

# ORTESOL

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C/O PSU Dept of Applied Linguistics  
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# The ORTESOL Journal

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## THE ORTESOL JOURNAL

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## In this Issue

This issue of *The ORTESOL Journal* contains articles that reflect the diverse interests of TESOL professionals. Integrating a focus on form into language teaching emerges as a theme throughout this issue. Contributors represent the range of settings where TESOL education occurs, including secondary education, university, and EFL programs.

- Yoritaka Tezuka investigated factors that affect whether Japanese learners of English render the complement of an English verb as a direct object or a prepositional phrase. In his article, he describes evidence that L1 interference, universal knowledge, lexical knowledge, and visualization of spatial relationships influence this choice. He concludes that grammar and lexicon are interconnected systems, and therefore a focus on grammar should be integrated into the teaching of English vocabulary.
- In her article, Choonkyong Kim reports the results of a study showing that English learners often overlook morphosyntactic clues (*ing* and *to*) when guessing the meanings of high-frequency polysemous words, such as *a coat* and *to coat*. She advocates raising learner awareness that many common words have multiple meanings and parts of speech as well as explicitly teaching learners to use morphosyntactic information to detect unfamiliar uses of familiar words.
- Mama Broekhoff's teaching notes describe "downshifting," a technique for improving paragraph development. She shows how to use a visual aid, Hayakawa's "Ladder of Abstraction," to help students learn to distinguish between general and specific. Examples of student writing illustrate how learners can apply downshifting to analyze and improve their paragraphs and essays.
- In their teaching notes, David Lasagabaster and Alex Kraukle advocate combining focus on meaning and focus on form by basing a series of activities on an oral text, a dictogloss. Using a humorous radio sketch as an example, they explain how to select a suitable text and carry out the dictogloss. They then suggest numerous techniques for raising students' awareness of language forms in four dimensions of communicative competence.
- Alice Chan's teaching notes present an algorithmic approach, inspired by studies in consciousness raising and form-focused instruction, that helps students correct persistent errors. To encourage educators to adopt this approach, she models its four steps—helping students notice the problem, guiding them to discover correct use, introducing explicit rules, and giving reinforcement exercises—focusing on the use of the preposition *until* as an example.
- In her review, Yuki Kanai recommends the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* for beginning- and intermediate-level English learners and for their teachers. She appreciates how well this dictionary serves its target audience with insights into the intuitive knowledge of native speakers, as well as through its clarity and its CD-ROM. Although its unique system of classifying headwords may initially confuse users, she believes it ultimately contributes to clarity.
- Tamara Smith's review encourages teachers to consider *Seeing the Big Picture: Exploring American Cultures on Film* for advanced level ESL classes. She praises the richness and insightfulness of the readings and the abundance of ideas for activities and projects. She suggests strategies for supplementing the book to incorporate a more intentional focus on developing language skills.

**The Influence of Universal Knowledge of  
*Direct Object* on Japanese Students'  
Sentence Making**

**Yoritaka Tezuka**  
*Chuo Gakuin University*

*An analysis of the negative transfer of a grammatical category, i.e., the direct object, in English by Japanese learners concludes that a learner's first language, universal semantic knowledge of direct object, lexical knowledge of English prepositions, and visualization of spatial relationships affect a learner's decision to create a transitive sentence. To examine what knowledge learners use when they encounter and use new English verbs, a fill-in-the-blank test was given to 6 Japanese students studying in the US. Nouns that are affected (whose shapes are changed) by the action of the verb and nouns that co-occur with the particle o in verbal constructions in Japanese were more likely to be treated as direct objects in English. Participants reported that co-occurrence with the particle ni and spatial imagery contributed to their choice to construct a prepositional phrase rather than a direct object. These findings agree with the view that grammar and lexicon are interconnected rather than separate systems. Possible directions for research and applications in teaching are discussed.*

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Yoritaka Tezuka received his MA in English and American Literature from Chuo University in Japan and MA TESOL from Portland State University. He is currently a part-time lecturer at Chuo Gakuin University. He is interested in pedagogical implications of second language acquisition, cognitive linguistics, language policies, and world Englishes.

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Learning idiosyncratic verbal complement patterns in English (e.g., verb + noun, verb + *that* clause, and verb + prepositional phrase) is torturous for second language learners but, ironically, essential for improving learners' English abilities. Some linguists point out that this difficulty is related to differences between the native language and the target language.

Studies of these differences, called *contrastive analyses*, have been undertaken in the field of applied linguistics. Brown (1994) mentions that the term *interference* occurs frequently in the literature on second language acquisition. The research, however, tends to miss the inquiry into more generalized principles that constrain possible formations. To reduce the burden of these verbal constructions, this study explores some universal mechanisms within diverse structural patterns of English sentences, i.e., the pattern of transitive constructions (a transitive verb + a direct object).

### Background Knowledge

#### Interference of Japanese Particles

Japanese learners of English tend to misuse the verb *discuss* by placing the preposition *about* before the noun.

- (1) \*We discuss about the problem.

It is widely considered that the reason for the mistake in (1) stems from the interference of the particle choice in the Japanese student's native language. In Japanese, case-holding nouns— including nominative and accusative—require case particles, and these particles are categorized into five types: nominative *ga*, accusative *o*, dative *ni*, genitive *no*, and topic marker *wa*. Unlike in English, in Japanese each of these particles comes after its noun to form one phrase.

- (2) a. Taroo-ga hasit-ta.  
Taroo-Nom run-past  
"Taro ran."

- b. Kodomo-ga hon-o yon-da.  
Child-Nom book-Acc read-past  
"The child read the book."
- c. Ziroo-ga Yosio-ni ringo-o age-ta.  
.tiro-Nom Yosio-Dat apple-Acc give-past  
"tiro gave an apple to Yosio."
- d. Hanako-no musuko-ga warat-ta.  
Hanako-Gen son-Nom laugh-past  
"Hanako's son laughed."
- e. Ano uti-wa  
That house-Top big<sup>mk</sup> house-past  
"As for that house, it is big."

(Tsujimura, 1996, p. 134)

The noun with the case particle *o* in Japanese is always coded as an object of the sentence. Accordingly, most Japanese transitive verbs take the phrase *noun + particle o* as their object. For example, the transitive verb *kaiketusuru* (*solve* in English) requires the noun *sono-mondai* (*the problem*) with the particle *o* as its direct object.

- (3) Wareware-wa sono-mondai-o kaiketusita  
We-SUB the-problem-ofu solve-VERB-PAST  
"We solved the problem."

Because the noun *sono-mondai* is recognized as the object in the Japanese sentence, it is smoothly translated as the direct object in English in the process of composing English sentences, as seen in (3).

On the other hand, another Japanese verb *touronsuru* (*discuss*) in (4) does not usually take an object to form the phrase *mondai-o-touronsita* (*problem-ow particle-discussed*); instead, the phrase *mondai-nituite-touronsita* (*problem-about-discussed*) is a more natural expression for Japanese, as seen in (5).

- (4) \*Wareware-wa sono-mondai-o touronsita  
 We-SUB the-problem-oar diSCUSS-VERB-PAST  
 "We discussed the problem."
- (5) Wareware-wa sono-mondai-nituite touronsita  
 We-suB the-problem-about discuss-VERB-PAST  
 \*"We discussed *about* the problem."

Because the particle *nituite* in (5) is usually translated into the preposition *about* in English, *sono-mondai-nituite* tends to be translated *about the problem*, which is judged ungrammatical or non-standard among native speakers of English. This is a typical example of negative transfer (interference) among Japanese learners of English. This interpretation from the field of applied linguistics is generally used to explain the use of *about* in such expressions.

#### Perspectives from Theoretical Linguistics

In the field of theoretical linguistics, on the other hand, some studies explore other interpretations. Some theoretical linguists propose general (or universal) concepts of the grammatical object in terms of semantic definitions. Bowerman (1982) collected data from his young daughters for about 4 years, by taping or taking notes of their daily speech. Adding the data from other children, he observed that children between the ages of 4 and 7 often overgeneralize the moving entity (what he calls "figure" [F]) as the object, rather than the destination of the movement ("ground" [G]). For example, one of his subjects produced the question, *Can I fill some salt [F] into the bear [G]?*—referring to a bear-shaped salt shaker—whereas an adult would ordinarily have said, *Can I fill the bear with some salt?* His longitudinal study indicates a system in which a semantic figure is automatically encoded as the grammatical object.

Other linguists propose a revision of Bowerman's (1982) hypothesis. They claim that the thing that undergoes a change of shape or state (so-called "being affected") tends to be coded as the object in English. Gropen, Pinker, Hollander, and Goldberg (1991) gathered data both from children (ages 3 to 9) and adults to predict what kind of noun (figure or ground) is counted as the object in learning new verbs. In their experiment, the subjects viewed the movement of a packet of pennies to a 20-cm felt square on a hollow frame (pattern A); the

subjects saw the felt sagging because the frame supported only the felt's perimeter. In the same manner, in pattern B, the experimenter moved the packet of pennies to a square of felt on a solid square. In this case, the felt did not sag because the felt's entire surface was supported.

After the demonstration of both patterns, the experimenter asked two questions: "Can you tell me, with the word *keating*, what I'm doing with the *pennies*?" and "Can you tell me, with the word *keating*, what I'm doing with the *cloth*?" By utilizing the meaningless verb *keat*, Gropen et al. sought to discover which noun (*penny* [F] or *felt* [G]) can become the -object.

Gropen et al. (1991) found that, regardless of question pattern, the figure predominated as the object, a result that supports Bowerman's study. At the same time, though, their data also reveal a tendency, not evident in Bowerman's study, for subjects in all age groups to consider a ground noun, such as *felt*, the object when the ground changes its shape. For example, there is a tendency to answer *You keated felt*, rather than *You keated pennies*, when the shape of the felt changed (as in pattern A, when the felt sagged). From this experiment, Gropen et al. conclude that in English whether the noun is affected or not will be the primary criterion for deciding which noun is the object.

This is a very persuasive argument because its universality is supported by other linguistic studies. In their typological survey, Hopper and Thompson (1980) found a close relationship in many languages between the grammatical object and the noun that was affected and underwent a change. Taylor (1989) listed properties of transitive sentences, and affectedness is counted as one of these properties. Similar to Gropen et al. (1991), Fisher (1994), through his experiments investigating children's acquisition of complementation of transitive verbs, also supported the affectedness of the direct object. The concept *affected noun as the direct object* is thus generally accepted among linguists.

I have briefly discussed so far the Japanese tendency of following two possible routes to produce the grammatical category *object* in English. The universal concept in Figure 1 is very convincing, but this model is not strong enough to define all objects in English.

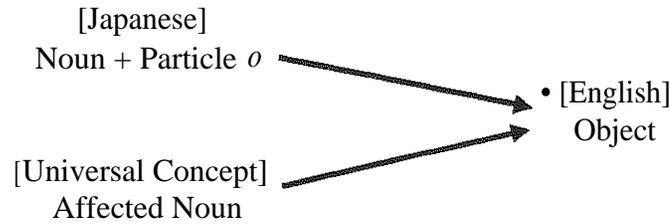


Figure 1. Factors that influence the creation of grammatical objects.

In the objects of the following sentences, for example, only *patient* nouns are affected.

- (6) a. Patient: He boiled *the milk*.
  - b. Theme: He threw *stones* at the window.
  - c. Location: The helicopter crossed *the road*.
  - d. Source: The train left *Rome* for Florence.
  - e. Goal: The mountaineer reached *the mountain top*.
  - f. Experiencer: The movie pleased *John*.
  - g. Stimulus: Jean admired *the painter*.
  - h. Instrument: He used *a knife* to cut the cake.
  - i. Beneficiary: They presented *Till* with a medal.
- (Schlesinger, 1995, p. 56)

Even though theoretical linguists reveal from various perspectives that affectedness is the most salient semantic feature of the grammatical object, it is still not clear how affectedness is influential in the process of encoding the grammatical object when creating English sentences.

The purpose of this paper is to propose that, for creating the object in English, the role of each of these two different cues—negative transfer and affectedness—is considerable. This study focuses on ideas from both theoretical and applied linguistics. Thus, two hypotheses are proposed.

1. Subjects will interpret affected nouns as direct objects more often than they will nouns that are not affected and do not undergo changes of state.
2. Subjects will interpret nouns that are translated with the Japanese particle *o* as the direct objects more often than they will nouns translated without the particle *o*.

