

# ELT RESEARCH IN ACTION

Bridging the Gap  
between Research and  
Classroom Practice

**Edited by**

**Jessica Mackay**

**Marilisa Birello**

**Daniel Xerri**

Preface by **Zoltán Dörnyei**



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## Preface

# Zoltán Dörnyei

**RESEARCH CAN BE UNDERSTOOD** in several different ways, but at the most fundamental level it concerns simply *trying to find answers to questions*. If we take this basic definition, the researcher versus classroom practitioner divide disappears, because both groups spend a great deal of their time trying to understand issues and find answers and solutions to questions that are relevant to their profession. In this sense, the real difference between the two camps lies primarily in their *research approach*, that is, in *how* they go about obtaining the answers they need. Researchers often say that they are more *systematic* in their quest as they apply procedures that are more likely to produce *enduring* or *generalisable* answers; teachers on the other hand often respond that in contrast to the frequently too abstract and detached research results, they generate knowledge that is *directly relevant* to and *applicable* in their practice.

If we are honest, neither side's case is as clear-cut as they would like to make it out to be. On the one hand, we know all too well that the validity of the 'scientific method' that has dominated empirical research since the Enlightenment has been challenged ever since the appearance of qualitative research methodology in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and such criticisms have gained further traction recently with the growing popularity of dynamic systems approaches and with several emerging problems concerning traditional statistical concepts such as significance testing. On the other hand, we need also to admit that practitioner-led research is not always as useful and relevant as one would hope for, and there is some truth

in those critical voices which argue that action research can often cut corners in ways that undermines its inherent values.

All these thoughts, of course, are not new at all, and in trying to address these matters, teachers and researchers have repeatedly arrived at the recognition that one of the most promising solutions to the teacher–researcher divide may lie in achieving effective cross-cultural dialogue between the two groups of professionals, with the aim of producing hybrid solutions that meet the needs and standards of both sides. There have been ample examples in the past evidencing that it is indeed possible to ‘have the research cake and eat it’, so to speak, but unless we actively encourage a non-partisan approach in this area, the natural tendency of both camps is to follow their own impetus and try to do it their own way. It is against this backdrop that the ELT Research in Action (ELTRIA) conference held in Barcelona in 2017 assumes special significance, and I applaud the organisers’ determination to further increase this importance by producing a tangible outcome of this meeting in the form of an edited volume.

I would recommend everybody to take a closer look at the content of this valuable volume. What you will hopefully notice straight away is the care with which the content has been edited and put together as well as the passion of the contributors to try and identify areas and approaches where research and teaching efforts can not only *complement* each other but can also produce something *unique* that neither approach would be able to achieve on its own. The selection of topics is commendably rich – there is indeed something here for everybody! – attesting both to the feasibility of bridging the gap between teaching and research and to the overall creativity that characterises the material in this book. So, if you want to be inspired and refuelled, why don’t you take a walk in the fascinating landscape drawn up by the highly committed team of contributors made up of teachers, researchers, teacher-researchers and researcher-teachers, coming from a wide variety of countries and instructional backgrounds. It is likely to be an instructive and worthwhile experience!



## Acknowledgements

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As ELTRIA conference organisers, Jessica and Marilisa would like to express their gratitude to colleagues at the Escola d'Idiomes Moderns (School of Modern Languages) at the University of Barcelona, without whom the conference and the resulting publication would not have been possible. These include the coordination and management team: Richard Blair, Ciarán Canning, Jon Gregg, Sara Alarcón, Pilar Fernández, Ester Xofra and Dr Javier Varea; and the organising committee and volunteers who contributed so much to the success of the event: Dr Phil Banks, Elisabet Bonany, Dr Marta Bosch, Matt Evans, Clara Machín, Juan de Miquel, Judith Dunan, Sean Hurson, Dawn McRobbie, Brendan Sheridan, Paula Vives and Iain Young.

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Needless to say, we also wish to thank the ELTRIA presenters, who travelled from 20 different countries to share their knowledge and experience with us in Barcelona. Finally, the editors would particularly like to express their gratitude to the contributors who have worked so hard to translate their presentations into the chapters in this book. We hope you enjoy the results of your efforts as much as we have. It has been our pleasure and privilege to work with you throughout this process.

