



RESEARCH

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- 02 From the Co-ordinators - Maike Grau and Alan Fortune
- 03 Issues in action research - Božana Knežević
- 06 A qualitative approach to the research of EFL self-concept - Sarah Mercer
- 10 Comparing language learning beliefs of Japanese university students and their teachers - Paul Riley
- 14 DIY EAP: is it really possible? - Ivor Timmis and Heather Buchanan
- 18 Researching English as a lingua franca - Martin Dewey
- 21 Growing with re-search: research in education - Interview with Dr Deniz Kurtoglu Eken
- 25 My links - Ana Falcao

From the co-ordinators

Dear ReSIG members,

This is the first time that we have written these introductory paragraphs, having only taken over the shared co-ordination of the SIG at the IATEFL conference in April. At the Exeter conference we agreed to take over the role from Simon Borg on a temporary basis for one year. This arrangement serves to keep things ticking over until Antony Bruton assumes the role in April 2009. I am sure we speak on behalf of all RESIG members in thanking Simon for his commitment and high quality work in establishing the SIG during the past few years. He is going to be a very hard act to follow but RESIG members can be confident that Antony will provide the leadership and ideas which will enable the SIG to thrive.

For many of the ReSIG members, our electronic discussion list is still a hidden dimension. It is a wonderful tool for sharing ideas, asking questions among like-minded people around the world on research-related issues. The e-mail addresses for the group are:

Post message: resig@yahoogroups.com
Subscribe: resig-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Unsubscribe: resig-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

Please get in touch with us if you have any ideas on how to stimulate interesting discussions or if you would like to host a fielded discussion on a particular topic.

We look forward to seeing many of you at the next IATEFL conference in Cardiff and especially at our ReSIG programme on Friday, 3 April 2009. For further information about the conference programme, the ReSIG track and everything else that matters, please refer to <http://www.iatefl.org>. Further information on our conference on Action Research at Sheffield Hallam University (UK) in October 2009 will be posted soon on our website, <http://resig.iatefl.org>

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About this issue of Research News

The articles in this issue of the newsletter are not clustered around a specific theme; rather they constitute a 'mixed bag' which should appeal to a range of reader interests. Action research (AR) has long been a subject of interest to ReSIG members and initial plans have already been made to follow up the SIG's successful 2006 Opatija (Croatia) conference on this theme with

another at Sheffield Hallam University in October 2009. It is apposite, then, that the first of the contributions in this issue deals with AR. Božana Knežević (Croatia) discusses her personal journey from an initial understanding of AR as a problem-solving activity to a current view of it as a moral/philosophical approach to teaching and education in general. Like the first article, Sarah Mercer's paper also focuses on methodological issues. In the context of a research project on self-concepts in the field of EFL with undergraduate students at an Austrian university she convincingly argues for using a qualitative research approach in a field which has predominantly been researched with quantitative research methods.

Paul Riley describes a study which investigates Japanese learner's beliefs about language learning and those of their teachers and reports a number of significant differences between them. Ivor Timmis and Heather Buchanan discuss their innovative attempts to promote learner autonomy in a UK higher education EAP context through helping students develop noticing strategies. Martin Dewey looks at key issues regarding English as a Lingua Franca in relation to common practice in English language teaching

In a transcribed interview "Growing with Re-Search", Deniz Kurtoglu Eken (Turkey) shares some of her very personal views on doing research. Last but not least, Ana Falcao (Brazil) continues her column 'MyLinks', in which she shows us useful articles, quizzes and other sites she has found for ReSIG members on her last treasure hunt in the World Wide Web.

From the editor

Thank you to the members of ReSIG committee for their work in reviewing submissions, and to the contributors who submitted their work for this issue of the newsletter. Please continue to support us by sending us your ideas and works for our publication. I do hope you enjoy reading this issue and I look forward to seeing in Cardiff.

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Issues in action research

Božana Knežević

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Introduction

This paper illustrates my personal development from understanding action research as a problem-solving activity to action research as a moral/philosophical approach to teaching and education in general. My first action research started out of the need to solve a problem, but soon developed into a form of practice in which my students and I reflected simultaneously on ourselves without focusing on the dichotomy between reflection and action. Action research provided the opportunity to explore our dilemmas in a way that was not tied to just solving a problem.

From solving a problem ...

Whenever I asked my students to work in pairs/groups, it seemed it took them a long time to organise and start work. I thus embarked on action research (Knežević, 2004) focusing my attention on the interaction between students. I wanted to see how much time they spent on/off a task, and I also wanted to investigate if they all participated in the completion of tasks. The focus of the research soon shifted to a particular student, Student A, because it was quite obvious that her attitudes to pair and group work and her self-esteem affected classroom dynamics.

.... to action research as a moral, ethical and practical science

The *hypothesis* that I established also reflected my beliefs that teaching has different facets, many going beyond education and impacting upon students' upbringing and the formation of personalities:

If I encouraged more positive attitudes to working in pairs and groups on equal, tolerant, collaborative terms, I might mitigate Student A's inherent animosity, incompatibility and discomfort and I might induce a shift in her system of values so that she started to enjoy working and learning with students of diverse attitudes and opinions.

Having established the hypothesis, I wanted to create an atmosphere that would help Student A and the rest of the students 'feel good' (Barksdale, 1989) about themselves, feel good about their peers, feel good in the classroom, feel good emotionally and physically. If I wanted to initiate a shift in Student A's system of values so that she started to enjoy working with other students, I felt I had to help improve her self-esteem and had to help her feel less worried and insecure.

I planned action steps and selected activities with the aim to develop better understanding of other people's behaviour. I think that the students' *reflective compositions* proved the validity of action steps and the research. Student A showed a shift in her system of values. All students stressed the positive change in the atmosphere, in interrelationship, in communication on and off task. Their compositions demonstrated they 'felt good'. None of them though was aware of what had caused the change. The change came spontaneously and slowly.

The research initiated changes in my students but, equally important, it contributed to my personal and professional growth and development. It goes along with Carl Rogers who writes that 'the teacher must be a real person to the learner, rather than being concerned merely to act out a role; second, he must trust and accept his pupils, respecting their feelings and opinions; third, he must also possess the ability to empathize with his pupils.' in Saunders (1979:52). The change started painfully with awareness that what I *thought* I was doing in my classroom *was not* what I was doing. I had always tried to understand my students in terms of how they felt and behaved, but the first stage of the research indicated a possibility that I was superficial. I made a mistake by quickly labelling Student A shy and insecure. Having reflected on it, I realised the mistake, and I tried to think of ways to improve. Helping her, I was helping all students and myself. By observing Student A's behaviour, by empathising with her I questioned my beliefs and actions. More significantly, I was more concerned with my students' feelings and behaviour than with strictly following the syllabus. Student A's words, in her reflective composition, '*But you cared*' are, for me, the best evaluation of the research. (Knežević, 2004:120).

To sum up, the starting point for the research was means-ends reasoning. There was a problem and I was thinking about how to solve it. But soon a different kind of reflection occurred - ethical reflection. It implied interpretation of the values to be realised in practice. It was also philosophy because it helped me reconstruct my concept of values in teaching. And the values as ends were not defined *before* the practice; they were defined in the practice.

Ethical issues

The research conformed to general ethical principles but there were some instances of concern. Let me give you an example. I was worried when I decided to scrutinise the relationship between Students A and C (who enjoyed 'stoking the fire'). I needed proof that there was a strong personality clash between these two students. The observer and I agreed that the situation was clearly affecting group dynamics and that we had to take a risk. The only way to confirm or deny the assumption was to allocate them to the same task. I decided to take a risk. If I had not taken the step, the whole research would have been at stake. My intention was not to give priority to research over ethics, even though I was fully aware of the danger, but at that point I could not see any other way to solve the problem. The decision was a crucial moment and it proved that the relationship between Student A and other students, Student C in particular, was obstructive to classroom management. Barker says (1984:192) 'It is now believed that some degree of intragroup conflict is useful and productive. It is possible that when conflict is appropriately channelled, it can contribute to more effective results.' I also wanted to see if we could all take the productive benefit from the situation. The intention was: *if I make it better for Student A, I will make it better for all*. The two students worked together in a role-play situation in which they were asked to adopt personas. The aim was to gauge the behaviour and performance of this pair; I hoped that interpersonal tensions would be reduced. And indeed tension did begin to ease.