**Method**

Participants

Data were collected from six Japanese students at a large urban university on the west coast of the United States (see Table 1). Five were students of English as a second language, and one (subject D) was a regular student. All had studied English in Japan for at least 6 years in junior high and high school. Their ages ranged from 19 to 28. Most of the students had been studying in America for about one half of a year, and the others for up to 3 years.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Sex	Months in US	ESL level
A	20	F	6	3
B	23	M	7	4
C	22	F	6	4
D	28	M	36	Regular student
E	19	F	5	3
F	19	F	18	3-4

Procedure

A sentence-completion test was designed as the data collection procedure. Each of the 12 randomly ordered test items was a sentence with a blank between the verb and its object. The participants could leave the blank empty or fill it in with a preposition, thus creating a sentence with a direct object or, respectively, a prepositional phrase.

- (7) a. My mother quartered \_\_\_\_ the tomatoes.  
 b. John bottled \_\_\_\_ wine.  
 c. They grooved \_\_\_\_ a window frame.  
 d. He greased \_\_\_\_ his hair.

This design is based on the test that Ktivecse and Szabo (1996) used for the purpose of identifying cognitive mechanisms in teaching and learning idioms.

The items were categorized into four types according to the characteristics of the nouns in object positions. Two binary categories were utilized to categorize the examples. The first was co-occurrence with the case particle *o* or *ni*. The second was the status of the object noun as affected or nonaffected.

- (8) a. [Group A: *noun + o*, +AFF]  
 Kanojyo-wa abara-o otta  
 She.SUB rib-om fracture-VERB-PAST  
 "She fractured (her) rib."  
 b. [Group B: *noun + o*, -AFF]  
 Jyon-wa wain-o botoru-ni-ireta  
 John-SUB wine-OBJ bottle-VERB-PAST  
 "John bottled wine."  
 c. [Group C: *noun + ni*, +AFF]  
 Liz-wa sukaato-ni siwa-o-tuketa  
 Liz.SUB skirt-OBJ crease-VERB-PAST  
 "Liz creased (her) skirt."

- d. [Group D: *noun + ni*, -AFF]  
 Kare-wa kabe-ni sikkui-o-nutta  
 He-suB wall-OBJ plaster-VERB-PAST  
 "He plastered the wall."

All sentences in Group A included objects that were affected nouns and translated into *noun + o* in Japanese. Sentences in Group B also involved objects of the form *noun + o*, but they were not affected. The objects in Groups C and D were translated into the noun with the particle *ni* (the particle that is usually translated into the preposition *to* or *on* in English). They were different in that the objects in Group C were affected and the ones in Group D were not.

Unusual transitive verbs were deliberately selected so that the verbs would be unknown to all participants. There were three sentences of each type. Each test item consisted of one English transitive verb, its Japanese translation, and an English sentence containing the verb followed by a blank space and noun. (Only the sentences are shown here. See Appendix A for more details.)

## (9) Group A

1. My mother quartered \_\_\_\_ the tomatoes.
2. The ball shattered \_\_\_\_ the window.
3. She fractured \_\_\_\_ a rib.

## Group B

1. They niched \_\_\_\_ the statue.
2. The government blacklisted \_\_\_\_ the director.
3. John bottled \_\_\_\_ wine.

## Group C

1. Liz sat down and creased \_\_\_\_ her skirt.
2. They grooved \_\_\_\_ a window frame.
3. The child fell and bruised \_\_\_\_ his knee.

## Group D

1. He greased \_\_\_\_ his hair.
2. Nancy strung \_\_\_\_ a bow.
3. John plastered \_\_\_\_ the wall.

The affected objects in Groups A and C underwent change in their states or shapes, such as being cut or broken into pieces, being wrinkled, being dug, and so on. On the other hand, such physical changes did not occur in the objects in Groups B and D. In most cases in the sentences of Groups B and D, grammatical subjects (actors) placed the object noun somewhere or put something on the object noun.

The participants were asked to fill in the blank with a preposition if they thought it was necessary. Otherwise, they were instructed to leave it blank. Because all of the verbs were transitive, none of the blanks were supposed to be filled in with prepositions. However, each participant filled in some prepositions. After the test, I interviewed all participants, asking the reasons they did or did not put a preposition in each blank.

### Results

Table 2 shows the results categorized by sentence group. The data support the hypothesis that the affected nouns that were translated into *noun + o* (Group A) were understood as the direct objects in English.

Table 2

Number of Responses of Each Grammatical Form for Each Group of Sentences

Grammatical form	Sentence group			
	A	B	C	D
Direct object	18	11	7	3
Prepositional phrase	0	7	11	15

Most participants placed more prepositions in Group C than in Group A (11 vs. 0) and in Group D than in Group B (15 vs. 7). These data imply that the type of particle that co-occurs with a noun in Japanese has a remarkable influence on whether that noun is translated as the direct object or not. I also found the concept of *affectedness* valid; most participants wrote more prepositions in Group 13 than in Group A (7 vs. 0) and in Group D than in Group C (15 vs. 11). These data reveal that the quality of affectedness also has an important effect on whether a noun is treated as a direct object or not, though affectedness is not as salient a factor as is the type of particle.

All participants left all the blanks in Group A empty. When prepositions were written (in 39% of the items in Group B, 61% in Group C, and 83% in Group D), the prepositions of place *on* and *in* were mainly used, except in sentences B-3 and D-2. All answers are listed in Table 3.

### Discussion

#### Conclusions

The data strongly support both hypotheses in this study, but through the interviews I found the problem of identifying a direct object to be much more complicated than expected (see Appendix B). For example, although the data for Group A imply that the quality of affectedness influences the decision to use the direct object, none of the participants commented, "I did not put in any prepositions because the noun in the object position changed its shape." Instead, they simply answered, "I did not write any prepositions because I just could not think of or imagine any prepositions."

They reported using spatial images as the primary cue to decide whether or not to put a preposition in the blank; many participants had spatial images first and then translated them into English. For example, in answering the question for item B-3 (*John bottled wine*), Participant D imagined "somebody fills a bottle with wine," so she selected the preposition *with*, whereas Participant A imagined "somebody put wine in the bottle," so she chose *in* for the answer.

Table 3  
Participants' Answers

Sentence	Participant					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Group A						
1	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X	X	X
Group B						
1	on	X	X	X	on	X
2	on	X	X	X	on	X
3	in	of	X	with	X	X
Group C						
1	on	on	X	on	X	<b>on</b>
2	on	X	on	on	to	X
3	on	on	X	X	in	
Group D						
1	X	on	on	X	on	on
2	with	with	on	with	with	X
3	on	on	on	to	with	on

Although I had expected that the particle *o* might play an important role in whether or not a participant decided to put a preposition in the blank, the participants did not comment on this, either. Instead, some

participants stated that they added prepositions because the noun could be translated into *noun + ni*. As I mentioned earlier, the particle *ni* is typically translated into the preposition *to* or *on*. It is "primarily associated with verbs of giving, and together with a noun, it implies the recipient" (Tsuji-mura, 1996, p. 134). The participants put more emphasis on the Japanese particle *ni* than on affectedness or the particle *o*.

The interviews after the test showed that the participants also used other strategies to reach their answers. Therefore, I have modified Figure 1 to include additional mechanisms that appear to influence the choices of Japanese speakers in expressing the direct object in English (see Figure 2).

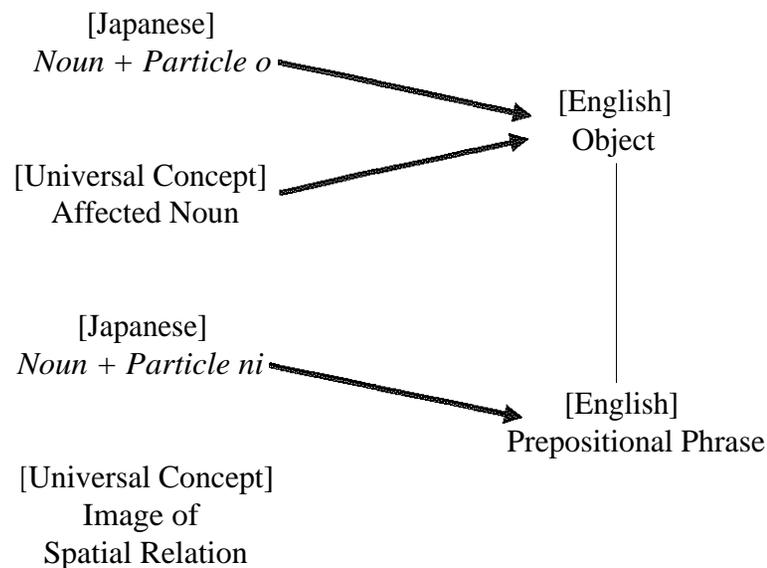


Figure 2. Factors that influence the creation of grammatical objects and prepositional phrases.

This revised figure indicates that the mechanism for choosing to create English grammatical objects is closely related to that for English prepositional phrases.

#### Implications for Further Research

This paper has discussed some characteristics of the direct object in English, focusing on the purely grammatical knowledge of Japanese learners. The results of this paper support the argument by Gropen et al. (1991) that proposed the generalized concept of the object in terms of semantic definitions. Recently, in theoretical linguistics there have been some attempts to reanalyze grammatical categories in terms of perceptual and cognitive systems. For example, Verfaillie and Daems (1996) described cognitive-based differences between grammatical subject and object. Other researchers, such as Thal, Bates, Zappia, and Oroz (1996), continued this line of inquiry and highlight that there are no special reasons to discuss grammar and semantic components separately. Boland (1997) also focused on sentence comprehension and concluded that syntactic and semantic components are more closely related. Likewise, this study suggests that there is no discrete and discontinuous boundary between grammar, the lexicon, and semantics.

A limitation of this study is its sample size. Because there were only 6 participants, we cannot step into the discussion about which prepositional phrase Japanese learners tend to choose. Therefore, I suggest that more studies be conducted to determine whether similar results would occur in a larger sample size. This sort of research needs to examine the role of prepositional phrases in addition to the universal concept of the direct object. Although Gropen et al. (1991) provided some significant interpretations of direct objects from semantic perspectives, for further research it is necessary to employ an extended framework that covers both transitive constructions and prepositional complements.

#### Implications for Teaching

This type of study has an important implication for the teaching and learning of vocabulary: Grammatical categories such as *direct objects* should be integrated into the teaching of English verbal patterns. For

example, it is possible to utilize this knowledge about direct objects for learning English verbs *rob* and *steal*.

- (10) a. Jesse robbed the rich (of all their money).  
 b. \*Jesse robbed a million dollars (from the rich).  
 c. Jesse stole money (from the rich).  
 d. \*Jesse stole the rich (of money).  
 (Goldberg, 1995, p. 45)

According to Goldberg (1995), these verbs are different in what entity is focused upon or affected. She mentioned that the verb *rob* takes the robbed person, who is "seriously negatively affected" (p. 46), as its object. Thus, sentence (10b) is judged as ungrammatical in spite of the fact that (10a) is grammatical. The verb *steal*, on the other hand, does not entail this implication. It focuses on "the fact that the stolen goods are not legitimately the thief's property, rather than the fact that they are actually someone else's" (p. 46).

This study provides evidence that analyses of English verbs by theoretical linguistics will help learners induce some general rules in English verbs from individual verb patterns. According to the data from Bates and Goodman (1997), grammatical knowledge and vocabulary acquisition are closely related. They stated that all linguistic forms—such as words, morphemes, and phrases—may be "acquired and processed by a unified processing system" (p. 510). According to Benton (1993), there is a "neglect and superficial treatment of complex grammatical and usage problems" (p. 6) in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages, and this "causes great difficulties for non-native learners" (p. 7). Incorporating grammatical theories into the practice of teaching and learning vocabulary, as proposed in this study, has the potential to solve this problem.

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## APPENDIX A

## Test

1. { Vg4.7) P=1- (quarter) }  
My mother quartered \_\_\_\_ the tomatoes.
2. { L h -0 it 6 (crease) }  
Liz sat down and creased \_\_\_\_ her skirts.
3. { 1-ti/r-...-3 < (niche) }  
They niched \_\_\_\_ that statue.
4. { it 6 (grease) }  
He greased \_\_\_\_ his hair.
5. { ;l (shatter) }  
The ball shattered \_\_\_\_ the window.
6. { (groove) }  
They grooved \_\_\_\_ a window frame.
7. &IT 6 (fracture) }  
She fractured \_\_\_\_ her rib.
8. { (ft (bruise) }  
The child fell and bruised \_\_\_\_ his knee.
9. { ". r,:0D-t (blacklist) }  
The government blacklisted \_\_\_\_ the director.
10. { (string) }  
Nancy strung \_\_\_\_ a bow.
11. { II-1;: Att (bottle) }  
John bottled \_\_\_\_ wine.
12. { L < U (plaster) }  
John plastered \_\_\_\_ the wall.