*Jessica Mackay, Marilisa Birello and Daniel Xerri*

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# Introduction

## Jessica Mackay

**IN THIS INTRODUCTION**, I attempt to summarise the origins and rationale behind the first ELT Research in Action (ELTRIA) conference held at the EIM, University of Barcelona on April 21-22, 2017, as well as give a brief overview of the chapters included in this book. I hope I also manage to capture some of the energy and enthusiasm of the event, which brought together teachers and researchers (and teacher-researchers!) from over 20 different countries in five different continents, all united by genuine curiosity and a willingness to ‘bridge the gap’ between these two communities of practice.

### **The research-practice divide**

The subtitle chosen for the ELTRIA conference has proven to be apt, if hardly original. A quick internet search for ‘Bridging the Gap between Research and Classroom Practice in ELT’ reveals that this is an issue which has preoccupied researchers and teachers alike for a number of years. In fact, one of ELTRIA 2017’s plenary speakers, David Block, was already ‘revisiting’ the gap between SLA researchers and language teachers in a paper published in 2000. Patsy Lightbown and Ron Sheen aired their differences on the subject in the pages of *Applied Linguistics* between 2000 and 2002. Far from going away, the debate regarding how and whether to bridge this gap continues apace, as seen in the lively exchange between two leading scholars in the pages of *ELT Journal* over the course of 2017 (see ch. 3 by Graham Hall).

As these debates will attest, there are a number of justifications for teachers' (lack of) engagement with research, explored extensively by ELTRIA plenary speaker, Simon Borg (see his [blog](#) for a full list). Teachers have little time to read research and often find that what they want to read is expensive to access. Furthermore, the 'gap' between these two 'communities of practice' has long been reinforced by differences in status, knowledge, and (often impenetrable) discourse (Crookes, 1998). Given the apparent extent of the division, and the intensity of the debate it generates, is it possible to reconcile the tension between research and practice in ELT? The task of 'mediation' (Cordingley, 2008), i.e., the transformation of knowledge from research into classroom practice, has often fallen to methodology writers, who themselves vary considerably in their perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of research findings for the everyday working lives of teachers. This is explored in ch. 1 by ELTRIA plenary speaker, Scott Thornbury.

Recently, however, members of both communities seem to be committed to working together towards 'bridging the gap'. Within the academic community, there is increasing acknowledgement of the role of the 'expert practitioner' in guiding the research agenda. At the 2017 European Second Language Association ([EuroSLA](#)) conference, a team from the University of Reading introduced their plenary session, 'Doing Knowledge Exchange with Practitioners', as 'this year's hot topic'. They quoted ELTRIA speaker, Rosemary Erlam (2008) in their objective to conduct research that is 'grassroots-driven rather than top-down'.

Teacher associations have also responded to the growing demand from members for ideas and input which are both evidence-based and relevant to classroom practice. The [IATEFL Research SIG](#) has offered numerous opportunities for teachers to learn about and get involved in classroom-based studies. Among its many initiatives, ReSIG offers grants to attend seminars and events with a research focus, runs webinars and regular forum discussions on open access articles, supports teacher research



events around the world, and even organises its own annual conference dedicated to teacher research. The interest in ELT research within the IATEFL community as a whole is reflected in the choice of plenary speakers at the annual conference, which in 2018 includes Lourdes Ortega, with a talk entitled ‘What is SLA research good for, anyway?’.

At grassroots level, a proliferation of blogs and podcasts has emerged in the last few years which aim to ‘present interesting and relevant language and education research in an easily digestible format’ ([ELT Research Bites](#)). As well as the aforementioned ‘ELT Research Bites’, these include, to name but a few, Scott Thornbury’s [‘An A-Z of ELT’](#), Geoff Jordan’s [‘CriticELT’](#), Shona Whyte’s [‘On Teaching Languages with Technology’](#), and the [TEFLology Podcast](#). These initiatives allow teachers who have struggled to access research findings to benefit from summaries and discussions. It appears that practitioners are ‘bridging the gap’ and engaging with research on their own terms.

### **Introducing ELTRIA**

The idea for the ELTRIA conference emerged from staffroom discussions between myself and my colleague Marilisa Birello. As teachers who actively participate in research, we were becoming increasingly aware of the groundswell of interest in ‘bridging the gap’ between these two sides of our professional identity. Faced with the challenge of developing a programme of Continuing Professional Development for the well-qualified and experienced staff at our school, we saw the potential for a conference that catered for teachers wishing to be better informed by up-to-date classroom research. In short, we perceived a need for a conference that *we* would like to attend: an opportunity for communication (and perhaps even collaboration!) between researchers and practitioners in a shared context, with shared interests, and a shared goal: helping learners become more efficient and proficient users of the target language.