From practice to theory

In the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy *phronesis* is a form of reflection concerned with putting ethical values into real action in a particular situation. (Carr, 2006). *Phronesis* is a moral and intellectual virtue that cannot be separated from practice. It is a way of ethical reasoning in which reflection, deliberation and judgement play a central role. Deliberation is necessary because *phronesis* is a deliberative process in which both means and ends are open to question. It is reflective because the means are always modified by reflecting on the end just as an understanding of the end is always modified by reflecting on the means. And judgement is an essential element of *phronesis* because its outcome is a carefully considered decision about what to do in a particular situation, and the decision can always be defended and justified in a critical discourse. Since, for Aristotle, *phronesis* is inseparable from practice, it cannot be developed or improved by theoretical philosophy. *Phronesis* can only be advanced by a form of '*practical philosophy*' that is 'practical' because it recognises that the knowledge that guides *praxis* always arises from and must always relate back

to practice. And it is 'philosophical' in the sense that it tries to raise the unreflectively acquired knowledge (of the good embedded) in *praxis* to the level of self-conscious awareness so that practitioners critically examine their practice. Interpreted in this way, practical philosophy is a pre-modern version of action research. Like action research, it can be defined as 'a form of reflective enquiry undertaken by practitioners in order to improve their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situation in which these practices are carried out' (Kemmis, 1988:42).

But, although action research represents a twentieth century embodiment of practical philosophy, it differs from it in several ways. For example, while practical philosophy protected practice against theory, action research provides a research methodology that integrates theory and practice. And methodology is in the core of debate around action research.

Gadamer (2001) writes that the modern preoccupation with 'method' has led the social sciences to adopt a methodologically alienated form of self-understanding that prevents the conditions from making understanding possible and thereby distorts the character of human understanding itself. For him, the principal reason is modern sciences' prejudice that bias and subjectivity must be eliminated from inquiries that claim to be rational sciences. Gadamer further argues that human understanding is never simple given in any perception but is always prejudiced by interpretation that determines how perceptions are understood. He goes on to say that just as all understanding involves interpretation, so it also involves application in the sense that it is always affected by the practical situation it is being applied to. Gadamer thus fuses interpretation and understanding, and understanding and application. (Carr, 2006)

Personally, I am no longer very interested in methodological debates as they presuppose that there is a method that is necessary for discovering essential truths about the objects of inquiry. With respect to research methods I understand action research as an eclectic form of inquiry. Whatever helps practitioners to investigate their practice and underlying values and beliefs is acceptable. Methods will be selected as the research develops. Both quantitative and qualitative data may thus be appropriate.

Conclusion

To conclude, action research is essentially moral and ethical because it is not only concerned with bringing about change, but with values. It is not only concerned with the appropriate methodology but with the transformation of classrooms and universities into learning organisations, learning organisations where

teachers and students reflect on their teaching and learning and thus practice *phronesis*. Elliott (2000:82) elucidates that:

'... action research is a *moral, ethical or practical science*:

- its major purpose is to realise an educationally worthwhile process of teaching and learning....
- enquiry into how to realise educational values in the practices of teaching and learning (enquiry into means) cannot be separated from philosophical enquiry into what these values mean and their implications for practice (enquiries into ends). It cannot be reduced to studies of instrumental effectiveness of particular teaching and learning methods in the light of fixed, unambiguous, and tangible/measurable ends.
- when it is so reduced, we get a vision of action research which amounts to a form of instrumental/technical problem solving. Conceived as moral enquiry, educational action research involves moral philosophy.
- enquiry into how to realise educational values in action, involves treating actions as experimental hypotheses, to be systematically tested in particular contexts of practice, as a basis for evaluating their adequacy as interpretations of the educational ends they are directed towards. Hence, educational action research is both a science, and a form of philosophical enquiry.'

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A Qualitative approach to the research of EFL Self-concept

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Introduction

This article considers the rationale for and advantages of taking a qualitatively-orientated approach to the research of the psychological construct, self-concept, in the EFL context. Examples from a qualitative study which analysed data in a grounded manner are provided to illustrate some of the reasons behind and benefits from this approach.

What is self-concept?

A person's self-concept consists of the beliefs one has about oneself in a particular domain, i.e., self-beliefs are grouped according to a particular field or area. EFL self-concept is thus an individual's self-perception of competence and their related self-evaluative beliefs in the EFL domain. It is considered to be related to but not the same as other self constructs such as self-esteem and self-efficacy (cf. Valentine & DuBois, 2005).

Whilst the construct has been widely researched within the field of psychology, there remains little empirical work investigating it explicitly and directly within Applied Linguistics, despite the increasing recognition of the important role various self constructs play in the language learning process (see, e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998).

The research design in this study

To contextualise the work discussed in this brief article, it is necessary to begin by considering the two main research questions this study attempted to answer. As there is very little research within Applied Linguistics investigating the EFL learner self-concept, it was felt that an exploratory study should address initial definitional and theoretical concerns:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What appears to be the theoretical nature of the EFL learner self-concept?

Secondly, since it is accepted that a positive but realistic self-concept is desirable, and in order to give the study greater immediate relevance to practitioners as well, it was also felt that the study should attempt to gain an insight into factors which may affect EFL self-concept development. The second research question for this study was therefore as follows:

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What factors appear to influence the EFL learner self-concept?

In order to answer these questions, open, holistic, situated data were generated from a number of sources within a central European university undergraduate level EFL learning setting. Although the research participants were all students at the same tertiary level institution with English as one of their main subjects, none of them took part in more than one form of data collection. Methods for generating the data included a series of interviews, narratives, autobiographies and a single longitudinal case study. The data were all transcribed, digitalised and then analysed line-by-line in a grounded manner with the aid of Atlas.ti software, in order to detect main trends and other features within each of and across the various datasets. Due to limitations of space, I will not discuss the rationale behind the particular methods employed or the grounded analysis approach but will instead focus on the reasons for choosing to carry out a qualitatively-orientated study.

Previous studies into self-concept in psychology

The majority of the key work into the construct stems from the field of psychology and has been carried out by Herbert Marsh and his colleagues (see, e.g., Marsh, 1990; Marsh et al., 1988). Despite their considerable and positive contribution towards a greater understanding of self-concept, it seems that the effects of their dominance in the field may have inhibited attempts at original, new approaches to research on self-concept. Most of the published studies into self-concept appear to reflect their theoretical models, their understandings of appropriate, valid research, and, importantly, their series of self-description questionnaires (ASDQ I, II & SDQ I, II, III)¹. These questionnaires were developed based on the original Shavelson et al. (1976) theoretical model, and many of the studies carried out since have employed these questionnaires, and the "empirical results were used to support, refute, or revise the instrument and the theory on which it is based" (Marsh & Craven, 2006: 138). Thus, there appears to have been a reliance in the field almost exclusively on quantitative approaches,

¹ASDQ = Academic Self Description Questionnaires; SDQ = Self Description Questionnaires. (See, e.g., Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Yeung, 1998)

many of which use similar versions of the same self-report questionnaires. This article does not wish to diminish the valuable insights gained through quantitative approaches and use of the ASDQ & SDQ questionnaire items; however, no research method in isolation will be entirely comprehensive, and it was felt that a fresh perspective on the nature of EFL self-concept might be gained by complementing the findings from existing quantitative studies with research which takes an alternative qualitative approach. As Dusek (2000: 237) comments, in respect to self-esteem research, “research that supplements the rigors of quantitative measurement with the richness of qualitative assessment can go far in the quest to flesh out issues relating to direction of effects and definitional concerns”.