## APPENDIX B

## Posttest Interview Results

Group A: noun + o, AFF

1. *My mother quartered \_\_\_\_ the tomatoes.*
2. *The ball shattered \_\_\_\_ the window.*
3. *She fractured \_\_\_\_ a rib.*

Group B: noun + o, -AFF

1. *They niched \_\_\_\_ the statue.*  
"I imagined something put somewhere." (E)
2. *The government blacklisted \_\_\_\_ the director.*  
"I imagined a paper to write." (A)  
"I imagined something put somewhere." (E)
3. *John bottled \_\_\_\_ wine.*  
"I imagined somebody put wine in the bottle." (A)  
"I imagined somebody fills a bottle with wine." (D)  
"I imagined the bottle is filled up with wine." (E)

Group C: noun + ni, AFF

1. *Liz sat down and creased \_\_\_\_ her skirt.*  
"I imagined the surface of the skirt." (B)  
"Because the noun is translated into 'noun + \_\_\_\_'" (F)
2. *They grooved \_\_\_\_ a window frame.*  
"I imagined groove is put on the window." (C)  
"Because the noun is translated into 'noun + ni'..." (D, E, F)
3. *The child fell and bruised \_\_\_\_ his knee.*  
"I imagined the surface of the knee." (A, B)  
"Because the noun is translated into 'noun + ni'..." (E)

Group D: noun + ni, -AFF

1. *He greased his hair.*

"I imagined grease is on the hair." (B, T)

"If we say 'grease his hair,' I feel grease come out naturally." (C)

2. *Nancy strung a bow.*

"I did not imagine the space. A bow is necessary to put string. I imagined 'with.'" (A)

"String is touching a bow." (B)

"String is on a bow." (C)

"A bow is necessary to put string on it. I imagined 'with using ...'" (D)

"I imagined a bow is fitted with string." (E)

"Because the noun is translated into 'noun + ni'..." (E)

3. *John plastered the wall.*

"I imagined something on the surface." (A)

"I imagined the surface of the wall." (B)

"I imagined something touching on the wall." (C)

"Because the noun is 'the wall'..." (F)

## Guessing Unfamiliar Meanings of Familiar Words: L2 Learners' Sensitivity to Grammatical Morphemes

Choonkyong Kim  
St. Cloud State University

*This study investigated the degree to which second language learners utilize salient morphosyntactic information when guessing the unfamiliar meanings of deceptively familiar words. Korean learners of English as a foreign language took a series of tests involving 10 English compound nouns. In these compound nouns, the first part was always a gerund based on noun-verb polysemy, as in landing signal. These words were used because their noun meanings are common and well known to most learners, whereas the same is not true for their verb meanings. Results from the tests revealed that participants did not fully use the information available from the grammatical morphemes, such as -ing and the infinitivizer to, both of which clearly mark a word as a verb. The results support a previous finding regarding the overriding effect of semantics over syntactic processing by second language learners (Kim, 1996). Information from salient grammatical morphemes can be short-circuited due to interference caused by partial familiarity with and incomplete semantic knowledge of second language vocabulary. Pedagogical implications include the importance of helping learners to become aware of the multiplicity of word meanings and to develop flexibility about revising their existing vocabulary knowledge.*

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Choonkyong Kim received her Ph.D. at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She taught various courses of adult EFL and EFL teacher training in Korea and in the US. In 2001, she was a visiting scholar in the Department of Applied Linguistics at Portland State University. Since then, she has been teaching in the MA-TESL program at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. Her research interests include second language vocabulary acquisition, psycholinguistics, and instructional methods.

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If a second language (L2) learner of English learns the word *land* initially in a sentence like *The rich man gave the city some land to build a children's hospital*, can we expect this learner to automatically understand the same word in a sentence like *The little boy watched the airplanes land at the airport* without further explanation? Knowledge of a word includes knowing the range of meaning and use of the word (Nation, 2001). Although most literature on vocabulary acquisition makes it clear that beginning learners of English must focus on the 2000 most frequent words (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000), it is important to emphasize that because many high-frequency words have more than one grammatical part of speech and several different meanings, learners must learn the multiple senses of these high-frequency words.

L2 learners constantly need to increase their vocabulary knowledge in both quantity and quality. On the one hand, educated adult native speakers of English know an estimated 20,000 word families (Nation, 2001); learning a lexicon of this size poses a tremendous challenge to L2 learners. Nagy and Anderson (1984) estimated that average school children learning English as their first language (L1) are expected to learn as many as 3000 words per year. This seems almost impossible in the case of L2 learning. Even though extensive reading for pleasure is believed to lead to vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1989), other studies show that a reader needs to know about 95% of the vocabulary in a given text for meaningful comprehension of that text (Laufer, 1992), or even up to 98-99% for pleasurable reading (Hirsh & Nation, 1992). Thus, basic vocabulary knowledge is crucial for extensive reading to become a facilitating factor for further vocabulary growth.

On the other hand, the lexicon of any given language has various types of internal complexities that are not necessarily the same as those of the lexicon of a learner's L1. For this reason, successful identification of regularities in the L2 lexicon can enhance the learner's vocabulary knowledge. Although some regularities might be associated with individual lexical items, others might be associated with more general, macro-level characteristics of the lexicon. In English, for example, noun-verb polysemies are very commonly observed as in *land* as a noun and *to land* as a verb, as in the example sentences above. Whereas most of these noun-verb polysemies are semantically related,

there are also semantically unrelated noun-verb homonyms, such as *rock* as a noun in *The boy threw a rock into the lake*, and *to rock* as a verb in *The babysitter gently rocked the cradle*.

Although it is important to know the individual instances of such vocabulary items, this study deals with a more general level of lexical information. Are L2 learners of English aware of such regularities in English to the extent that their knowledge of such words can be constantly revised and updated when they are presented with evidence indicating the possibility of unfamiliar meanings of familiar words? Failure to recognize such macro-level regularities might lead to rigid vocabulary knowledge and eventually impede full knowledge of the target vocabulary. This is a concern because, in a lot of noun-verb polysemies, the noun meaning is common and familiar to L2 learners, whereas its verb meaning may be less common or not so familiar to the learners. In other words, knowing a word in its noun sense only, without being aware that it can also be used as a verb or that it might be a homonym, can preempt further sophistication of learners' knowledge of the word.

If this proves to be true, it would be a case of comprehensive vocabulary growth being blocked by existing partial knowledge. With a pedagogical motivation, this study was designed to explore the following initial research question: Do L2 learners revise their existing vocabulary knowledge based on syntactic clues available from salient grammatical morphemes, such as *-ing* attached to a verb and the infinitivizer *to*? In an attempt to find the answer to this question, the multiple-choice test from Kim (1996), which had been designed to focus on the methodology of psycholinguistic research in L2, was revised to suit the purpose of this study.

## Method

### Participants

Forty-two college students from English conversation classes at a university in Korea volunteered to participate in this study. All participants were native speakers of Korean who were freshmen from various departments at the College of Commerce. Gender was not an

important factor for the purpose of the study. Because the pattern of within-subjects variation across tests on common vocabulary items was the object of investigation, it was not necessary to conduct a separate English proficiency test. However, at the time of data collection for this study, participants represented a homogeneous group of English learners on the following criteria: They had 6 years of formal English instruction in secondary school, and they had just been placed in the same level of conversation class.

### Materials

Ten noun-verb polysemies were used in this study: *arm, book, coat, ice, land, page, park, rock, taxi, and trip*, all of which were from the 2000 most frequent word list in English (Carroll, Davies, & Richman, 1971). Their noun meanings are more common than their verb meanings, and their noun meanings are well known to most learners of English. An informal survey among Korean learners with English proficiency comparable to that of the participants in this study confirmed that the noun meanings of these words were indeed familiar to these learners. Based on these target words, four types of tests were developed for data collection.

**Pretest self-evaluation of vocabulary knowledge.** The purpose of the pretest self-evaluation was to measure participants' general awareness of the polysemous nature of the target words. Participants were asked to rate their knowledge of each of the target words by marking one of the three response items: (a) *easy word for me: I know its meaning well, and I can use it without difficulty;* (b) *difficult word for me: I only vaguely know its meaning, and I have heard it before;* and (c) *unknown word to me: I do not know what it means, and I have never heard it before.* In addition, they were asked to indicate the parts of speech of the target words and were reminded that, if a word belongs to more than one part of speech, they should write them all. Notice that the purpose of this self-evaluation was not to test the knowledge of individual words, but to measure the learners' own perception of their knowledge of these words.

In addition to the target words, there were 10 low-frequency words and 10 made-up words. None of the 10 low-frequency words came

from either the list of the most frequent 2000 words or the academic word list (Carroll, Davies, & Richman, 1971; Coxhead, 2000). These were included because the target words were all high-frequency words, which could make the rating procedure unnatural from the participants' point of view if all the words were well known to them. Ideally, the three sets of words (the target words, low-frequency words, and made-up words) matched the three categories of responses to choose from (see Appendix A for a complete list of the words used in the pretest self-evaluation). To control for any possible order effects, the list was randomized to produce two versions: Order 1 and Order 2.

**Translation test.** The purpose of the translation test was to measure participants' interpretation of the target vocabulary relative to their noun meanings and verb meanings. Each item of the target vocabulary was used to form a compound noun, in which the target word was used as a gerund, as in *taxiing speed*. **Then, each compound noun was used to form a sentence to be translated into Korean.** All the words used in the sentences were high-frequency words, and the sentences were also simple declaratives such as *The passengers talked about the taxiing speed with each other.* Ten filler sentences were included, each of which had a noun preceded by an adjective, as in *The scientist bought a new computer for his son.* Twenty sentences were randomized to produce two versions to control for order effects (see Appendix B for a complete list of the sentences).

**Multiple-choice test.** The purpose of the multiple-choice test was to measure participants' attention to subtle syntactic cues—the grammatical morpheme *-ing* attached to the target words, and the infinitivizer *to—in* identifying the verb meanings of the target words rather than their noun meanings. The infinitivizer *to* was used in the choices rather than repeating the *-ing* morpheme to avoid making the correct option too obvious. **The participants had experienced 6 years of explicit English grammar instruction in Korea, where use of the phrases *verb + -ing* or *to + verb* is very common, so it was assumed that participants were familiar with the fact that these morphemes are attached to verbs in English.**

Based on the sentences used in the translation test, 20 multiple-choice items were constructed: 10 target items and 10 filler items. In

each of the target sentences, the target word in its gerund form was underlined, and the participants were supposed to choose a phrase that best explained the meaning of the underlined target word. Of the four choices provided, one had the verbal meaning of the target word, and another had its noun meaning. The other two choices were distractors. For the compound noun *taxiing speed* in the sentence *The passengers talked about the taxiing speed with each other*, for example, the following verb and noun meaning choices were provided:

Verb meaning: to move slowly

Noun meaning: a small passenger automobile

Notice that the phrase that designates the verb meaning was headed by *to*, and this was to make it clear that it is a verb phrase. In other words, even when the verb meaning of *taxi*, the root verb of the gerund *taxiing*, is unknown to the participants, they can infer that its meaning derives from a verb because the grammatical morpheme *-ing* must be affixed to a verb. If they use this clue to identify the grammatical root of the word as a verb, then a similar clue that the phrase headed by the word *to* is a verb phrase can help them identify the correct answer. This process does not even involve accessing the semantic information of the target compound noun for the verb phrase choice. It only takes paying attention to syntactic information that is readily available. However, participants need to overcome being deflected to the noun meaning of the target polysemy because the noun meaning is more commonly known to them.

The filler items were constructed in a similar manner with the exception that, in 5 out of the 10 filler sentences, the adjective before a noun was replaced with a made-up word. This was to balance the level of difficulty associated with the target vocabulary, and to engage the participants in both semantic and syntactic processes in their efforts to choose correct answers for either the target items or the filler items. In the example sentence mentioned earlier, the word *new* was replaced with the made-up word *lertant* to produce the sentence *The scientist bought a lertant computer for his son*. For such test items, there was no correct answer because the made-up word could mean anything. (The four choices given as possible synonyms of the made-up word

*lertant*, for the sake of illustration here, were *brand new*, *expensive*, *hi-tech*, and *slow*.) The remaining 5 filler items were easy. For example, the word *expensive* was underlined in the sentence *Tom went to an expensive restaurant last night*, and the four choices were *costing a lot of money*, *new and unknown*, *famous and stylish*, and *extremely popular*. See Appendix C for a complete list of test items.