The first ELTRIA conference was an opportunity to bring together different members of the ELT community to share knowledge and experiences about the teaching and learning of English in everyday classroom practice. As conference organisers, Marilisa and I were delighted that the following leading experts in ELT and SLA agreed to share their considerable insights with us as plenary speakers: David Block, Simon Borg, Carmen Muñoz and Scott Thornbury. The variety of sessions and workshops was equally impressive, and we were particularly pleased that presenters represented many different contexts, ranging from early-career researchers to renowned names in the field, many of whom are included in this publication.

### **Organisation of the book**

In the process of planning and holding the ELTRIA conference, it emerged that there were three main organising principles that motivated our speakers to present: the desire to spark (or continue) debate and encourage new ways of thinking about a topic; the discussion of the relevance of theory when translated into ELT practice; and the presentation of research which has emerged from practical issues or dilemmas in the classroom. Accordingly, the book has been organised into three sections.

#### *Bridging the gap: Reflection and debate on the issues that unite and divide research and practice in ELT*

This section starts with a summary of Scott Thornbury's ELTRIA plenary, an analysis of his research into the important role of methodology writers as 'mediators' between the research and practice communities. The second chapter presents Richard Sampson's personal action research journey, with rich insights into the benefits of AR for all interested parties. Finally, in the concluding chapter Graham Hall discusses the research-practice divide, and the need for principled engagement with ELT research findings, the very motivation behind ELTRIA, leading us neatly into the next section.

*Research into practice: Relating, testing and applying theories in classroom settings*

This section presents the potential for and findings from classroom research based on theoretical principles. Chapter 4 describes the process of adapting theory to practice, as the well-known materials writer, Jill Hadfield, presents her own experiences of writing a teacher's resource book based on motivation theory. The two following chapters will be of particular interest to teachers intrigued by the use of task-based methodology. In chapter 5, Mayya Levkina examines whether it is possible to teach pronunciation through tasks while the influence of teacher questions on task performance is the focus of chapter 6 by Natsuyo Suzuki.

In chapter 7, Stephen Scott Brewer discusses the possibility of translating the construct of 'enaction' into classroom practice, with a focus on memory techniques. Ouacila Ait Eljoudi explores Algerian EFL learners' and teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in chapter 8. In chapter 9, Chiara Astrid Gebbia shares findings from her ongoing research, in which she examines the importance of metaphorical competence as an indicator of proficiency among Italian EFL learners. This section concludes with chapter 10, in which Sophie Thompson, Luke Plonsky and Emma Marsden present the IRIS digital repository of research instruments. This is essential reading for teachers interested in using validated and reliable means of collecting data in their own classroom research.

*Practice into research: Exploring practical issues and questions in the classroom*

The final section identifies some of the practical problems that we encounter as practitioners and how research can help us to explore these issues from an insider perspective. In chapter 11, Matthew Evans analyses a key issue, learner demotivation, as he highlights some potential causes of dropout in a large language school in Spain. The following two chapters both explore inno-

vations in an Algerian EFL context: Katia Berbar discusses how to implement cooperative learning in chapter 12, while chapter 13 present insights from Nawal Kadri's experience of learner self-assessment and how it compares with teacher evaluation.

The following chapter (14) may not adhere strictly to the ELT theme of the conference, but Alexandra Georgiou's exploration of the linguistic practices of newly arrived immigrant children in Cyprus has clear and increasingly important implications for ESL and general primary and secondary teachers all over Europe. In chapter 15, Seiko Harumi reports on an action research project that focussed on raising Japanese EFL learners' awareness of interactional features in their classroom talk. The last two chapters in this section both focus on introducing learners to aspects of specialised discourse. In chapter 16, Ralph Rose presents ADAPS, a tool that addresses the teacher's need to find and present specific academic texts for their learners. To conclude, in chapter 17, Jean Jimenez and Ida Ruffolo discuss ways of drawing learners' attention to the language used in the tourism industry in ESP classes in Italy.