Complexity of the construct

As a “mental construct”, self-concept is inherently complex (Valentine et al., 2004: 129). A qualitative study was considered to be well suited for generating rich, detailed data which could allow some of the assumed complexity of the construct to emerge. An example from this study may illustrate the type of complexity that the analysis of the data revealed. The findings for the first research question about the theoretical nature of the self-concept structure suggested that the self-concepts of the learners in these data appear to be considerably more complex than is proposed in the dominant Marsh & Shavelson (1985) model. Their model, which stems from quantitatively-orientated studies, suggests a simpler, linear, hierarchical set of relationships between an individual’s various self-concepts. However, the learners in this study displayed evidence of a complicated, interconnected network of overlapping and interrelated self-beliefs, more akin to a molecular than a hierarchical structure. For example, none of the learners in any of their self-descriptions appeared to transcend any kind of hierarchy in terms of how their self-descriptions appeared to be configured; indeed, they often made unexpected connections across their self-concept domains and there was little evidence of beliefs from other, broader self-concepts subsuming beliefs from different domains. Whilst it is not the intention of the study to dismiss the Marsh & Shavelson (1985) model as invalid, the findings in this study provide grounds for critically reviewing certain aspects of the dominant model and igniting debate about possible alternative understandings of the nature of the construct and approaches to researching it. Theoretical models will inevitably reflect the research approaches from which they originate, and thus, it seems fruitful to employ a variety of methods in order to gain a fuller, more comprehensive picture.

Individual variation

The qualitative nature of the data was also particularly well-suited to revealing individual variation across learners in terms of the structure and content of self-concepts expressed, as well as the types of factors that affected their development. Particularly noteworthy examples of this in the study are the unexpected references by learners to elements from a range of non-language related domains, findings which possibly would have been excluded and overlooked if fixed-item tools had been used. For example, individuals appeared to vary in terms of the aspects of their self-concept network they perceived as relevant to their EFL self-concept. Thus, one learner closely connected her sports self-concept to her EFL self-concept, describing herself as being an ‘active’ person and, thus in her opinion, consequently better at speaking than reading in English; speaking being considered by her to be more ‘active’ than reading. An example from the data may illustrate this learner’s beliefs in this respect:

A bookworm, yeah that’s it, a bookworm. I’m just not that type of person, I’m much too physical or active... Or if I talk with people in English, that’s still exercise. That’s actively taking part in something but sitting down and reading, I can’t do that or I can not, I don’t know I’m just not a regular reader, that’s just not me. (J#13: 785 – 786; 789 - 793)

Other learners also made similar unanticipated connections across self-concept domains in ways which were unique to them as individuals. This aspect of the findings is important as it implies that any theoretical model of self-concept structure should be able to accommodate and represent the potential for such individual variation and raises questions about whether a single, monolithic model can be justified. It also illustrates the value of data which allows the uniqueness of individuals to be explored in detail.

Contextual variation

A further valuable finding from the analysis within and across the datasets concerns the potential for contextual variation in reported self-concepts. For example, it appeared that different self-concepts mentioned by these learners tended to cluster around certain periods of time and contexts in their reported development. For example, learners referred more frequently to mother tongue self-concepts in relation to the early stages of learning English, a possible future EFL self or in connection to specific language skills such as reading or speaking. In addition, different self-concepts dominated the findings in each dataset reflecting the influence of the context in which the data were generated, for example, a general foreign languages self-concept was

expressed more clearly in the autobiographical data than the other datasets. The analysis therefore seemed to suggest a dynamic self-concept network which may vary depending on context and the perceived relevance of a particular self-concept for individuals in certain contexts. These findings thus suggest the importance for research and theoretical models to be sensitive to the possible influence of context and the potentially dynamic nature of reported self-concepts over time and settings. By taking an approach which permits such subtleties and variation to emerge, research can avoid oversimplifying reality and also become sensitive to potential contextual influences on data generated.

The unique nature of EFL learning – the holistic view

The final key benefit which emerged from the open, qualitative approach taken in this study is the holistic view of the learner it afforded. As already shown, the rich, detailed data generated allowed unexpected factors, inter- and intra-learner variation, and the rich complexity involved in EFL self-concepts to emerge. Additionally, the findings concerning the development of learners' EFL self-concepts also revealed that a considerable amount of influential language learning and language use experiences took place in informal contexts beyond the classroom. Compared to other subjects, this dimension may be a characteristic unique to foreign language learning, especially for advanced learners such as those who were the focus of this study, as there tends to be a large number of opportunities for language learning and use outside of formal learning contexts (e.g., socially, online or in the form of an overseas visit). It is thus important that research investigating how learners form their EFL self-concepts does not overlook these informal language encounters, especially if using fixed-item tools adapted from research into other domains which may focus disproportionately on formal learning contexts.

Conclusion

Given the inherently complex nature of the construct, as well as the over-reliance to date on quantitative methods and the exploratory nature of the study in the under-researched domain of EFL, a qualitative study was deemed the most suitable approach for providing rich and fresh insights to complement and extend findings from the abundance of quantitative studies which already exist. This brief paper does not wish to devalue quantitative or fixed-item approaches or to suggest that a qualitative approach is inherently superior. Rather, it wishes to illustrate the potential offered by taking an open-ended, qualitative approach and analysing the data in a grounded manner. The dominance of any area of research by a single approach can be inhibiting for the

creativity and development of thinking in the field and it is thus hoped that future research investigating the EFL self-concept will employ a range of approaches, including qualitative approaches which, as this paper has hopefully shown, can offer valuable, original insights into the construct.

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Research News: Call for contributions

Research is our business, and we want to publish your article. We are looking for articles that describe research results in language teaching. Innovative lines of ELT research are particularly welcome. We are also interested in articles that focus on research methodology, the research process, or problems in research.

You could also propose and edit themed special issues, for example on topics such as classroom action research, problems in teaching and learning speaking or even a geographically organised issue on topics locally relevant. We will be happy to support you with editorial advice and comment.

Publication dates and deadlines:

The deadline for the issue to be published in March is February 1st, 2009.

Contributions to the summer issue should be handed in by July 1st, 2009.

For author guidelines please refer to our website: <http://resig.iatefl.org/submit.htm>.

Please send articles as an email attachment to Shaida Mohammadi, Newsletter Editor: resigeditor@smpedu.com. You can contact her or the SIG co-ordinators (ResearchSig@iatefl.org) for any further questions concerning your contribution to the newsletter.

We look forward to your contributions!

Alan Fortune and Maike Grau, Research SIG co-ordinators.

Comparing language learning beliefs of Japanese university students and their teachers

Paul A. Riley

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Introduction

Learners bring into the language-learning classroom a complex set of variables based on attitudes, experiences, and expectations. These variables help form the beliefs which learners possess about the nature of the language-learning task. Learners may believe, for example, that a second language can only be successfully learned through communication with native speakers of the second language or that language learning is fundamentally a task of memorisation, involving repeated translation from the first language. Failure to address unrealistic student expectations, or inaccurate student notions of how best to learn a second or foreign language, can influence:

- The learning strategies employed by students
- The willingness of students to participate in class activities
- The level of trust between student and teacher
- Student anxiety levels
- Breakdown in the learning process
- Discontinuation of study

Pioneering research was conducted into beliefs related to second and foreign language learning by Horwitz (1985, 1988) at the University of Texas. Several further studies can be found in the literature. Studies relating to Japanese students include Luppescu and Day (1990), Keim et al (1996), Sakui and Gaies (1999), and Sato (2004).

The study

Aims

- 1) To describe the beliefs about language learning of first year entering university students in Japan.
- 2) To compare the beliefs about language learning of this body of students with the language learning beliefs of their (native English speaker) teachers.