The three subsets of items in the multiple-choice test were supposed to engage the participants in different types of decision-making processes. The answers to the easy filler items could be readily identified without much effort. As for the filler items with made-up words which offered no clues, the participants were expected to try all known strategies to guess the meaning of the made-up word, such as varying pronunciation, seeking morphological clues, placing the word in a semantic context, and drawing upon one's knowledge of the world. Only in the test items with the compound nouns using the noun-verb polysemies were there syntactic clues available from grammatical morphemes. Thus, participants were expected to use such clues to identify the correct answers.

Posttest self-evaluation of vocabulary knowledge. The purpose of this test was to see the effect of having taken both the translation and the multiple-choice tests on participants' self-evaluation of the target noun-verb polysemies. For that reason, the material used in the pretest evaluation was reused. Notice that the purpose of the pretest and the posttest was to assess not the participants' knowledge of the target words but their perception of their knowledge of these common words.

#### Procedure

Participants took the series of tests in small groups. The instructions were given in Korean. The instructions for the translation test directed that each and every word from the sentence must be translated into Korean. As for the multiple-choice test, participants were directed to guess the meaning of the target vocabulary using all clues available in either the sentence or the four provided choices. The pretest of vocabulary knowledge preceded the translation test, which was followed by the multiple-choice test so that the information available in the multiple-choice test could not influence participants'

interpretations of the target vocabulary. The series ended with the posttest of vocabulary knowledge. It took 35-40 minutes to finish all four tests.

### Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the proportion of verb choices and noun choices in each of the four tests.

Table 1  
Proportion of Verb and Noun Choices Across Tests

Test	Verb choice	Noun choice	Verb & noun choice
Pretest	0.04	0.64	0.25
Translation	0.31	0.34	—
Multiple choice	0.47	0.34	—
Posttest	0.03	0.39	0.39

*Note.* Dashes indicate that the choice was not provided on the test. Participants also chose other parts of speech, so the totals do not add up to 1.00.

There was no significant effect of order in any of the four tests; thus, order was not considered in further analyses. Of interest was the comparison of participants' choices of verb meanings between the translation and the multiple-choice tests. A matched  $t$  test revealed that the difference was significant ( $t = 5.63$ ,  $df = 41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in the direction that the participants chose verb meanings in the multiple-choice test at a higher rate than in the translation test. This means that there was increased awareness of multiple meanings of the target vocabulary as a function of forced attention to syntactic information in the multiple-choice test.

How does such task-related attention to multiple applications of vocabulary affect a learner's self-evaluation of vocabulary knowledge? This was the focus of an analysis of the participants' choices of parts of speech for the target noun-verb polysemies in the pretest and posttest self-evaluations. A preliminary glance at the descriptive data showed that the noun-verb polysemies were identified mostly as nouns in the pretest, whereas they were recognized as noun-verb polysemies at a similar rate as they were recognized as nouns in the posttest. For the purpose of this study, however, it was more important to examine the difference between the two tests rather than the distribution of answers within each test. Matched  $t$  tests revealed a significant difference between the two tests in the choice of both verb and noun ( $t = 4.71$ ,  $df = 41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and in the choice of noun ( $t = -5.52$ ,  $df = 41$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Such results indicate that task-related attention to syntactic clues changed participants' view of the target vocabulary. Participants' self-ratings of the level of difficulty of the target vocabulary also revealed this pattern. The target vocabulary items, all high-frequency words as nouns, were mostly rated as easy words in both the pretest and the posttest. However, the target noun-verb polysemies were rated as easy words slightly less often in the posttest (88%) than in the pretest (97%), and the significance was more than marginal ( $t = -3.39$ ,  $df = 41$ ,  $p < .002$ ).

Although participants rated the target vocabulary as easy words most of the time in the translation test, they translated correct verb-based meaning only 31% of the time. In addition, 8% of the time they translated the target words as verbs unrelated to the target meaning, which may indicate that the participants noticed the verbal form even though they were not familiar with the verb-based meaning of the target vocabulary. Thus, on the translation test a total of 39% of responses reflected awareness of the verbal morphosyntactic form, a smaller proportion than the 47% of noun-verb polysemies correctly identified as verbals in the multiple-choice test. However, the 25% decrease in the participants' perception of the noun-verb polysemies as nouns (from 64% in the pretest down to 39% in the posttest) did not translate into an equivalent increase in the participants' perception of the same words as noun-verb polysemies in the posttest. The increase was only by 14% (from 25% in the pretest to 39% in the posttest), which indicates

that some participants are reluctant to classify the words into multiple parts of speech.

There remains yet another important concern when we look at the participants' changed view of the words. Although the multiple-choice test clearly facilitated participants' correct recognition of the target noun-verb polysemies as verbals, the exact nature of this facilitation is still not clear. The assumption underlying the multiple-choice test was that participants' improved performance would indicate successful processing of syntactic information even when the target words were unknown to them as verbs. But this assumption may be erroneous. Some participants might have already known some of the target polysemies as verbs, yet recognized them as such only in the multiple-choice test and again in the posttest self-evaluation of vocabulary knowledge. This would mean that the results from the multiple-choice test and the posttest self-evaluation could be confounded with task effect and previous familiarity with some of the target vocabulary. See the General Discussion section for further speculation about this.

### General Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

A successful learning mechanism would capitalize on regularities occurring in the object of learning. In the English lexicon, for example, noun-verb polysemies are fairly common, and it would help facilitate vocabulary growth for L2 learners of English to be aware of this phenomenon. Knowing a word as a noun in the first place might function as a springboard for learning its verb meaning. However, when the familiarity of the word as a noun is very strong, it could, ironically, hinder the process of expanding the knowledge of the word because it is labeled as a very well-known vocabulary item in the learners' minds (Laufer, 1989). The study reported here examined the level of flexibility in restructuring the knowledge of familiar vocabulary in L2. Because a previous study showed that L2 learners do not utilize syntactic information to the same degree as native speakers do when the syntactic information is very subtle (Khn, 1996), stronger syntactic clues were used in this study to investigate the effect of such clues in reorganizing L2 vocabulary knowledge. The results showed that the L2 learners did not always use the grammatical morphemes *-ing* and *to* to recognize noun-verb polysemies as verbs although these morphemes clearly label the target vocabulary as verbs. As mentioned in the

description of the test materials, it had been assumed that, for Korean learners with 6 years of formal grammar instruction in English as represented by the participants in this study, such grammatical morphemes would be a salient feature marking the part of speech of a word. It appears that the saliency of such morphemes may not be as strong as had been assumed although it certainly influenced the participants' performance in the tests.

This is a cause of pedagogical concern, particularly when considering the fact that the tasks used in this study were designed to direct the learners' attention to relevant features for guessing the unfamiliar meaning of familiar words. The experimental context in this study provided possible verb meanings of the target noun-verb polysemies, whereas such provision is not always available in real language use contexts, where the learners would have to derive (or *generate*, in Nation's, 2001, terminology) the unfamiliar meaning based on various contextual clues. The point is that, even when the context was set up to help the participants recognize the fact that the target vocabulary had more than one part of speech, their use of grammatical morphemes was limited. Because the familiar meaning of the target vocabulary is so strongly represented in their mental lexicon, some learners apparently do not even entertain the possibility that they might not really know the word very well. If this is a pattern that learners exhibit when encountering words that are perceived to be highly familiar, further learning of vocabulary will suffer greatly.

While the discussion among researchers continues regarding the implicit-explicit continuum of instruction (Abu Radwan, 2000), it seems almost intuitive that the participants in this study could have benefited from some form of instruction on the importance of incorporating morphosyntactic information in guessing meaning from context. Notice that this does not necessarily mean that explicit instructions are needed every time phrases like *arming cast* are encountered. In fact, all the participants in this study are familiar with phrases like *verb + -ing* and *to + verb* because these are explicitly introduced in their textbooks. Rather, the problem is associated with limited ability to use their grammatical knowledge of these forms when familiar words are used in an unfamiliar way. Thus, it seems important to help raise L2 learners' level of awareness as to the use of all relevant features and

clues when guessing word meanings. As evidence from L2 vocabulary acquisition suggests (Aarnoutse & Tomesen, 1998; Slobin, 1973), strategies such as morphological analysis may assist L2 learners as well (Mogilevski & Burston, 1999), and some form of instruction might be required because the strategies of morphological analysis and guessing from context are independent of each other (DeKeyser, 1997; Mori & Nagy, 1999). By contrast, Laufer (1997) warned of the danger of relying too much on morphological information when guessing word meaning because some morphological structures can be deceptive; for example, some learners interpreted *outline* as *a line on the outside*. Most relevant to the findings from this study is the suggestion by Nation (2001) that determining the part of speech of an unfamiliar word should be the first step in guessing its meaning from context.

The concern raised in this study becomes even more serious when we consider that most high-frequency words are associated with multiple meanings because they frequently occur in various contexts. As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on the importance of knowing the most frequent words includes the importance of knowing these words in their multiple senses. Thus, the ability to use such words in various contexts, rather than in some limited contexts only, would add to learners' mastery of L2 vocabulary and enhance the productivity of vocabulary use. Unfortunately, however, L2 learners tend to make relatively less effort to learn more about high-frequency words than they do to learn low-frequency words that have limited use in common contexts. A series of informal surveys of college students in English conversation courses revealed that they almost never look up high-frequency words, such as *water* and *land*, in English monolingual dictionaries (in-class interviews with Korean learners of English by the author).

Beginning students, who are at the level of learning just this kind of vocabulary, rarely use monolingual dictionaries. For advanced learners, who are proficient enough to use English monolingual dictionaries, words like *water* and *land* have already become so familiar that they rarely look them up in the dictionary. Most of these advanced learners admitted that they use the dictionary when they encounter completely unknown words or relatively unfamiliar words such as *moisten* and *soil*. Thus, it is likely that L2 learners will look up the

word *moisten* when they encounter the word in a sentence like *The nurse moistened the patient's mouth*. It seems less likely, however, that L2 learners will look up the word *water* when they encounter the word in sentences like *My mouth watered* or *The reporter watered down her comments about the congressman*. An analogy that comes to mind is that of flexibility and productivity in use between a \$20 bill, which can be used in most transaction contexts, and a \$20 prepaid calling card, which can be used only for telephone calls. Similarly, high-frequency words function like cash, whereas low-frequency words have limited use. L2 learners need to understand the importance of investing more effort in acquiring cash-like vocabulary.

The observation that L2 learners exert less effort to learn high-frequency words is consistent with the results obtained in this study. Although the investigation was limited to the case of noun-verb polysemies in English, the findings from this study suggest that premature stability and lack of flexibility in revising existing knowledge of apparently easy L2 vocabulary can hinder further growth of vocabulary knowledge. When both quantity and quality are measures of a speaker's vocabulary knowledge, knowing only the primary sense of a high-frequency word is not sufficient. At a more global level of vocabulary learning, learners need to be reminded of the multiplicity of word meaning and use. General characteristics of the lexicon such as polysemy and homonymy need to be brought to their attention in a meaningful context. Awareness of such phenomena can help reduce confusion and prompt learners to attend to relevant information that can help them expand their vocabulary knowledge.

### Implications for Further Research.

Psycholinguistic studies have shown that native speakers share rule-governed knowledge about the semantic boundaries allowed for novel senses for a given word (Kaschak & Glenberg, 2000; Kelly, 1998), as in the novel verb sense of the noun *crutch* in *Lyn crotched her apple to Tom so he wouldn't starve* (Kaschak & Glenberg, p. 512). In this sentence, the word *crutch* is used as a verb that means something like *using a crutch to push an object to someone*. The present study did not clearly distinguish noun-verb polysemies, such as *land*, from homonyms, such as *rock*, in the materials used. Thus, to analyze L2

learners' sensitivity to multiplicity and productivity of vocabulary use with more precision, future research will need to be more selective about the words used in this type of study. With a more selective list of words, researchers could explore whether L2 learners and native speakers apply the same kinds of psycholinguistic rules when expanding their existing knowledge of certain words. Productivity is an important aspect of vocabulary knowledge, yet too much idiosyncrasy in generating novel meanings or uses may cause miscommunication among speakers.

