Thornbury’s argument rested on three propositions. Firstly, he argued that in the years since the dissolution of the dogme ELT group, he and others have made efforts to address the tendency for dogme to be defined in negative ways – for example, that it is “anti-textbook” or doesn’t trust materials. He suggested that dogme can be framed more positively by discussing what it does involve – namely, a set of teaching practices in which cycles of task, feedback, and repetition are built from learner interests and aim to address (emerging) learner needs. Dogme therefore reveals itself to be a form of task-based language teaching in which standardized materials such as textbooks are replaced by texts created by the people in the room.

Secondly, Thornbury argued that recent research has offered a firmer theoretical basis upon which dogme can stand. In particular, he highlights the

growth of socio-cultural and usage-based views of language and learning. Both research traditions emphasize the social roots of language and the need for language learning to emerge from participation and social interaction. He cites, for example, Nick Ellis in his *Cognitive and Social Aspects of Learning from Usage*: “Language is learned from participatory experience of processing language during embodied interaction in social and cultural contexts” (2015, p. 61). Such research, Thornbury argues, provides theoretical support for the importance of the social and interactional aspects of classroom activity that the dogme movement has long treasured.

Lastly, Thornbury highlighted the extent to which teachers have found, and continue to find, inspiration and opportunity in the dogme approach. Quoting from teachers’ Twitter posts, he showed how dogme can influence teaching careers. One teacher, for instance, claimed that dogme “marked my progression into actually being a teacher ... not an instructional attendant.” Such testimonies suggest the power of the dogme approach to connect teachers with the core elements of being a language teacher – the root practices of listening, noticing, scaffolding, and facilitating. They echo the process of reconnection with teaching essentials that I underwent when discovering the dogme ELT chat group.

So, is it true that dogme has “come of age”? Well sadly, I don’t think it has. Thornbury’s arguments certainly seem to suggest that it is less precariously poised than in its early years – more clearly defined and with deeper theoretical support. But dogme nevertheless remains a relatively marginal, counter-cultural aspect of TESOL culture. Scholars Geoff Jordan and Humphrey Gray (2019) have noted, for example, that “it is rare to see any of the alternatives [to standardized language teaching approaches, such as dogme] discussed in journals, or at conferences, or in teacher training courses such as CELTA” (*We Need to Talk About Coursebooks*, *ELT Journal*, 73(4), 438–446). This is to say nothing of the near-total lack of knowledge of these alternative methods in many EFL contexts. There is a reluctance or a resistance to the wider adoption of these methods. My take is that it doesn’t feel true to talk of a method coming of age when it remains so marginal.

“So, standardization in TESOL isn’t going anywhere.”

This reluctance to embrace alternatives to TESOL standardization is not a new thing – indeed, it was a key part of dogme’s founding ideology. As early as 1998, Scott Thornbury made an analogy between bottled water (which could be said to represent the privatization and commodification of something that nobody owns) and the publishing industry’s treatment of grammar, which they “bottle” and commercialize in order to drive profit. The

dogme chat group also discussed the challenge of teaching alternative practices like dogme on initial teacher training courses like CELTA. (This discussion continued for some years on the website teachertrainingunlugged.com.) And of course, few would deny that it can be helpful, at least in some cases, to standardize teaching practices – doing so can help newly trained teachers to feel competent, increase professionalism in schools (at least on the surface), lend face validity to classroom practices, and also form the basis for wide acceptance of linguistic proficiency tests.



So, standardization in TESOL isn’t going anywhere. But alternative methods like dogme have a role to play that goes beyond their immediate use in the classroom: to provide a check on the power and influence of standardization in language teaching. Its job is to make sure that teachers don’t forget that real education requires real student participation – not just in the sense of speaking up during class time but by helping to guide curricula content. It may not be fair to suggest that dogme’s coming of age can only be celebrated when the giants of the TESOL world have been felled; still, I think that its impact, not clarity of theory or method, that alternative methods must be judged by. To maximize this impact, we need to talk about how to implement alternative methods at scale. Can initial teacher training programs, such as the CELTA, be adapted to help trainees teach without standardized methods? Can we persuade administrators that paying customers in language schools are not necessarily happier when standardized methods are used to erode the differences between individual teachers? Can we establish best practices regarding the classroom situations in which published materials really help, and in which they hinder?

Looking back on my own journey with dogme, I wonder now whether I began to drift away from the movement not only because it became more fragmented but also because it turned its focus inward, toward self-definition and theoretical support. I suppose that this is fair enough. But if Thornbury’s claim of dogme’s coming of age means anything, perhaps it is that the time has arrived for the movement to look outward again: to re-assert its critical, counter-cultural credentials. That is where it is needed most.

The Columnist

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The Brain Connection

Why Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Trains the Brain in a Unique Way

By Dr. Curtis Kelly

There is this thing that has bothered me for a long time. I love TBLT (task-based language teaching). I think it is right. Human. Natural. And I am so glad it is being used more and more in language teaching. That is as it should be.