Instrument

The study employed the 45-item questionnaire developed by Sakui and Gaies (1999). The items were answered on a four-point Likert-type scale, with the answer options of “strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree”. For data analysis purposes, these responses were numerically coded as one, two, three, and four, respectively. The English translation of the instrument was used to produce a teacher version for this study. The teacher version consisted of 37 items with eight items omitted and six items re-written to represent a teacher viewpoint.

Participants

The study was conducted at a private university in Tokyo, Japan in April 2002. A total of 744 students were enrolled in the 23 participating classes, and all 661 students present completed the questionnaire. At this university classes are held four times a week with each class of students having two or three teachers. All 34 teachers of the 23 classes invited to participate in the study agreed to do so. Of the 34 teachers, 32 were native speakers of English, with two near-native speakers.

Data Collection

All student questionnaires were completed during regular classes before the end of the second week of semester to try to ensure that students' beliefs had not been influenced by the teaching practices or teaching materials of the university program. To check the reliability of the instrument, four of the twenty-three classes, containing 101 students, were randomly chosen to complete a second, scrambled version of the questionnaire. The scrambled retest questionnaire was administered fourteen days after the first administration.

Data Analysis

Pearson correlation, Cronbach alpha, and *t*-tests were conducted on the data. A general alpha level of $\alpha = 0.01$ was set for analysis of the data. To further reduce the possibility of error in carrying out multiple *t*-tests, the alpha level was set at $\alpha = 0.001$ when comparing student beliefs with teacher beliefs.

Results

Instrument

Pearson correlation of average response scores for the test-retest questionnaires ($n = 101$) was $r = 0.98$ indicating a high level of correlation between the two

administrations. Paired sample *t*-tests of the 45 items revealed significant differences in means for only three items. Pearson correlation between the results of this study and those of Sakui and Gaies (1999) was $r = 0.8934$, indicating a high level of consistency between the responses in the two studies.

Student beliefs

Table 1 shows the ten strongest student beliefs, with the score on the four-point scale and percentage of students agreeing with each statement.

Table 1: 10 strongest student beliefs

%

| | | |
|---|------|------|
| 1) 6. To say something in English, you needn't wait until you can speak it correctly. | 3.68 | 98.2 |
| 2) 2. English class should be enjoyable. | 3.67 | 98 |
| 3) 11. In learning English it is important to repeat and practice a lot. | 3.59 | 97.4 |
| 4) 15. Listening to tapes and watching English programs on television are very important in learning English. | 3.44 | 95.9 |
| 5) 27. In order to speak and understand English very well, English education at school is NOT enough. | 3.43 | 95.1 |
| 6) 5. It is useful to know about English-speaking countries in order to speak English. | 3.37 | 93.2 |
| 7) 1. It is easier for children than adults to learn English. | 3.34 | 92 |
| 8) 7. Considering the amount of time I have studied English, I'm NOT satisfied with my progress. | 3.34 | 92.8 |
| 9) 23. People who are good at math and science are not necessarily poor at learning foreign languages. | 3.28 | 92.7 |
| 10) 26. Japanese are NOT good at learning foreign languages. | 3.26 | 94.9 |

Comparing Teacher and Student Beliefs

Of the thirty-seven common questionnaire items, Table 2 shows the twenty items showing a statistically significant

difference between student responses and teacher responses.

Table 2: Student / teacher differences

| | ($p < .001$) | S % | T % |
|--|----------------|-----|-----|
| 17. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have many | | 83 | 30 |
| 35. I make mistakes because I do not study enough. | | 55 | 6 |
| 30. Some people are born with a special ability which is useful for learning English. | | 28 | 74 |
| 38. I want my teacher to correct all my mistakes. | | 41 | 3 |
| 32. Learning a word means learning the Japanese translation | | 42 | 2 |
| 19. Learning English is different from learning other subjects. | | 56 | 88 |
| 42. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one. | | 55 | 94 |

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| 34. I can improve my English by speaking English with my classmates. | 77 | 100 |
| 13. If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on. | 53 | 18 |
| 41. To understand English, it must be translated into Japanese. | 24 | 0 |
| 9. It's O.K. to guess if you don't know a word in English. | 91 | 100 |
| 15. Listening to tapes and watching English programs on television are very important in learning English. | 96 | 70 |
| 31. Speaking and listening to English are more useful than reading and writing English. | 80 | 53 |
| 37. I should be able to learn everything I am taught. | 61 | 30 |
| 25. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent. | 45 | 12 |
| 21. If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job. | 84 | 64 |
| 36. To say something in English, I think of how I would say it in Japanese and then translate it into English. | 60 | 97 |
| 29. You can learn to improve your English only from native speakers of English. | 17 | 3 |
| 14. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules. | 16 | 0 |
| 26. Japanese are good at learning foreign languages. | 5 | 16 |

We can see that the item of greatest difference is Item 17. The students seem to believe much more strongly than the teachers that they will have many opportunities to use their newly acquired English in the future. Other differences of note between student and teacher responses include:

- 41% of students believe that they want their teacher to correct all their mistakes, while only 3% of teachers believe they should do so (Item 38).
- 42% of students believe that learning a word means learning the Japanese translation, while only 2% of teachers believe this to be the case (Item 32).
- 100 % of teachers believe that students can improve their English by speaking with their classmates, while only 77% of students believe this (Item 34).
- 53% of students, compared to only 18% of teachers, believe that if they are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on (Item 13).
- 96% of students, compared to only 70% of teachers, believe that listening to tapes and watching English programs on television are very important in learning English (Item 15).
- 84% of students believe that if they learn to speak English very well, it will help them get a good job, while only 64% of teachers agree (Item 21).

- 59% of students believe that to say something in English, they translate from Japanese, while 97% of teachers believe that their students do this (Item 36).

Discussion

Sakui and Gaies suggest that there may be “growing awareness and approval” (1999: 488) on the part of Japanese students in the ongoing promotion of oral communication as a major goal of English education in Japan. This seems to be reflected in the beliefs of the students in this study who may already be aware of some of the learning processes involved in a more communicative approach to language learning. Three of the strongest four beliefs, items two, eleven, and fifteen, could be considered as relating to a communicative orientation to learning English.

However, amongst the student responses there are several which could be a cause for concern, or even a hindrance, in a communication-focused classroom. The four main areas of concern appear to be beliefs relating to translation and use of the L1, error correction, the difficulty of language learning, and motivation. Student over-dependence on translation could be a major obstacle in a communication-focused classroom. From Item 41, we can see that 24% of students believe that in order to understand English it must be translated into Japanese. From Item 38 we can see that 41% of students want their teachers to correct all their mistakes. Students expecting to be continually corrected by their teacher in the use of English could easily become disheartened if they perceive that such ‘teaching’ is not taking place. Not only do nearly half of the students expect their errors to be continually corrected, they

believe this to be justified, due to their belief that errors will be more difficult to rectify at a later stage (Item 13).

Other differences between teacher and student belief include teachers reporting a stronger belief (74% agree) in the notion of learner aptitude than learners (28% agree), as seen in Item 30. Teachers also believe more strongly (94% agree) than learners (55% agree) that it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one. In addition, more teachers (88%) than students (56%) believe that learning English is different from learning other subjects.

One result with possible ramifications for the classroom is Item 34. In line with a communicative language teaching approach, 100% of the teachers believe that students can improve their English by speaking English with their classmates. However, 23% of students believe they cannot improve their English by speaking with their classmates. On the other hand, students see much more value in listening to tapes and watching television programs.

The high number of significant differences between teacher and student beliefs (20 out of 37 items) reinforces the necessity for further research into the language learning beliefs of both learners and teachers. Such research will help to address what Cortazzi and Jin call "largely unnoticed gaps between the expectations of the teacher and students" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 169). Such gaps need to be noticed and addressed before they have opportunity to negatively affect the learning process. Recurring themes in the research to date relate particularly to the issues of error correction and translation in language learning. Students in this study also appear to expect a more teacher-centred classroom and see little value in practicing English with their classmates. It seems crucial that teachers communicate with students to try to identify mismatches in beliefs and expectations, and explain the theory behind the goals of the course, and the practices and methodology of the classroom.