Another direction for research addresses teaching strategies. From a pedagogical point of view, what types of vocabulary learning activities or strategies are conducive to increased understanding of the multiplicity of word meanings? Activities such as the multiple-choice test used in this study seem to improve L2 learners' awareness in this area. The words used in this study are only a small sample of a large number of high-frequency words. Strategies for teaching and learning L2 vocabulary that can be applied effectively to the majority of these high-frequency words will prove most productive. When it comes to high-frequency words, a principled approach to teaching L2 vocabulary includes explicit teaching of individual words and strategies for learning them (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000). Some of these strategies must focus on raising the learners' awareness of the polysemous nature of these high-frequency words so that their existing knowledge serves as a solid foundation, not as an unheeded obstacle, to enriching their vocabulary knowledge.

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APPENDIX A

List of Words Used in Pretest and Posttest  
Self-Evaluation of Vocabulary Knowledge

Category	Words
Target words	arm, book, coat, ice, land, page, park, rock, taxi, trip
Low-frequency words	brim, churn, fizz, fluke, gaunt, heave, lieu, nudge, slug, tote
Made-up words	bink, dune, drade, frab, grock, gruse, smill, spig, tive, vash.

instructions

*Level of difficulty.* Evaluate your knowledge of the words, and mark one of the following categories.

1. Easy word for me: I know its meaning well, and I can use it without difficulty.
2. Difficult word for me: I have heard it before, and I only vaguely know its meaning.
3. Unknown word for me: I do not know what it means, and I have never heard it before.

*Parts of speech.* For each word, indicate its part of speech using the following expressions: *noun, verb, adjective, adverb, article, determiner*. If a word belongs to more than one part of speech, write them all.

APPENDIX B

Sentences Used in the Translation Test

Target Sentences

Mr. Lee heard about the arming cost yesterday.  
 A strange man came to the booking desk at noon.  
 The company uses cheap coating material for its product.  
 Julia put the icing cream on the table.  
 Everyone saw the landing signal in the dark.  
 There was a paging announcement during the meeting.  
 Sam remembered the parking hours very clearly.  
 Mr. Kim bought a rocking chair two weeks ago.  
 The passengers talked about the taxiing speed with each other.  
 Mary had a tripping accident at the station.

Filler Sentences

Tom went to an expensive restaurant last night.  
 The nurse talked to the old patient with a smile.  
 Someone sent a strange letter to the president.  
 Mrs. Park made a delicious pie for her guests.  
 Cindy wrote a long letter to her grandmother.  
 The doctor put the green bottle on the floor.  
 Susan told a terrible lie to her sister.  
 The scientist bought a new computer for his son.  
 Bill met his best friend in front of the library.  
 A girl brought a small box to her mother.

APPENDIX C

Multiple-Choice Test items Used in  
the Experiment

items with Target Vocabulary

1. The passengers talked about the taxiing speed with each other.
  - a) a small automobile
  - b) to move slowly
  - c) with a loud noise
  - d) pins in a box
  
2. A strange man came to the booking desk at noon.
  - a) to arrange in advance
  - b) a piece of information
  - c) a set of printed pages
  - d) near a corner
  
3. Everyone saw the landiltg signal in the dark.
  - a) a corner in a building
  - b) in a hurry
  - c) a ground space
  - d) to come onto a surface
  
4. Mr. Lee heard about the arming cost yesterday.
  - a) to supply with weapons
  - b) a chemical element
  - c) a part of the human body
  - d) thin and light
  
5. The company uses cheap cg jgIn material for its product.
  - a) a bold statement
  - b) to cover the surface
  - c) a long jacket
  - d) extremely complicated

- 6. Julia put the icing cream on the table.
  - a) a piece of frozen water
  - b) a container with handles
  - c) in small pieces
  - d) to cover with mixture
  
- 7. There was a paging announcement during the meeting.
  - a) to call aloud
  - b) a side of paper in a book
  - c) a lid for a kettle
  - d) rarely available
  
- 8. Mary had a tripping accident at the station.
  - a) a short journey
  - b) into a dark hole
  - c) a list of titles
  - d) to lose one's balance
  
- 9. Mr. Kim bought a rocking chair two weeks ago.
  - a) a risky plan
  - b) under pressure
  - c) to move regularly
  - d) a large piece of stone
  
- 10. Sam remembered the park hours very clearly.
  - a) a piece of grassy land with trees
  - b) with an angry tone of voice
  - c) to put a vehicle somewhere for a time
  - d) a large piece of plastic board

Filler Items with Made-up Words

- 1. The scientist bought a lertant computer for his son.
  - a) brand new
  - b) expensive
  - c) hi-tech
  - d) slow

- 2. Someone sent a Heard letter to the president.
  - a) dangerous
  - b) impolite
  - c) secret
  - d) strange
  
- 3. A girl brought a cried box to her mother.
  - a) small and light
  - b) large and heavy
  - c) dark in color
  - d) made of wood
  
- 4. Bill met his commirt friend in front of the library.
  - a) suspicious
  - b) best
  - c) comfortable
  - d) truthful
  
- 5. Mrs. Park made a snart pie for her guests.
  - a) sweet and warm
  - b) a kind of fruit
  - c) very delicious
  - d) cold and sour

Filler Items with Real Words Only

- 1. The nurse talked to the old patient with a smile.
  - a) not young in age
  - b) clever
  - c) weak and sick
  - d) respectable
  
- 2. The doctor put the green bottle on the floor.
  - a) an unprepared stage
  - b) fresh and new
  - c) heavy in weight
  - d) a color between yellow and blue

3. Cindy wrote a funny letter to her grandmother.
  - a) difficult
  - b) enjoyable
  - c) strange
  - d) serious
  
4. Tom went to an expensive restaurant last night.
  - a) new and unknown
  - b) costing a lot of money
  - c) famous and stylish
  - d) extremely popular
  
5. Susan told a terrible joke to her sister.
  - a) very surprising
  - b) extremely bad
  - c) funny and interesting
  - d) slow and boring

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## TEACHING NOTES

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### **Downshifting: A Visual Technique for Teaching Paragraph Development**

**Mama Broekhoff**  
*University of Oregon*

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**Marna Broekhoff has been an instructor in the American English Institute at the University of Oregon and now teaches at Koc University in Istanbul. She also taught two years at Saitama Women's College near Tokyo in the mid-1990s. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and specializes in teaching writing.**

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**Problem**

One of the biggest problems in teaching paragraph writing, to nonnative and native speakers alike, is the concept of adequate development. Too often students write "paragraphs" of only one sentence, or of multiple but only loosely related sentences. We urge them to write a more general topic sentence and more specific supporting details, but what does this mean? Many international students, particularly Asians, are not familiar with writing in paragraph form and experience great difficulty in distinguishing general from specific.

**Teaching Procedure**

A concrete technique for teaching paragraph development that I have used for many years is constructed from the semanticist S. I. Hayakawa's "Ladder of Abstraction" (see Figure 1) and his concept of "downshifting" (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). To start students distinguishing between general and specific, I usually present word pairs such as the following, asking students to label the words in each as *General*, *Specific*, or *Equal*:

summer	clues	several	government	Koreans
season	fingerprints	many	democracy	Japanese

With the same instructions, I then present pairs of sentences:

The cause of poor health in this area can be traced to many factors.  
One of the main causes has been termed the "Big Mac Attack."

Acceptable length of hair has probably caused the most discussion.  
Significant changes in school policy have been introduced.

Propositions, of course, are more complex than nominal categories because the subject and predicate or different clauses can be at different levels of generality, but most students do not have difficulty with this exercise.

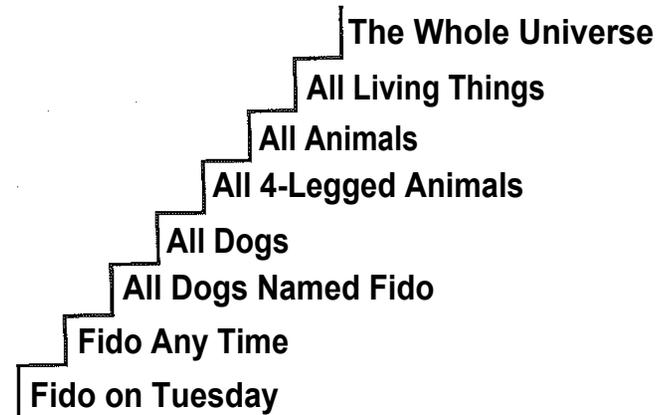


Figure 1. S. I. Hayakawa's Ladder of Abstraction. (Adapted from Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990, p. 85.)

Next is the ladder itself, which I draw on the board, eliciting student responses. I start with the most specific category, such as "Fido on Tuesday," and work up to the most general. I make the point that a good paragraph travels up and down this Ladder of Abstraction, with the topic sentence at a higher level than the supporting sentences. However, no paragraph could be adequately developed with a topic sentence from the top of the ladder, and a sentence from the bottom rung is probably too specific for most writing purposes. General and specific are clearly relative terms, to be adapted to the particular rhetorical situation. Also worth noting is that as we climb the ladder, the categories enlarge and their specific attributes decrease, which could explain the difficulty of trying to write specific and relevant supporting details for topic sentences near the top.

After drawing the ladder, I ask students to number the levels of generality of sentences in a sample paragraph, with a 1 for the most general (which should be the topic sentence), a 2 for a sentence which supports the topic sentence, a 3 for a sentence which further explains or gives an example, and so forth. Most good essay paragraphs have three levels, possibly more. Consensus on whether a given sentence is

Level 3 or 4 is less important than understanding the interplay between general and specific within a paragraph. With this numbering exercise I alert students to common signal words for the different levels, such as *reasons, types, main concerns* for Level 1; *first, second, third, moreover, likewise, however, or finally* for Level 2; and *specifically, for example, in other words, or as a result* for Level 3.

The sample paragraph I use most often for this purpose is a canned product about Jake's new job. It is very stilted, with far too many transitional words, but it is easy for students to work with and illustrates the point about sentence levels. I ask students to read and label the sentences in the Jake paragraph according to their level of generality (students write the numbers given below in parentheses).

(1) There are several reasons why Jake likes his new job. (2) To begin with, he now has more free time. (3) Specifically, he goes to work later in the morning and gets home earlier in the evening. (2) Furthermore, he now makes more money. (3) To be specific, his weekly paycheck has increased from \$75 to \$130. (2) Above all, he now has a better chance for advancement. (3) For instance, the skills that he is learning will help him to qualify for a much higher-paying position.

The next step is to send students home to number the sentence levels and rewrite a paragraph in one of their own rough drafts. I ask them to put a 1 by the topic sentence, a 2 by reasons why the topic sentence is true, and a 3 by examples, illustrations, or other specifics. The hope is that if they discover only 1s or even 1s and 2s in their paragraphs, they will realize that more supporting detail is needed. I often copy paragraphs from these drafts (without revealing the writers' identities) for the whole class to work on.

### Results

I have used this downshifting technique for teaching paragraph development with good results for many years and at all levels, with both native and nonnative speakers. These levels include college upper division business and technical writing, regular and remedial freshman composition, and intermediate ESL classes (Levels 3 and 4) at the

American English Institute (AEI). It has worked particularly well for the 800-word argumentative essay required at the end of Level 4. Some of the ideas presented above may seem too sophisticated for less advanced students, but the technique can be used in simplified form, without presenting all its ramifications.

Here are some examples from Level 4 student essays written before and after the exposure to downshifting. In the first pair of revised paragraphs, the student has added details while making her topic sentences more specific and relevant to those details; in other words, she has moved everything lower on the abstraction ladder. (The student numbered the sentences herself; the second paragraph could have been split.)

*(Before)*

The teaching ways are the biggest difference from America and Taiwan. In America, the teachers encourage the students to speak and emphasis on the participation of the students in the class. At the same time, the American teachers like the students to ask questions because they hope the students can find the answers by themselves. However, in Taiwan, the teachers always give the answers to students. They ask the students to remember anything that they teach but don't care whether the students understand or not.

The teaching comments are different, too. In Taiwan, the teachers use the stiff, formulary, and stereotyped textbooks to teach the students. Not like the American teachers, they teach the students reading and writing with novels and some new articles. This method makes the students to know how to use their learning in really English writing.