But this is what bothers me. No one has really been able to say why it is so good. I mean, what does TBLT really give us that other approaches do not? Sure, a task can be more reflective of what a student might experience in the real world, like filling out a hotel check-in card, but to tell the truth, that is not what attracts me to TBLT. In fact, I hate those boring kinds of real-world tasks and go for the less realistic ones, like solving a murder mystery! By the way, these are officially referred to as, respectively, “rehearsal” and “activation” tasks ... another example of the confusing jargon that academics like to throw on top of simple concepts. Also, as a side note, I wrote a TBLT book in the early nineties I was both embarrassed about but secretly considered my best, *The Snoop Detective School Conversation Book*. It is full of information gap mysteries to solve. Older and less likely to be embarrassed these days, I am regrooving these murder mysteries with a friend, to be published by Abax. Write me if you’d like to try one or two.

The pundits also tell us that students might get more engaged by doing tasks, and they are more likely to use their own language in an output task, but I can show you dozens of traditional PPP lessons that do this too, even with “Write five hope to be sentences about your future.”

No. There is something else that makes TBLT special, something no one has clearly explained yet. I can’t put my finger on it, but I know it is there. And to go along with that feeling, there is this niggle I can’t get rid of. Deep in my gut, I know that the answer to this question can be found in neuroscience. I’m sure it is there, but not sure where. I do see a connection to the social brain, predictive processing, and how emotion shapes learning, but again, none of these concepts from neuroscience are particular to TBLT.

Then, a couple months ago, I found the answer. And as expected, it came from neuroscience. Let me explain:

First of all, tasks are the hallmark of task-based learning. Tasks are problems to be solved, usually closing some kind of knowledge gap between learners. The key points are that (a) the learner’s primary goal is completing the task, (b) language is just a tool for doing so, and (c) they use their own linguistic resources. Language, then, is not the object of study, as in other approaches, it is the conduit.

In language terms, TBLT bridges the language gap between knowing... and doing.

“So how does the brain do this? How does it change goals into actions?”

What makes TBLT different is that it assumes that the knowing is already there, and wholly shifts the emphasis to the doing (correctly recognizing that doing enhances the knowing as well). It is L2 internship.

Yet, the knowing to doing is never an easy gap to cross. I know how to lose weight, but a quick web search will show you that I haven’t, and believe me, I’ve tried.

So how does the brain do this? How does it change goals into actions? How does it juggle the many aspects of making any kind of attempt, such as planning a weekend trip, or figuring out to move one’s classes online?

Neuroscientists have been studying these questions for decades, but the answers have been elusive. Researchers like Adele Diamond have identified basic executive functions in the prefrontal cortex – working memory, cognitive

flexibility, and self-inhibition – that once developed in childhood can then evolve into higher-level skills, such as the ability to read (requires working memory), the ability to change perspectives (requires cognitive flexibility), or the ability to shed pounds (requires self-inhibition, my personal weakness). But it was not until recently that some committed neuroscientists have tried to figure out how this incredibly complex system works to make us do things.

The way the brain turns knowing into doing is called cognitive control, using areas of the brain located in the prefrontal cortex and elsewhere. Cognitive control is the system that we have for orchestrating our goals into actions; it is the way we get things done. As neuroscientist David Badre tells us,

Knowledge and action are distinct things to some degree. So, knowing is not enough. You have to be able to bridge from what you want to do to how you behave. And that gap is not trivial. It's not easy. You actually need a class of functions in the brain to bridge it. And that's what cognitive control is all about. (Campbell, 2021, 6:14)

I heard Badre say these very words while taking a walk in Kyoto. They literally stopped me in my tracks. I instantly saw the connection to TBLT and how cognitive control answered that nagging old question of mine: What makes TBLT special. (The way I put two and two together is in itself an example of cognitive control.)

I don't think many language teachers realize how important this aspect of learning is. It tends to get glossed over. In a traditional language teaching approach, students might be asked to do things like write five hope to be sentences about their futures, but this does not require much planning or original language generation. It is just a substitution exercise with set forms. But when student pairs are given a task to solve, such as an information gap where they compare before and after photos to solve a crime, they have to do much more than just utter set forms. They have to plan how they will attack the problem, generate their own language to do so, and negotiate meaning with their partners. They have to put the language they know into action, moving it from knowing to doing.

Once we understand that cognitive language control is a special skill that students need training in, it lifts a veil. It explains why a student who can read Dickens and Brontë sputters through a simple conversation. It explains why our learners are so

often silent, why their skills grow so much during a homestay abroad, and it explains why TBLT is not just an alternative approach that one might choose, it is mandatory. Without that kind of open-ended practice, especially in L2 speaking environments, language competence will be forever curtailed.

“Once we understand that cognitive language control is a special skill that students need training in, it lifts a veil.”

Over the last few decades, education in general has been adding hands-on practice and internship to close the gap between knowing and doing, especially in fields like medicine and business. Yet even now, most teaching is still based on an obsolete paradigm: banking information in learners' heads in case they might need it someday. Understanding cognitive control can change all that. Let us in the language teaching profession lead the way into a more holistic, more enabling, manner of learning.



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The Columnist

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