Further research

The results of this study cannot be generalised to other institutions or other bodies of students. Further studies of other student groups in Japan will enable a comparison of results to help produce a clearer picture of the beliefs and expectations about language learning of students at Japanese universities.

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DIY EAP: Is it really possible?

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Introduction

Some years ago, a colleague walked into the office and remarked, 'The plant on the landing needs watering', to which I replied, 'I didn't know there was a plant on the landing'. To paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, I had seen the plant, but not observed it. It is this difference in perceptual focus between seeing and observing which underpins the action research project described in this article. The origin of the project was a perception amongst tutors on the MA in Materials Development and ELT at Leeds Metropolitan University course that some of the non-native speaker students on the course made relatively disappointing progress with their English given the apparently favourable conditions for language acquisition/learning:

- They had rich exposure to the language, both inside and outside class.
- They had many *opportunities* for interaction and output.
- As they were teachers or prospective teachers, the MA input was, at least in theory, meaningful and relevant.
- One would assume that, having invested time and money on the course, they were motivated.

The problem crystallised when a small number of students came to see us to ask about doing extra language support courses. We advised them, given the time constraints, to concentrate on the MA and reassured them that their language would improve as the course went on, thus consigning them to a kind of *de facto* CLIL [Content and Language Integrated Learning] i.e. we worked on the assumption that by studying content – in this case 'Materials Development' – through the medium of English, their English would automatically improve to the requisite degree. Most survived this process, but one or two conspicuously did not. In one

case, we actually felt that the student's English got worse. The question became then, 'Can we do anything for these students besides sending them off for language support courses?' A possible solution began to suggest itself when one of the students told me that, for her action research project, she wanted to investigate what she perceived to be the fossilisation of her active vocabulary. We decided to carry out an experiment in task repetition in which I asked broadly similar questions to the student in two interviews with an interval of a few days between them (described in more detail below). The most significant part of the experiment for me was that the student told me that she thought she had benefited from the very act of thinking about and analysing her own language and from deciding to do something about it, quite apart from any specific benefits of task repetition. Devising ways in which the students could work autonomously on their language development by exploiting the language encounters they were involved in as part of the course seemed to offer a middle way between time-consuming extra language support courses and the 'de facto CLIL' option.

Autonomous Noticing Activities

We came up with a set of autonomous noticing activities to pilot with the eight non-native speaker students on our MA course. 'Activity' is a deliberately loose label as we did not wish to become embroiled in debates over definitions of 'task' and 'strategy': at this stage we are interested in anything which works. The activities are, however, theoretically informed: a search on 'noticing' and related concepts on the *ELTJ* website produced the following references which were of particular value in devising the tasks: (Clennell 1999; Crabbe 2007; Cresswell 2000; Goh 2007; Harris 2007; Lynch 2001, 2007; Mennim 2003; Morton 1999; Storch 1998; Thornbury 1997; Vickers and Estela 2006; Wilson 2003). Schmidt (1990) was also an important influence. From these references emerged the three main features of the autonomous noticing activities:

- Autonomy
- Metacognitive awareness
- Noticing

The tasks are *autonomous* in the sense that the students are meant to operate them independently, though the tutor will normally explain and demonstrate the task initially, and may occasionally be required to work with a student on an activity. The activities do, in a very literal sense, require students to take responsibility for their own learning. They also require the development of *metacognitive* awareness as students will need, once they have sampled the tasks, to reflect and choose

those which seem to be most effective and appropriate for them. The rationale for a focus on *noticing* tasks was based on two fundamental acquisition principles stated by Schmidt and Frota (1986), quoted in Thornbury (1997: 326)

- Learners need to pay attention to form for input to become intake;
- Learners need to notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language.

The basic design principle of the autonomous noticing tasks we developed was that they would help students to notice more from the input/output they were already engaged in through their MA studies. There seemed to be two advantages to this approach:

1. They would be working with material they had already understood, at least at a general level and would not, therefore, face the difficult task of processing meaning and form simultaneously. This would also save time. In the tasks below, we have generally advised the students to work with the abstract as this is likely to contain the key lexis for a given topic (Morton 1999).
2. They would be working with material they perceived as relevant.

As this is very much work-in-progress, the tasks we have tried out so far are described and briefly evaluated below:

Back Translation/ Two way translation

Procedure

1. Take a short interesting section from an academic article you have read and found interesting. If you are not sure which section to take, choose the abstract, the introduction or the conclusion.
2. On a separate piece of paper or in a separate document, translate the section you have chosen into your first language.
3. Go back to your translation a day or more later and translate it back into English.
4. Compare your version with the original.

Feedback

Feedback on this activity was generally very positive, though I feel the difficulty of the sample text chosen

limited how much students could notice as there were simply too many differences between their version and the original. Below are examples of some of the things students reported that they noticed through this task:

- Simple v 'sophisticated' vocabulary e.g. try v attempt
- Striking collocations and chunks e.g. off the peg; tailor-made; strike a chord
- Different use of articles and tenses
- Differences in style e.g. 'I use longer phrases and sentences than the writer'; 'My style is more literal, less metaphorical than the writer'.

Academic Word Power

Procedure

1. Take the abstract from an article you have read and found interesting recently.
2. Go to <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~alzsh3/acvocab/>
 - Click on the AWL [Academic Word List] highlighter. An empty text box will appear.
 - If the article you have chosen is available electronically, copy and paste the extract into the text box. If it is not available electronically, you will need to type it in.
 - Click level 10 and then click submit. The words in your text which are on the academic word list will be highlighted e.g.

I think, however, that the **survey**, given the number of **responses** and relatively wide geographical coverage, can support the following modest **conclusions**:

- Look carefully at the way the highlighted words are used in collocations and chunks in the text e.g. **support a conclusion, a modest conclusion**
- Choose one of the highlighted words to study further e.g. conclusion

3. Go to: <http://www.collins.co.uk/corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>

- Type your word ['Conclusion'] into the collocation sampler, press enter and a table will appear which will show you the most common words used with 'conclusion'

The table shows you the most common words which are used before or after 'conclusion' i.e. the common collocates of 'conclusion'.

4. Now type the same word [conclusion] into the concordance sampler on <http://www.collins.co.uk/corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>

- You will get 50 concordance lines which show real examples of 'conclusion' used in context. Look for examples of 'come' with 'conclusion'.
- You can repeat this process with other collocations of 'conclusion' or start the whole procedure again with other highlighted words from your text in the text box.

Feedback

This activity had rave reviews from the students who tried it out. With hindsight, I feel that uptake would have been greater with an introductory session.

'Grammaring' Texts

Procedure

1. Take a short interesting section from an academic article you have read and found interesting. If you are not sure which section to take, choose the abstract, the introduction or the conclusion.
2. From your typed copy, delete some of these features:
 - articles;
 - prepositions;
 - demonstrative adjectives (this, that, these and those);
 - relative pronouns;
 - auxiliary verbs.

You can also put verbs in their base form.

It is easier if you start each new sentence on a new line (see the example in the appendix).

3. Save the version with the deletions.

4. Go back to the deleted version a day or two later and try to reconstruct the text.

5. Compare your version with the original.

Feedback

We have had little uptake so far on this activity. We suspect this is because the sample abstract used was too difficult. This suggests that introducing activities with less academic texts is important.