*(After)*

(/) The teachers of the stress the students' participation in classes and encourage the students to talk about their opinions and ask any question since they hope the students can find what their problems and the answers are by themselves. (2) Thus, at the

A.E.I., every student must be often asked by these questions like "What is your opinion?" or "Why do you agree or disagree with this idea?" in any class. (1) On the contrary, my English classes in Taiwan are usually progressing in silence. (2) You only can hear the sound of the teacher in class, and find that the students always work hard to take notes, but not speak or ask questions. (3) Therefore, in the beginning, I am not used to speak in any A.E.I. class; however, now I enjoy this kind of teaching method which not only helps me to figure out my problems but also improves my speaking skills at the same time.

(1) Besides, reading material is one of the other differences between the A.E.I. and my English classes in Taiwan. (2) My Taiwanese teachers often use the stiff, formulary and stereotyped textbooks to teach the students about English reading. (2) Not like the reading and writing classes of A.E.I., the teachers use a mystery novel and some new articles. (3) I like this kind of reading material in reading and writing classes of the A.E.I. because it can attract me to read and show me how to use my learning in real English writings. (3) Moreover, in this reading material, you can learn not only a lot of useful words but also many daily conversations.

In the second example, the student, already an able writer, added a topic sentence at a higher level of generality to make it more relevant to the paragraph. (Again, the numbering is the student's own.)

*(Before)*

(2) American people always say to me, "What's up?" or "How are you doing?" every morning. (3) I can answer to a close friend such as roommates or classmates, but I'm always confused when asked by a person who is not so familiar. (4) If I say "good" or "not much," there will be no problem. (4) However, even if I feel bad or great, I can't say that because not so familiar acquaintances don't know about me, so it is very hard work to explain my condition and the reason of my condition from the beginning. (2) When Japanese people meet friends who are not so familiar, we

say only "Hi." (3) I think it is enough if the person who I meet is not so familiar. (4) We don't need to know each other's condition.

*(After)*

(1) American people always ask my condition in greetings even though they are not my familiar friends. (2) They always ask me "What's up?"....

### Applications

The benefits of teaching students to distinguish between general and specific through the concept of downshifting are myriad. For many students, the visual aid of the abstraction ladder and the act of numbering sentences fit well with their learning modalities. Most obviously, with regard to writing, it can help them to create significant topic sentences and to develop these with adequate and relevant detail. It can help students understand paragraph unity and the need for transitions to show the relationships among supporting sentences. In the process, students come to see the whole essay as a macrocosm of paragraph structure and to write meaningful essays rather than a series of unrelated statements. Students who write the latter type of "essays" often cling, in Hayakawa's terms, to the upper rungs of the abstraction ladder.

But writing is not all that improves. By increasing students' abilities to separate main ideas from evidence, generalizations from supporting details, inference from fact, the technique increases their skills in reading, note-taking, and exam preparation. Last, but not least, it may help them separate the trees from the forest in their personal lives!

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**The Text as a Rich Source to Promote  
Language Awareness: The Use  
of the Dictogloss**

**David Lasagabaster and Alex Kraukle**  
*University of the Basque Country*

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David Lasagabaster is Associate Professor of English Studies at the University of the Basque Country, where he teaches applied linguistics and English language. He has published on second language acquisition, bilingualism, and the use of authentic texts in the foreign language classroom.

Alex Kraukle is a native speaker of English who has been teaching English as a foreign language to speakers of Spanish for almost ten years. He has published on language teaching methodology and codesigned a journal in English to be used in the foreign language classroom.

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Throughout history, the teaching of a second or foreign language has experienced *the pendulum effect*, as some methods (e.g., grammar-translation) focus on form and others (e.g., the communicative approach) focus on meaning (Schmidt, 1995). • Focus-on-form approaches promote *language awareness*, which is usually defined as explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning and use (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2001); that is to say, learners are helped to become aware of linguistic forms and of the functioning of the linguistic system. Focus-on-meaning approaches accentuate communication.

We contend, however, that the focus-on-form and the focus-on-meaning approaches are not exclusive. Rather, they must be worked on together. Although the real influence of language awareness on foreign language learning has been controversial (Ellis, 1997), several studies (Lasagabaster, 1998, 2001; Leow, 1997; Robinson, 1995; Schmidt 1990, 1993) have clearly shown that awareness has a facilitative role in this process. Linguistic competence has to be developed together with the sociolinguistic, discursal, and strategic competences. In this sense, grammar is seen "not as the central organising principle of communication, but roughly as an important component of communication" (Richards, 1985, p. 148).

In this article we present the *dictogloss--a* teaching technique that combines focus on form and focus on meaning. The activities involve students in thinking about the linguistic forms and functions as well as the meaning within a text, while they form their own attitudes toward the text and achieve control of the language learning process. Therefore, our aim is to foster students' language awareness (James & Garret, 1991).

### **The Text as a Means to Boost Language Awareness**

The heart of the dictogloss is an oral text, in other words, an oral passage made up of a set of sentences that are connected to each other. Teachers and publishers agree that the text is better than isolated grammar exercises for working on several linguistic aspects (the grammatical and lexical relationships between different elements of a text, for example) because it is ruled by several discursal conditions (Carter & McRae, 1996; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Lasagabaster &

Sierra, 2001). The text helps the learner to better understand the functioning of the whole linguistic system. By using the text, the student can analyze the functioning of the language as a whole and in a real way, instead of being exposed to activities devoid of textual references. If we want our students to reflect on language, we must establish a context of text production and comprehension, taking into consideration the circumstances surrounding the communicative context as well as the grammatical and textual rules. The choice of an appropriate text, therefore, is of the utmost importance because it must be included in a wider project or set of objectives.

Our approach is to work on the four dimensions of communicative competence—linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursal, and strategic (Canale & Swain, 1980). Thus, we have chosen an oral text because it allows us to concentrate on several aspects that would be more difficult to deal with in a written text; for example, speakers in real-life situations change the rate at which they talk and use fillers and repetition to give themselves time to think.

We have chosen the dictogloss (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Wajnryb, 1990) as a means to develop our students' language awareness. In this activity, learners reconstruct a text that is read aloud. According to Kowal and Swain (1994, p. 73), this promotes language learning by (a) making them aware of gaps in their knowledge, which they would subsequently seek to fill; (b) raising their awareness of the links between form, function, and meaning of words as they work to construct their intended message; and (c) obtaining feedback from their peers and their teacher as they complete the task.

### **The Dictogloss**

**First of all, it has to be pointed out that the dictogloss is well suited for students, irrespective of their linguistic proficiency, since it has proven to be very successful even with mixed-ability groups (Kowal & Swain, 1997). In our case it is aimed at upper-intermediate/advanced students.**

Choosing a Text

A dictogloss text should be authentic and interesting to the learners. Due to the usual heterogeneous nature of groups, the chosen text should appeal to a wide variety of tastes. Furthermore, the language used in the text should be in accordance with the students' command of the target language. Thus, the two main questions to bear in mind are attractiveness and linguistic adequacy. \* In this case we have chosen a satirical text about women's rights from the BBC Radio 4 program, *On the Hour*, which was broadcast during the 1980s. Students enjoy both the topic and the humorous and ironic manner in which it is treated in this radio sketch. By building on the strange claims made in the text, this dictogloss can be followed by an interesting debate on gender relationships. Because the whole text (see the Appendix) is rather long, lasting about 2 minutes, an extract was chosen for the dictogloss.

Presenter: . . . we've just received this report through the line from CBN's Barbara Wintergreen. What it's about I've no idea because I haven't actually had a chance to listen to it yet.

Reporter: A woman's place may be in the home, but from 5 tomorrow it's definitely not in the state of Nebraska. Nebraska Governor Mike Morgan has won Supreme Court approval for controversial legislation banning women from his state.

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\* *Editor's note:* In selecting an appropriate oral text, educators in the US must also take into consideration fair use guidelines for off-air taping of radio programs for educational use. A summary of these guidelines may be found in "Is Fair Use a License to Steal?" by L. Starr, 2000, Education World, <http://www.education-world.com/acurr/curr280b.shtml>

Governor: The issue is what kind of America we want. What kind of America do we want to take into the millennium? Now we want an America that is strong and full of purpose, and now when you are trying to make a decision based on strength and strength of purpose, you do not want a woman around. 10

Interviewer: What does your mother think of this legislation?

Governor: My mother is dead.

Interviewer: Your wife? 19

Governor: My wife is dead.

Interviewer: I'm sorry about that.

Reporter: The Supreme Court ruling paves the way for other 22 states to bring in female clearance bills of their own, and all the signs are that women could be banned from three fifths of America by the fall!

Prelistening Activity

A prelistening strategy helps our students understand the whole text, analogous to looking at a map before getting into the car. One of our aims is to encourage our students to create expectations about what they are going to listen to by eliciting information from them about the main topic. For this text we ask these questions: *What is celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March? Do you think that the role of women in society has changed in the last decades? Do men and women really have the same rights?* These questions are used to foster a short discussion about the main theme of the text.

The Dictogloss Technique

For the dictogloss, the students listen to the original text three times. The first time, students are advised just to listen and not to take

notes. The second time, they hear the text with a pause of 3 to 8 seconds after each sentence (depending on its length) so they can take notes. The third time, they hear the whole text without pauses. Students are given 20 minutes to rewrite the text in their own words, working in pairs. Then they write their version of the text on a transparency to be discussed by the whole class. Although the teacher introduces the task, the activity is not teacher-led. The teacher's role is to help the students while they work and to review the final output. The class then compares the reconstructed texts with the original, distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable differences.

### Awareness-Raising Activities

We build on the dictogloss by selecting from a variety of awareness-raising activities, some adapted from proposals by Thornbury (1997) and Willis (1996), so that we can tackle several communicative aspects in more depth. We have divided examples of these activities into four different dimensions of communicative competence—linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic—according to Canale and Swain's (1980) framework. All these activities are aimed at advanced students. Of course there is no need to do all of them; teachers should choose those that fit their particular purposes.

#### Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence comprises the semantic, lexical, morphosyntactic, and phonological aspects of the language. It involves not only knowing the rules but also applying them.

##### Semantic level

1. Students spot vocabulary differences between the original text and their reconstructed versions. The students check their own versions or those of their partners, highlight the differences, and bring them to the whole class for discussion. They share their versions using the overhead projector and report on the differences using fully formulated sentences, e.g., "In the original the governor said, 'What *kind* of America do we want?' but we said, 'What *type* of America do we want?'" The teacher provides

feedback to students related to the appropriateness of the students' choices, taking into account the original text.

2. The teacher introduces the term *noticing* into classroom metalanguage to help students concentrate on the differences between their own output and that of native speakers (Willis, 1996).
3. Each student writes a sentence that summarizes the main idea of the text. The class discusses the summaries.
4. Using an English-English dictionary, students express specified phrases in their own words and see if their partners can figure out which ones they are. Examples include *through the line*; *ruling paves the way for other states*; and *bring in female clearance bills*.
5. The teacher introduces the terms *cognate* and *false cognate* or *false friend* into the classroom metalanguage and asks the class how many cognates or false cognates they can find in the text. In the sample text, for Spanish speakers there are several cognates (*received*, *idea*, *definitely*, *legislation*, *decision*) and one "false friend" (*actually*).

##### Lexical level

6. Learners sort a jumble of words from two sentences, from the original text or from some of the sentences on the transparencies, into five categories (nouns, verbs, prepositions, adverbs and adjectives) and then reconstruct the two sentences. We may omit some words to make the task a bit more difficult.
7. Each student looks up in an English-English dictionary the meanings of five words from the text. A partner tries to guess the words by reading the definitions. Alternatively, students can write their own definitions.

Morphosyntactic level.

8. The students use their knowledge of grammar to reconstruct the text from a set of nouns and adverbs from the original, e.g., *woman, place, home, tomorrow, definitely, state, Nebraska*. To complete this task successfully, students need to understand not only the grammar but also the concept and form of a paragraph.
9. Students look for words ending in *-ly* in the text and classify them by lexical category. In this text these words are used with the negative form of the verb (*I haven't actually had a chance; It's definitely not in the state of Nebraska*). Students notice the position of each adverb.
10. Students look at words ending in *-ing* in the text (*ruling, banning, and trying*) and comment on how they are used, noting whether they are nouns, adjectives, or verbs in the present continuous tense.

Phonological level.