Task repetition²

1. Find someone to interview you. The topic doesn't really matter as long as it is something reasonably easy to talk about. Record the interview.
2. A few days later, ask your interviewer to interview you again with the same questions.
3. Transcribe both versions of the interview.
4. Look for differences in fluency, accuracy and complexity in your language use. The framework below will help you to analyse your language.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Accuracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Error |
| | |
| Fluency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed (words per minute) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repeating a word or phrase - Self correction |
| | |
| Complexity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tokens – the total number of words used |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types – the total number of <i>different</i> words used |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type/token ratio: the number of types as a percentage of the tokens (see example below). A higher percentage indicates greater variety in vocabulary |

Feedback

As noted in the introduction, the student who tried out task repetition was most enthusiastic about the sense of

² Thanks to Hallie Park for permission to use her tables and for her cooperation with the task repetition experiment

empowerment which working with her own language gave her. Currently, another of our MA students is researching her own perceived fossilisation in aspects of German grammar using similar techniques and has spoken enthusiastically of the results.

Conclusion

The response so far has certainly been encouraging enough for us to want to take the experiment further and to apply some of the lessons we have learned this year. Although we are aiming for autonomy, it does seem that structured sessions where students are initially talked through the tasks with accessible sample texts will help uptake. Integrating the tasks into a reflective assignment is another way that uptake might be increased. The selection of manageable text extracts for the examples is crucial, and it might be that less academic journals than those traditionally on MA reading lists might be a good starting point. We feel, however, that autonomous noticing activities have considerable potential and that we have only scratched the surface so far³. As Thornbury (1997: 327) puts it: "Opportunities for noticing alone are not enough, however, if the learners lack the strategies to take advantage of them. Since noticing is a conscious cognitive process, it is theoretically accessible to training and development. This suggests that the teacher's role is to develop noticing strategies that the student can then apply independently and autonomously."

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³ If readers would like to try out any of the above tasks with their own students, we would be very interested in any feedback

Researching English as a lingua franca

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Contextual Background

As a language of wider communication, English has for some time been undergoing some pretty major processes of transformation, processes which have led to an ever-increasing diversification of its forms. Therefore, it is entirely inevitable that the English (or perhaps better, Englishes) used in an institution of Higher Education in London say, is very different from the English used in a meeting of financial experts in New York, which in turn is different from the various ways English is used, say, in Australia, or India, or Nigeria, or for that matter during an international conference on climate change to be held in Poland.

Undoubtedly, English has a significantly transnational presence in today's globalized world. This is true to such a degree that it is essential we investigate what impact this is having on the way English is being spoken, learnt and taught around the world. One specific implication for the teaching of English must involve a consideration of how pedagogy might be untethered from one or other set of standardized norms, especially as defined in relation to the notion of a national variety (i.e. most usually American English or British English). Until now, these norms have acted as a kind of restraining force on the language, serving as the mechanism by which the linguistic innovations of certain users [primarily educated speakers of English as a Native Language (ENL) varieties] are sanctioned, while the innovations of all other users are deemed to be non-standard 'deviations'. Yet overattachment to an external set of norms is ultimately detrimental to the effectiveness of English as a means of international communication – it arguably limits the extent to which the language can act as a linguistic resource for the expression of contextualised realities, themes and identities.

Research Findings in ELF

In the light of this backdrop, my own research work deals with the spread of English internationally, and involves specifically an investigation into the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). The research has entailed the

collection and analysis of a corpus of exclusively non-native speaker – non-native speaker spoken interactions, the main aim of which has been to provide systematic descriptions of innovative linguistic features that tend to occur in such interactions, with the view ultimately to analysing emerging patterns in the use of linguistic resources by speakers for whom English is not their L1.

There is currently a growing body of ELF literature, including existing and ongoing corpus-based projects in phonology, pragmatics and lexicogrammar. The data gathered under this, and similar other ELF empirical projects (see especially Mauranen 2003, Seidlhofer 2004) contribute to our growing understanding of the diversification of English in the world. The findings of such research contribute specifically to descriptions of the ways in which the lexical and grammatical resources of English are being employed in ELF settings. The theoretical and empirical insights gained from this research have so far been discussed with reference to the contemporary context of globalization (see Dewey 2007a), and to the historical context of the development of English diachronically (Dewey 2007b). A further focus of the discussion has also centred around the pedagogical implications of the findings of ELF research for ELT and language teacher education (Dewey 2007b).

Below I present a very brief overview of the main findings reported in Dewey (2007b). By no means do the following examples represent a definitive set of linguistic features; nor, more importantly, are they intended to be prescriptions for pedagogic practice. My purpose in highlighting this list (a somewhat unsatisfactory, but nevertheless necessary format given restrictions of space) is to indicate for teachers those features that (at least so far) appear to be especially characteristic of ELF interactions.⁴

- Use of 3rd person singular zero
- Extension of relative *which* to include functions previously served only by *who*
- Shift in the use of articles, (especially preference for zero article where L1 use is largely idiomatic, and preference for definite article to attach extra importance to a referent)
- Invariant question tags (and use of other similar universal forms, such as *this* for *this* and *these*)
- Shift in patterns of preposition use, e.g. *we have to study about*
- Extension to the collocational field of words with high semantic generality, e.g. *take an operation*

⁴ Similar findings are also reported in Cogo and Dewey (2006). In addition, many of the features described here corroborate initial findings of the VOICE (Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English) project, as reported in Seidlhofer (2004).

- Novel collocations (often produced via analogy?, e.g. there are a lot of... thousands you know severe criminal – criminals)
- Increased explicitness, e.g. *how long time* in place of *how long*
- Preference for bare and/or full infinitive over the use of gerunds, as in *interested to do* or as in *to study is...* and *to read is...*, where the infinitive is used as subject of a clause
- Exploited redundancy, such as ellipsis of objects/complements of transitive verbs, as in *I wanted to go with, You can borrow*, etc.
- Semantic shift and common meaning ('false friends' / partial cognates) e.g. the non-preferred meaning in L1 English becomes the preferred meaning in EFL contexts, as in *actually* = "currently" rather than "in fact".
- Productive use of derivational morphemes, e.g. *angriness*
- Coinage, e.g. "in the review you can read the holder and then you can just leave the book" [*holder* = 'cover']
- Semantic extension, e.g. *stay* used with the sense of 'be' rather than 'remain' as in the following, "It's very difficult to accept that your mother or father stays with another"

It is also essential to point out that these cannot be assumed to be core features in the same way Jenkins (2000) has outlined core phonological features. Phonology, in contrast to lexis and grammar, is a more closed system – there is a finite set of possible sounds which can be described and identified. In lexis and grammar the search for a set of core features is far more complex, and a definitive set of necessary and essential features cannot ever be fully achieved.

Implications for ELT

Research of this kind raises quite considerable concerns regarding teacher beliefs and knowledge in English language pedagogy. Indeed, discussions of the international spread of the language have become increasingly high profile in recent years. A number of key texts in language teacher education have also begun to include sections on the internationalization of English. The latest edition of Harmer's *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (2007) deals for example with the spread of English in the world, introducing (although very briefly) the concept of ELF to novice teachers. Several books have also begun to address matters more directly and more extensively (e.g. Holliday 2005, and McKay 2002), but in terms of the more practical concerns of ELT practitioners, to date there has been little in-depth treatment of the precise consequences for current practice in the language classroom. There has as yet been no detailed account of what might be involved if teachers were to incorporate an ELF/World Englishes

perspective on any practical level (though see Jenkins 2006 for a discussion of the key issues). What has begun to take place is a good deal of debate (often heated, sometimes personal) regarding the relevance of ELF related research to ELT methods, materials and practices⁵. The extent to which the ELF debate has given rise to controversy in the ELT profession is best attested in a recent book, Jenkins (2007), which deals in depth with the complex issue of attitude and identity in relation to ELF, not to mention the extent to which the claims and arguments of those researching lingua franca communication have tended to be variously misinterpreted and/or misrepresented (see Seidlhofer 2006, and Dewey & Jenkins in press).