11. To practice discrete sounds, students choose words that have sounds in common, as in the following examples.
  - a) Which sound is in all these words?  
*mother Governor matter other*
  - b) Which stressed vowel sound is the odd one out?
    - 1) *just mother that won*
    - 2) *report Morgan purpose court*
12. Looking at the text, students focus on the letters *s* and *a* and discuss the different ways they are pronounced.
13. Students listen to excerpts of the text (lines 1-9) and discuss the conditions that affect how the letter *h* is pronounced.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence entails knowing what to say and how to say it in the right place and at the right moment. It is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules and of the appropriateness of the message, taking into account the communicative situation. These activities

require students to think about such issues and thus avoid the very commonplace state of second language learners who remain unaware of the effectiveness and appropriateness of their language use.

14. Students focus on a speaker's statements—in this case the governor's—and decide whether they are appropriate, taking into account his social position.
15. Students engage in a role play related to the text. In this example, pairs of students continue the interview with the governor and ask him all the questions that come to their minds. The students playing the role of the interviewer have to stand up for women's rights but, realizing they are working for a broadcasting network and speaking to a governor, must use appropriate language. Similarly, their partners take on the role of the governor (and espouse his ideas), reproducing the language that would be used in a formal, public communicative situation and endeavoring to avoid colloquial or slang expressions. In the meantime, those watching the performances note all those expressions that are not in the appropriate register. After groups finish their performances, the class discusses the appropriateness of the language used.

Discoursal Competence

Discoursal competence is the capability to recognize and produce coherent texts. To achieve discoursal competence, a student must master the discourse rules. Apart from producing grammatically correct sentences, the student has to be able to organize them appropriately. To develop discoursal competence, students respond to questions like these.

16. How many paragraphs have you used in your own version of the text? Why?
17. What do *you* (line 15), *that* (line 21), and *their* (line 23) refer to?
18. How is cohesion achieved in the text? What does the reporter do so that the governor's words become part of the text?

19. Look at the words in the text and think of their first meaning. Have they a different meaning once you take into account the intonation, stress, or context? Why?

#### Strategic Competence

Strategic competence, the capability of compensating for deficiencies in their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discoursal competence, enables students to interact despite having a limited command of the language. Students practice different strategies, including paraphrasing, using nonlinguistic resources (e.g., eye movements or gestures), avoiding complex issues, repeating phrases to allow time to think, changing rate of speech, using fillers (*you know; well*), and other ways to overcome communication difficulties. Although vital for students to learn how to use, unfortunately strategic competence is rarely given consideration in textbooks.

Role plays can be used to develop strategic competence as well as sociolinguistic competence. Different pairs can focus on different aspects of communication as they prepare and perform their role plays.

20. When participants leave the room to prepare their role plays, the rest of the students are asked to pay attention to the nonlinguistic resources (e.g., eye movements and gestures) to which their classmates resort. They discuss their observations after the performance.

21. As they prepare to perform a role play of an interview, students consider what sorts of strategies they could use to give themselves time to think. For example, in the interview with the governor, how might they respond to the governor's unexpected and cutting answers? At this stage, students should think of different strategies, such as using fillers (*well; now; um*), changing the subject (*by the way; incidentally*), indicating an additional point (*in any case; furthermore*), reformulating the utterance (*in other words; rather*), or changing their rate of speech. They then put their ideas into practice while acting out the interview.

#### **Some Final Considerations**

Language teaching is complex. Approaches to language teaching that focus primarily on form or on meaning have failed to foster the development of learner autonomy (Ellis, 1997). Even in natural language acquisition contexts that guarantee sufficient quantity of input, complete formal accuracy is unlikely to be achieved without any focus on form (Ellis, 1995). Because we cannot communicate without using linguistic and even nonlinguistic tools, teachers should not oppose communicative competence to linguistic competence (Titone, 1996), which is why these competences should not be considered mutually exclusive domains.

We consider the text as a communicative unit, rather than the isolated sentence, to be ideal for building communicative competence. Our teaching experience has shown us that students can progress in all four dimensions of communicative competence, reaching serious and significant conclusions while enjoying the text that serves as their starting point. In addition, teachers can select particular texts and create activities according to their students' needs and interests, while effectively integrating the four language skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

Language teachers should not be ashamed or afraid of using both grammar and communicative language activities. Some teachers do this with a sense of guilt (Maestri, 1995) because they believe it goes against the currently popular methodology. However, as noted earlier, research studies have demonstrated that the development of learners' language awareness is a very powerful and fruitful tool for language teaching and learning. By utilizing text-based activities like the dictogloss, learners become more aware of the positive relationship between linguistic knowledge and language performance. **The** dictogloss and related activities that we have described here emphasize language as a means of communication and at the same time boost student awareness of the linguistic system as rule-governed, thus intentionally promoting language learners' growth in every aspect of communicative competence.

### Acknowledgments

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APPENDIX

Transcript of Radio Sketch

- Presenter: . . . we've just received this report through the line from CBN's Barbara Wintergreen. What it's about I've no idea because I haven't actually had a chance to listen to it yet.
- Reporter: A woman's place may be in the home, but from tomorrow it's definitely not in the state of Nebraska. Nebraska Governor Mike Morgan has won Supreme Court approval for controversial legislation banning women from his state.
- Governor: The issue is what kind of America we want. What kind of America do we want to take into the millennium? Now we want an America that is strong and full of purpose, and now when you are trying to make a decision based on strength and strength of purpose, you do not want a woman around.
- Interviewer: What does your mother think of this legislation?
- Governor: My mother is dead.
- Interviewer: Your wife?
- Governor: My wife is dead.
- Interviewer: I'm sorry about that.
- Reporter: The Supreme Court ruling paves the way for other states to bring in female clearance bills of their own, and all the signs are that women could be banned from three fifths of America by the fall.
- Morgan: I am wholly in favor of a state for women.

Interviewer: Just one?

Morgan: One state would be enough, er . . .

Interviewer: Which one do you propose?

Morgan: That would be a matter for the Supreme Court to

Interviewer: But not Nebraska?

Morgan: Certainly not Nebraska, no.

Demonstrators: Mother nature has disconnected the gender since time immemorial . . .  
Mother nature is . . . a woman . . .  
If you are a woman . . .

Reporter: It's an issue that's divided the USA. Women's league protester Donna Doubtfire dubs Morgan's legislation "geographic gynofascism."

Demonstrator: It's geographic gynofascism.

Interviewer: So what do you mean by that?

Demonstrator: I mean that men are trying to segregate women into some sort of pen where they have no rights and no bodies and no minds and no future . . . A woman's body is her own property and she alone should be able to decide its location.

Reporter: Meanwhile, big bucks are being spent on a TV gender fight:

Male voice: Honey?

Female voice: Yes dear?

Male voice: Get out!

Male voiceover: Paid for by the American Brotherhood.

Female voice: Senator Morgan says women should get out of the home and out of the state. **We say . . .**  
Baaaaaanalls .

Female voiceover: Paid for by the Sisters of America.

Male voice: Can you imagine what I would sound like if I were a woman?

Female voice: I'd sound like this.

Male voice: See? Keep 'em out.

Demonstrator: You are running a spike into the solidarity of women by saying that .

Reporter: So it looks as if this is one Supreme Court ruling that definitely says "Wham, barn, no thank you, rna'am!"<sup>1</sup>

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From *On the Hour* [Radio broadcast], Radio 4, (n.d.), London: British Broadcasting Corporation. Copyright by British Broadcasting Corporation. Printed with permission.

**Alerting Students to the Correct Use of *Until*  
Using an Algorithmic Approach**

**Alice Y. W. Chan**  
*City University of Hong Kong*

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Alice Y. W. Chan is an assistant professor in the Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong. Her areas of interest include phonetics and phonology, lexicography, contrastive analysis, syntax, and error correction.

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### An Algorithmic Approach to Error Correction

Handling students' language accuracy problems is one of the main difficulties facing English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers nowadays. To help students overcome their persistent common lexico-grammatical problems, my collaborators and I have recently developed an algorithmic approach to error correction (Chan, 2002; Chan, Kwan, & Li, 2002a, 2002b, in press; Chan & Li, 2002; Chan, Li, & Kwan, in press; Kwan, Chan, & Li, in press; Li & Chan, 2000, 2001). Partly inspired by theoretical and empirical studies in consciousness-raising research (Rutherford, 1987, 1988; Schmidt, 1990; Sharwood Smith, 1981), and partly by recent research into form-focused instruction (Doughty & Williams, 1998), the algorithmic approach is characterized by four main features: (a) pedagogically sound input requiring minimal cognitive effort; (b) proceduralized steps supported by instructive examples; (c) explicit rules to help learners conceptualize the correction procedure; and (d) reinforcement exercises.

We experimented with 13 lexico-grammatical problems, such as the dangling modifier, the inappropriate use of the connective *on the contrary*, and the anomalous structure *very like*, as in the sentence *I very like music* (for details, see Li, Chan, & Kwan, 2002). Results of the research study show that the approach is effective and versatile, and that students made significant improvements in the lexico-grammatical items under investigation after remedial teaching (Chan, 2002; Chan, Kwan, & Li, 2002a; Chan & Li, 2002).

Teachers may apply the algorithmic approach to other anomalies, provided they are well-defined lexico-grammatical problems amenable to effective correction using the approach (Chan, 2002). To show the versatility and adaptability of the algorithmic approach, I will describe its main features using the teaching procedure for a lexico-grammatical problem not dealt with in the research study—the use of the lexical item *until*, which is used inappropriately by many Chinese ESL students, including advanced learners.

### Use of *Until*

The following examples show how *until* is inappropriately used.

1. ?The most important person in my life is my father *until forever*.
2. ?I still remember this picture *until now*.
3. ?I have not heard from, you *until present*.

At first glance, the sentences all seem acceptable. A careful scrutiny of the intended meanings, however, reveals that by using *until* with words like *forever* or *now*, the speaker wants to emphasize the truth of the preceding statement both at the time of speaking and *forever* or *now*. The speaker does not intend to state that the preceding statement ceases to be true *forever* or *now*. Such a use of *until* may result in misunderstanding between the speaker and the listener.

To help students acquire the target language norm, teachers should guide them to understanding the proper use of the lexical item. According to the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2001), if something happens *until* a particular time, it happens during the period before that time and stops at that time. The preposition *until* is also used with a negative to emphasize the moment in time after which the rest of the statement becomes true, or the condition that would make it true (p. 1720; also see Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985, p. 534). The following section demonstrates how teachers can help students discover the correct use of *until*.

### Procedure

#### Phase I: Help Students Notice the Problem

Are the following sentences correct? Mark a **I** if you think so, and a **x** if you don't think so. Two examples have been done for you.

X

a. She will wait until 4 p.m.	
b. The most important person in my life is my father until forever.	
c. He will not stop working until he is tired.	
d. I have not eaten my lunch until now.	
e. She was a high-ranking official in the committee until 2003.	
f. I remember his name until now.	

Phase II: Guide Students to Discover the Correct Use of Until

Although the sentences all look similar, some of them may not be used appropriately to express the writers' views. Let us look at sentence (a) first.

(a) She will wait until 4 p.m.

- Ⓜ What will she do? \_\_\_\_\_
- Ⓜ Is she going to wait nonstop? \_\_\_\_\_
- \* When will she stop waiting? \_\_\_\_\_

Now, let us look at sentence (b).

(b) The most important person in my life is my father until forever.

- Who is the most important person in my life? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is my father the most important person in my life FOREVER?

Let us compare sentence (a) with sentence (b). Fill in the boxes below by putting a or a x to show the truth of the statements (in capitals) at the time specified.

(a) WAIT	Before 4 p.m.	4 p.m. and after

The above shows that although both sentence (a) and sentence (b) use *until* with a time, the intended meanings are different.

Now, let us look at sentence (c).

(c) He will not stop working until he is tired.

- What will he NOT do? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is he going to work nonstop? \_\_\_\_\_
- When will he stop? \_\_\_\_\_

Look at sentence (d).

(d) I have not eaten my lunch until now.

- Did I have my lunch before saying the sentence? \_\_\_\_\_
- Did I have my lunch when saying the sentence? \_\_\_\_\_

Let us compare sentence (c) with sentence (d). Fill in the boxes below by putting a or a x to show the truth of the statements (in capitals) at the time specified.



and explicit rules can help students conceptualize the correct model. The algorithmic approach described in this article, which adopts a step-by-step consciousness-raising mechanism, helps to arouse learners' consciousness of the nature of the anomaly and the correct usage. When learners can notice their own errors and have a heightened awareness of the target language norm, they will be able to achieve mature linguistic competence. I suggest that ESL teachers try adopting this approach to help their students overcome other common, consistent lexico-grammatical problems their students encounter.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### **The ESL Student's Secret Weapon**

**Yuki Kauai**

*Portland State University*

*The Cambridge Dictionary of American English.* Sidney I. Landau (Ed.). Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1088. 2000. \$23.00. ISBN: 0-521-77974-X paperback with CD-ROM.