As Kachru and Nelson (2006) point out, a World Englishes perspective represents a significant challenge to ELT, since recognition of the pluralistic nature of the language brings with it a need to reconsider a number of key beliefs that we currently tend to hold in ELT with regard to codified models and norms. Underpinning World Englishes and ELF research is the notion that all language users have a natural tendency to mould the means of communication they have at their disposal in ways that will best suit their communicative needs and contextual realities. In the case of multilingual speakers, this creative inclination is probably further enhanced, as they have at their disposal a much broader repertoire of resources with which to play. For Kachru and Nelson the pluralism this entails has particularly far reaching consequences with regard to current practice in ELT.

"... users familiar with several varieties of English can make accommodations with other users they come in contact with, to the greater satisfaction of all participants. This means that ELT professionals have a responsibility not to limit their students' creativity, but to help to shape it, through increased awareness of others and ever less complacency about 'my English'" (Kachru & Nelson 2006: 21)

Similarly, Jenkins (2006) questions the extent to which it is viable for ELT practitioners to continue to administer external norms, and to continue to favour one of the two prestige models, American or British English, describing in some detail the major implications that research of this kind holds for English language professionals.

What is essential for me to clarify here, however, regardless of how far-reaching these implications may be, is that the aim of ELF researchers has not been to propose the concept of a monolithic version of English that is to be used by all speakers of the language globally. Neither is it to propose an alternative (and

⁵ See for example a recent article disputing the claims of ELF researchers, Saraceni (2008), and a subsequent reply to this, Cogo (2008), both printed in the journal *English Today*.

especially not reduced) version of English to be taught in all contexts. The key notion underlying research of this kind is the inherent variability of human languages, the pluralism that characterises linguistic interactions. In other words, a strong premise informing ELF research is the heterogeneous nature of any linguistic system, and the necessarily variable nature of language use.

Ultimately, any effort to identify commonplace features of a language variety (such as those described above) runs the risk of portraying as static something which is a fundamentally fluid phenomenon. An important initial consequence of ELF research is thus to raise awareness amongst teachers of English of this fluidity, and of the relationship between abstracted language models and the variable nature of communication. It is certainly not for research to determine what should or should not be taught in the language classroom, but it is our responsibility as researchers to make available and accessible current research findings. It is then up to us as ELT professionals (I see myself as belonging very much to both traditions) to engage with this research in order to make better sense of how we might respond to the global status of English by reconsidering beliefs and practice in the language classroom.

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Growing with re- search: research in education

Interview with Dr Deniz Kurtoglu Eken

Brian Rodrigues

Brian Rodrigues, Freshman English instructor and former Re-search INSET⁶ participant at Sabancı University's School of Languages, interviews Dr. Deniz Kurtoglu Eken who, in addition to her role as the director of the school, is actively involved in research, teacher development and trainer training. The transcript below has been edited for a shorter version due to space limitations. The full podcast is available at:

<http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/do/eng/?PodCast/PodCasts.php>

B. Rodrigues: What do you understand by the term research? What does it mean to you?

D. Kurtoglu Eken: I think before anything else it's got to do with asking meaningful questions that I feel you can't avoid – whether you're aware that it's research or not is one thing, but it's part of human nature to be asking questions. Maybe one thing about research to make it more systematic is that the questions have to be meaningful; and for me personally and professionally, the questions and the research have to be inspiring. You can't force yourself to be involved in research; you *want* to explore, you *want* to find out...what it means to me? In its simplest terms, it means to find out; to find out answers to your questions, to explore meaning to your questions.

B. R.: When you say meaningful and inspiring, what do you hope to achieve when you ask these questions? Ultimately, of what use are the answers you get?

⁶ The Re-search INSET is a professional development course offered by Sabancı University School of Languages. The course offers input and hands-on practice on classroom and learner-based research. More information is available at:
<http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/do/eng/popup/researchinset.html>



D. K. E.: You could be asking loads of questions I suppose but the reason why I chose the word meaningful is because it goes nicely with the word inspiration; that you have to feel inspired by it. For example one of my own questions to myself is 'How do I create meaning? What realities do I create for myself?' Now I feel this is a meaningful question because it inspires me; it involves a whole process...and it stems from a need and interest for me to explore this area.

B. R.: And in terms of practical use, how do you see that helping you? Is it just to, basically, think about these issues, answer them for yourself or do you see them as having further use than that?

D. K. E.: Definitely, I do. If I feel I'm inspired, I feel I'm able to enthuse others. In my job as a director - as you know I'm involved in a variety of roles – and if I'm unable to do that then I'm not doing my job properly. But more importantly if I'm unable to have that, I'm not fulfilled in what I do. So for me it's personal and professional fulfilment. Practical value? For teachers, definitely. Because if I'm able to enthuse people with research, I would hope – and also through the examples we share and work on together - that it transfers to the classroom in terms of classroom research.

B. R.: I also know that you like to break up the word research into its constituent parts, which are *re* and *search*. What do you want to convey by doing that?

D. K. E.: On my part it wasn't a conscious decision initially; I just liked the play on words, but because I love reading outside the field of ELT particularly in the areas of psychology and philosophy, the more I read the more I am inspired by these...ideas...And one of the ideas that was so powerful for me comes from a book by Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. There's loads of ideas there, but the one I want to refer to is not actually from this book itself but a reference made to another book by Timothy Wilson called, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*...I think there's a lot there that we search for, that we try and find out answers to but that we are

not necessarily aware of...what I really believe at least with myself as a person and a professional is that whether I'm aware of it or not or whether I even like it or not, I'm in a constant search for meaning, for ideas, for answers and that's why the idea of *re-search* is based on the idea that we're searching already but what the *re* stands for is... 'again', like looking into something again or that we're not aware of it but we've searched it already unconsciously and it's re-search, the first process being unconscious, the second being conscious. Does that make sense? Sorry.

B. R.: Yes, I think it does. Is there any practical value that comes out of looking at it this way? What you're saying is very interesting but very difficult to get one's mind around.

D. K. E.: I see what you mean. I think with some of the research tools, there would be something practical there. I would strongly encourage teachers, individuals, professionals to believe in the idea that they *are* - whether they're aware of it or not - in this constant search and re-search anyway. And I believe that's a good point to start at with research because too often there is this misconception that, 'Well I can't be a researcher, I'm only a teacher...Research? Oh, I've got to do all these questionnaires...' but it's *there*. You know, you look at a student and you're wondering about what goes through their mind, that's finding out. So at a practical level, maybe the word 'practical' doesn't do it justice. Maybe the word practical is at an awareness level.

B. R.: Can you distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research for us and perhaps tell us in what situations and why one approach is more appropriate than the other?

D. K. E.: There are loads of books on this and I wouldn't claim at all to be an expert...I wouldn't like to see it as a dichotomy but I think...qualitative has been done some injustice... in one of the key books in the area by Miles and Huberman called *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Fred Kerlinger says, "There's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0" as opposed to an idea by Donald Campbell, "All research ultimately has a qualitative grounding". If we try and put those ideas together, as Miles and Huberman state, "Numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world. Quantities are of qualities..." I think this is a really useful way of looking at it. And to exemplify this maybe I could share with you a couple of extracts which I think you certainly couldn't embrace with quantitative research. A student says,

The teacher should do this job because s/he loves it, not just to earn a living. You can tell very easily if the

teacher loves what s/he is doing. For example, from the way s/he responds to your questions. Some teachers could explain something ten times to help you...but others would just give you a quick evasive answer or would ask, 'Have you still not understood?'

...Now these are from students and if I could just share a couple from teachers, when they were asked to choose a metaphor to describe where they see themselves in their own professional development. This is from one teacher with two and a half years' teaching experience:

I feel like a crawling baby, I know how to walk but when I try it, people do not reward me. They see the mistakes that I do while walking and ask me to crawl.

Another teacher says,

Like an athlete who hasn't displayed her best, most outstanding performance yet [but] who is still working hard and hopefully can do one day or who can get injured and quit the field any time.

I feel this is an excellent way to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research...My love for research comes from the idea that if we want to explore something in depth, then numbers are not going to be enough. Things like this that I've read out, I don't think that there is any way that quantitative research can capture that [i.e. the meaning, the message, the intensity with which the emotions are expressed] so maybe one useful way of looking at it is to see them as complementary because we can't do without numbers either...If we take student involvement as an example, you can approach it both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, you could be tallying the number of times the teacher nominates each student, you could look at male/female student involvement, what sort of percentage, etc. Qualitatively and very usefully, you could take that further and talk to students about their involvement, look at non-verbal features such as facial expressions, etc...In qualitative research, there's a lot there that's already happening as long as we don't shy away from our own insights as researchers... As teachers we're also researchers and we have every right to be a researcher...as a manager I'm a researcher, as a trainer I'm a researcher, as an individual I'm a researcher.

So what are the features? It's descriptive...and I don't think we should be worrying about subjectivity ...we can still try and distance ourselves from our data...meaning is of high importance...and not starting with a hypothesis... We want to keep an open mind

basically...assumption-free as best as possible...so again going back to this example of student involvement, I can say, 'Well my students are not involved in the lesson because it's Friday afternoon.' That's an assumption. Why should I assume that? A much richer way of looking at it would be exploring students' perceptions of their own involvement in class and not really adding any 'color' to it, saying whether it's Friday afternoon or not... That will help us to analyze our data inductively... You might remember this term by Glaser and Strauss, 'grounded theory'; it's a bit like theorizing from the classroom...so this is theorizing from your data; let the data speak rather than saying, 'This is what I'm going to get out of it.' ...

B. R.: ...It's interesting that you mentioned getting students' opinions on certain things. In your work you lay great store on learner-based research. Can you explain what learner-based research is, and why is it so important in your eyes?

D. K. E.: I don't think such a term or phrase exists and I haven't been using this term just so that we have another posh term out there...but I felt the need to distinguish between other... mindsets on research...It's a bit like learner-centered teaching. You can look at it in two ways but before I expand on those ideas, to me learner-based research is any form of research that is inspired by learners and learning; and by learners I'm not necessarily referring only to language learners, I'm also referring to myself as a learner, teachers as learners, any person who would hopefully view themselves as a learner...How does it happen? What sort of examples can we give there?

One form of learner-based research is learners as informants; any research that involves the learner as a research participant can be viewed as learner-based. However, with this term, I take it even further than that...we want students as researchers and as researchers...And how do we do that? One example is to involve...students as observers of teaching and learning... involving language learners in observing classes...with simple yet useful observation tasks...

Another example is, I borrow classes from teachers because I don't get to teach regularly...and...I try and fit my teaching and research work into the curriculum...so whatever the teacher would like me to do, I do using the course book and the core material but at the same time I use this idea of a learner diary where I get them to explore through little, interim re-search tasks... I get them to look at themselves, ...to explore their own ideas...One example was...in a unit on beliefs and values one of the little research tasks was based on...for example, I said to the students, 'Please think about and write down two or three concepts that come to your mind for the following concepts...life, society, people,

family, learning, teaching and I even asked them to choose a seventh concept themselves and to do the same...And then in another task, I got them to...go back to these concepts and to write down a strong belief - related to one of these concepts - that they might have...learner re-search diaries can be a thread running through the teaching-learning process...but...I don't think learners should be forced at all to share what they write with you...; they should keep it to themselves and there is a beauty in that; there's a beauty in having those ideas to yourself and in having that space to yourself... However, we could give them an option that if they want they could share some of those ideas with us as teachers or as researchers...

And maybe a third example to learner-based research in the second strand that I've been mentioning is the idea of role reversal which I love...it is basically reversing the process of research in terms of who leads the research...for example...I had this meeting with a student...there and then...I asked the student because I felt that I had to support him with his self-confidence and self esteem...I said to him, 'Would you like to carry out an interview with me?' And he sort of sat up and 'Yes' he said 'What about?' I said 'Well about...anything you feel you might want to ask me about if you had the opportunity.'...The interview went so well...this is just one example because I've been using the idea since then with students and teachers...from the process...I learned...that the questions people choose to ask you are most often questions that they want to ask themselves or they want someone to ask them. So this idea of role reversal is excellent in the sense that you're putting the learner in the lead...

B. R.: Excellent. Talking about the Re-search INSET...I found this writing in the diary most useful for me; me reflecting on myself; maybe learning about myself...for me, the re-search thing was looking into my own mind and seeing what I thought about certain things and looking at my own views and my own approach and comparing it with what other people were doing and I found that really fascinating and I think it made me a better learner as well...

D. K. E.: ...Thanks so much for sharing that...too often research is based on like this ping pong thing...you ask me, I ask you...the arrows that are missing are the arrows going back to us...I also use it...on my computer in my drafts folder I have a draft e-mail; I'm the recipient, it's addressed to myself and the title...keeps changing depending on my mood although I keep the previous titles...and every now and again even if it's a couple of minutes - which, as you know, I call space rather than time...I find myself writing away, maybe just a couple of lines and that's an excellent tool for talking to myself...and from time to time going back to it and seeing...I wonder why, how I felt like that at the time

B. R.: Thanks very much Deniz...It's been very enlightening...Is there anything else that you would like to add before we sign off?

D. K. E.: Probably loads more but maybe to finish off with something that inspires me these days...This comes from Sketches of Satie by John and Steve Hackett, it's actually a very inspiring piece of music and inside [the CD cover] there's a quotation that says, 'Ah but there's the beauty in the things he didn't do.'...With re-search, there's a lot of hidden beauties...there's a lot of inspiration that we maybe haven't found yet, but if we can enthuse ourselves...there will be things we do and things we don't do, but that there's a beauty in everything and anything out there...Going back to the idea of qualitative research...there might be one person out there who chooses not to do what you might be asking them...to do, but that there's also a beauty in the idea that he has chosen not to do it. I find that very inspiring.

My Links

In this seventh column of My Links, you'll find again a few more websites on research and supporting resources. We hope you find them useful!

▶▶ The *LLAS website* offers 'a collection of commissioned articles for learning and teaching in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies written by recognized authorities in their field and reviewed by an editorial board.'

<http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/guidecontents.aspx>

▶▶ *Keegan's Big Approaches Quiz* is a fun interactive exercise which could be also useful to Psychology of Language learners. There are also a couple of prizes for the winners!

http://www.gerardkeegan.co.uk/resource/quiz_bigapproaches.htm

▶▶ The *Journal of Learning Design* 'aims to provide a forum for critical debate and professional exchange about models, theoretical positioning and best practice in learning.'

<http://www.jld.qut.edu.au/>

▶▶ *Reading Quest: Making Sense in Social Studies* 'challenges you to think about what students should know or be able to do, and what it looks like when they are engaging the content towards the purpose of that lesson.' Teachers of any content area and researchers can find the strategies and the process useful and helpful.

<http://www.readingquest.org/home.html>

▶▶ *OERL, the Online Evaluation Resource Library* 'was developed for professionals seeking to design, conduct, document, or review project evaluations.' Take the site tour for all the resources.

<http://oerl.sri.com/home.html>

▶▶ *On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: The Value of Reflexivity* is an article by Diane Watt in which she 'highlights the value of reflexivity both during and after a [research] study, and may help to demystify the research process for those new to the field.' Please note this is the PDF article from The Qualitative Report Volume 12 Number 1 March 2007 82-101.

<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR12-1/watt.pdf>

▶▶ *CiteULike* 'is a free service to help you to store, organise and share the scholarly papers you are reading. When you see a paper on the web that interests you, you can click one button and have it added to your personal library.'

<http://www.citeulike.org/>

▶▶ *TEXT* is the international peer-reviewed journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs. The current issue, volume 12, no 1, offers a useful article on 'Peer reviewing: privilege and responsibility'.

<http://www.textjournal.com.au/>

If you have comments, a request or a link to suggest, please do get in touch!



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