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Yuki Kanai is a graduate student in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages who studies in the Applied Linguistics department of Portland State University

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The *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* is an English as a Second Language (ESL) student's secret weapon. This English-English dictionary was developed particularly for beginning-level ESL students, and it is also a good resource for ESL teachers. In addition to clear definitions and helpful usage indications, the dictionary provides cultural information that is useful and effectively presented for ESL students, especially for beginning- to intermediate-level learners seeking to break the native speakers' code of unspoken rules—or intuitive knowledge—necessary for maintaining smooth communication. As an added bonus, this paperback dictionary comes with a CD-ROM that provides interactive features for pronunciation practice. Among the many strengths of this dictionary, three characteristics in particular stand out when it is compared to similar dictionaries—its distinctive features, its clarity of presentation for its target audience, and its accompanying CD-ROM.

A unique feature of this dictionary is its in-depth entries, called *language portraits*, which contain especially rich information about the intuitive knowledge of Americans. Language portraits provide brief explanations about aspects of the English language that are assumed to be unfamiliar to speakers of other languages. Each category—such as parts of speech, grammatical features, fractions and decimals, education systems, greetings, titles and forms of address, writing styles, addresses on envelopes, and telephone usage—is described separately from its headword definition. Although integrated into the alphabetical listing of words, language portraits are printed within boxes and are highlighted in a separate table of contents.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and ESL instructors may appreciate specific language portraits that provide clear explanations of common areas of difficulty for their students. For example, words like *say*, *tell*, *talk*, and *speak*, or *see*, *look*, and *watch* can be confusing for Japanese students because a split occurs from their first language (L1), Japanese, to their second language (L2), English. *Split* is a term used in second language acquisition to denote when a single word or form in the L1 diverges into two or more words or forms in the L2. Therefore, in Japanese, there is only one word to express *say*, *tell*, *talk*, and *speak*, but in English it manifests as four different words, and thus Japanese learners may have a difficult time acquiring correct usage

of these four words. The examples in this type of language portrait may help instructors to explain concepts explicitly to learners.

Other valuable features are the Parts of Speech and Other Labels section and the Idioms Index. In the Parts of Speech and Other Labels section, brief explanations of the functions of parts of speech are introduced with examples. The Idioms Index is located at the end of the dictionary, separate from the actual dictionary. The Idioms Index helps users find an idiom even if they can remember only one of its component words. Because the meaning of each word may not provide any clue about the actual meaning of the idiom, and because a great deal of exposure and memorization is required for a learner to be able to understand and learn many idioms, this section is extremely useful for ESL learners.

The second major strength of this dictionary is its clarity. This clarity is achieved in several ways. First, the vocabulary used in definitions is carefully controlled. Every one of the dictionary's 40,000 entries is a frequently used word or phrase and is defined using a 2,000-word vocabulary. The definitions, however, are clear, substantive, and not overly simplified. Also, full-sentence examples clarify usage for each headword. Idioms and compound nouns derived from each headword are defined within its entry. **Second**, pronunciation is introduced in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a system that is more often used in learners' bilingual dictionaries than in U.S. dictionaries. Students who are already familiar with the IPA will be able to use the phonetic symbols more efficiently and effectively. **Third**, helpful grammatical and usage information is included with definitions. Usage labels indicate whether a term is from a regional dialect, such as British English, Canadian English, or a regional dialect of the US. Usage labels also show whether a vocabulary item is suitable for particular people or situations by indicating its degree of formality, such as *formal*, *slightly formal*, *informal*, *not standard*, *slang*, *rude slang*, and *taboo slang*.

Another feature that enhances the clarity of the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* is its unique system for classifying and presenting headwords based on meaning. Each entry represents one meaning. Therefore, there is more than one headword for each lexical

item that has more than one meaning. For example, the word *close* is represented as eight different headwords in the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* because there are eight different meanings for the word *close*. On the other hand, in the Webster's dictionary there is only one headword for the word *close*, with 13 definitions for adjective uses, 6 for verb uses, and 1 for the noun use (*Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary*, 1984, p. 134). Learners who are using the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* for the first time may think all headwords are independent words rather than the same word with different meanings. However, it should not be too difficult to become accustomed to using this unique formatting and to choose the correct meaning. This is because the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* provides a clearer definition of each word and illustrates its usage with an example sentence. In this way, each meaning is explained in more detail than in a standard dictionary. See examples below.

**close** **IFECI** /Mous/ *adj* [not gradable] very warm, with no movement of air • *It was uncomfortably close in the gym.*

**dose** **MAKE NOW OPEN!** /ki013Z/ *v* [VT] to change from being open to not being open, or to cause this to happen • *Come in and close the door* [T] ◦ *Because of an accident, police closed (blocked) two lanes of the expressway.* [T] ◦ *Grace closed her eyes to think.* [T]

**closed** /lclooZd/ *adj* [not gradable] • If a society or economy is closed, it does not allow free exchanges or trade with other societies or countries. • **Closed circuit** television is a system that sends television signals from various places within or around a store or building to a limited number of screens, as a way to prevent stealing or other illegal activities. • A closed shop is a place of work where you have to belong to a particular labor union (= organization of workers).

**close** **[EN] I STOP!** /klouz/ *v* [VT] to end or stop operating, or to cause this to happen • *Authorities closed the aging nuclear plant.* [T] ◦ *After a run of three months, the show closes on Saturday.* [I] • (esp. of a business) To close is also to temporarily stop being available to customers: *The store closes at 9 tonight.* [I]

**close** /klouz/ *n* (C usually sing) • *The ski season has come to a close.*

The final outstanding strength of the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* is its CD-ROM, which includes all the information found in the paperback. Although it is possible to purchase the paperback dictionary alone, I strongly recommend buying the one with the CD-ROM. ESL students may in fact find using the CD-ROM more useful than using other English-English dictionaries, for its convenience and its pronunciation feature.

Because the CD-ROM can be installed on a computer, the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* can be used whenever students are at a computer—surfing the internet, reading or writing e-mail messages, or composing an essay. They can easily click the small icon in the task bar next to the time clock to pull the dictionary back up on the screen to search for a word, an operation that can be completed in less time and with less effort than using a paper dictionary. For this reason, the program could be installed on the computers in language labs at schools so that students can save time looking up words in the dictionary.'

The best feature of the CD-ROM is that the students can hear the actual pronunciation of each headword by clicking on its adjacent speaker icon. The pronunciation of each individual word on the CD-ROM may differ somewhat from the way it would be pronounced in a native speaker's string of speech. Nevertheless, being able to hear the sounds is a welcome complement to seeing phonetic symbols in print and helps learners to practice the correct pronunciation of words in American English. As a nonnative speaker of English and a graduate student who is under training to become an ESL/EFL teacher, I find this function very useful because it is important for me to know the correct pronunciation of words and to pronounce each word accurately and clearly for my future students.

Cambridge University Press offers a networkable CD for language labs, which is priced at \$150 for up to 30 users and \$3 for each additional user over 30. The license agreement that comes with the CD-ROM packaged with the book is for a single user only. Contact [eslhelpacup.org](http://eslhelpacup.org) for information about the networkable CD.

ESL students who are pursuing a degree in higher education may not find this dictionary the most useful or effective because it focuses more on cultural issues and pragmatic aspects of the language and less on higher level vocabulary for academic purposes or for a particular field of study. But for beginning- and intermediate-level ESL/EFL learners and instructors, I heartily recommend the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* even though its homonymic headwords may confuse some users at first. Each component of this dictionary was carefully selected and developed by specialists to illustrate English language use in the US in both written and spoken form. The *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* serves as a quick reference to English grammar, writing conventions, American culture, and word meaning. This dictionary is an ESL student's secret weapon, an extremely useful resource for ESL and EFL students and instructors alike.

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## **Seeing the Big Picture: Exploring American Cultures on Film**

**Tamara Smith**

*Tokyo International University of America*

*Seeing the Big Picture: Exploring American Cultures on Film.* Ellen Summerfield and Sandra Lee. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. Pp. 222. 2001. \$27.95. ISBN 1-877864-84-6

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Tamara Smith is an assistant professor at Tokyo International University of America in Salem, Oregon. Her research interests include the internalization of language rhythm and the development of academic language proficiency.

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If "a picture is worth a thousand words," then film should be able to inspire many thoughtful ideas and ongoing discussions that lead to meaningful activities, papers, and projects in the classroom. Ellen Summerfield and Sandra Lee have used film in their classes at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, to motivate students and teach them about American culture. They share the product of their work in *Seeing the Big Picture: Exploring American Cultures on Film*. Summerfield and Lee have done an outstanding job of researching and creating materials that effectively introduce students to the history of American cultures, that engage students in the practice of thinking critically about the content of film, and that skillfully help students develop useful concepts for understanding other cultures.

*Seeing the Big Picture* is organized around eight feature films that provide insights into mainstream American culture as well as the cultures of Native Americans, African Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, gays, and the deaf. Before viewing each film, students participate in previewing activities that involve freewriting and discussion. The book supplies historical background and some geographical context. The historical background is detailed and insightful; this is one of the noteworthy strengths of this book.

Several follow-up activities help students think beyond the basic plot after viewing each film. One of these activities, "Spotlight on Culture and Communication," highlights a cultural concept in each film. For example, after viewing the movie *Children of a Lesser God*, students are asked to find a clip from the film portraying ethnocentrism and to prepare a presentation explaining how pertinent cultural concepts and filmmaking techniques apply to their selected clip. This is an interesting and challenging exercise. However, most English as a Second Language (ESL) students would require an extended discussion of the concept and examples, and an opportunity to practice in class before they could successfully complete the activity on their own. Within the "Spotlight on Culture and Communication," a limited number of cultural concepts are introduced: nonverbal communication, values, empathy, internalized oppression, assimilation of immigrants, cultural borders and conflicts, "coming out of the closet," and ethnocentrism. Other concepts that are also useful for understanding

cultures—such as communication styles—might have to be provided in supplemental materials.

Readings also constitute a follow-up activity in each chapter. The readings are insightful and thus help the students better understand the movies from the perspective of the people that they are studying. For example, in the chapter on Native Americans, Summerfield and Lee have included four critiques of the movie *Dances with Wolves*. These four reviews allow the students to see that the mainstream press has praised this movie for its portrayal of Native Americans. In contrast, the Native American critic Shoots the Ghost, an Oglala Lakota, suggests that the movie is historically inaccurate and points out that the hero of the movie is once again a white man (p. 32).

Finally, each chapter concludes with abundant ideas for activities, papers, and projects. For a language teacher, the variety of options makes it possible to find a project idea that can be adapted to accomplish a particular language learning goal.

Summerfield and Lee suggest that *Seeing the Big Picture* is appropriate for introductory college classes and advanced ESL classes (TOEFL 500 and above). The book is probably best suited for content classes, yet could be used in advanced speaking/listening classes if accompanied by supplementary material that focuses on specific language skills. For instance, an ESL teacher could provide useful phrases for leading a discussion, model their use, and then have the students take turns being leaders during one of the many discussion activities presented in the book. It would be natural to talk about the features and structure of successful oral presentations and have the students practice these skills when presenting a project. Moreover, historical background information provided in *Seeing the Big Picture* could easily be adapted to practice note-taking by simply presenting this information in the form of a short lecture. The material is challenging yet accessible for advanced ESL students. An ESL class would be able to thoroughly cover only a few chapters during a term, especially if the students come from cultures where critical thinking is not stressed in the educational system. However, students would face genuine academic challenges with the benefit of having motivating material for listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities.

For ESL teachers who enjoy delving into film, who want to explore American cultures in some depth with their students, and who are willing to provide additional materials focused on specific language skills, I would strongly recommend *Seeing the Big Picture: Exploring American Cultures on Film*. The materials are interesting and extensive, and they can be easily supplemented to adapt to the specific needs of students as well as to the requisites of various curriculums.

## INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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*The ORTESOL Journal*, a professional, refereed publication, encourages submission of previously unpublished articles on topics of significance to individuals concerned with the teaching of English as a second or foreign language, especially in elementary and secondary schools, and in higher education, adult education, and bilingual education. As a publication that represents a variety of cross-disciplinary interests, both theoretical and practical, the *Journal* invites manuscripts on a wide range of topics, especially in the following areas:

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