### **Conclusion**

Together with my colleagues on the ELTRIA organising committee and my fellow editors, Marilisa Birello and Daniel Xerri, we hope that the following chapters can provide readers with just a taste of the breadth and diversity of topics that were presented at ELTRIA and manage to transmit the sense of optimism about a new era of teacher research and collaboration. We are all looking forward to sharing this experience with you at ELTRIA 2019.

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# Section 1

## Bridging the gap

Reflection and debate on the issues that  
unite and divide research and practice

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in ELT

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## Writing methodological texts: A view from the bridge

**Scott Thornbury**

Harwood (2014) comments that ‘very little research has been done on ELT teachers’ guides’ (p. 9). While he is referring to those that complement specific coursebooks, the same might be said of methodology texts in general, i.e. those free-standing monographs on methodology that often constitute a core text on pre- or in-service training courses. The dearth of research is perhaps surprising, given the key role that these texts often play, not only in terms of enshrining and perpetuating existing classroom practices, but in the construction of teachers’ knowledge. Indeed, given many teachers’ well attested reluctance to engage with ‘research-based discourse’, either by conducting research themselves or by reading the findings of other researchers (see, for example, Borg, 2009), methodology texts may constitute one of their few sources of information as to how language teaching is conceptualized and practised. Hence, as Stern (1983) notes, they ‘form a valuable link between the “theoretic”...and the “practical”’ (p. 478). Indeed they may go some way towards bridging the ‘dysfunctional’ discourse between researchers and practitioners (Clarke, 1994).

How effectively, then, do teachers’ guides perform this bridging function? And, given their potential to shape teachers’ pedagogical knowledge, how trustworthy are they? Do the writers of methodology texts represent and interpret the research-based discourse accurately and faithfully? Or do they cherry-pick the research findings, or otherwise simplify, or even distort them, in

order to promote their own particular agendas – which, in the case of methodology writers, may often be a specific method?

In order to address this issue, four leading writers of such texts were interviewed (by e-mail). They were Penny Ur (henceforth PU), author of (among many titles) *A Course in Language Teaching* (2012); H. Douglas Brown (henceforth HDB), author of (most recently) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (2014); Jeremy Harmer (JH), author of many titles, including *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (2015); and Jim Scrivener (JS), author of (among others) *Learning Teaching* (2011). While no accurate figures are available (and are probably jealously guarded by their publishers), a straw-poll of teacher trainers in a variety of contexts suggests that, between them, these four writers command a substantial share of the global market for methodology texts for use on ELT teacher training courses, both pre-service and in-service.

The questions that they were invited to address were the following:

1. How did you get into writing methodology texts?
2. How important is it, do you think, to link research and classroom practice?
3. How have you kept/do you keep abreast of new developments in research, e.g. SLA, corpus linguistics, neurobiology, etc.?
4. Given that most research is somewhat inconclusive, how do you select from – and prioritize – the research findings that inform your texts?
5. Do you feel you have an ‘agenda’, i.e. a bias towards a particular theoretical (or a-theoretical) position? If so, do you think this matters?
6. Does it concern you that you might be ‘dumbing down’ or otherwise misrepresenting research findings? How do you guard against this?
7. To what do you attribute your success? (Don’t be modest!)

In describing how they became writers of methodology texts, all four referenced their prior involvement in teacher education which had helped them articulate their own ‘personal theories’ of teaching and, at the same time, led them to identify a need in the market for practically-oriented texts written in accessible language. As JS recalls: ‘I thought there was a real space in the market for a book that focussed on the hows a teacher needed when doing a short intensive practical course like CTEFLA (CELTA).’

On the question as to the importance of making connections between research and classroom practice, opinions varied, and, indeed, tended to reflect a range of positions along a cline from ‘very important’ to ‘not important at all’. For example, on the one hand:

Teachers need to *ground* their teaching in research-based findings and assumptions. And, more importantly, teachers themselves should not shrink from engaging in their own classroom-based “action research.” It’s an all-important interaction. (HDB)

And, on the other:

I’ve never found much formal “research” very helpful to my own classroom work. I am not “anti-research” but I do carry a suspicion of many statistical studies in teaching. (JS)

Rather than relying on research, therefore, JS maintains that ‘I learn more about my own teaching by watching and thinking about my own teaching. Other people’s discoveries rarely feel applicable to me (being uniquely me), my context (being uniquely it) and my students (being uniquely them).’ He regrets that many practising teachers ‘are rather in awe of supposed “experts” and quite wary of trusting their own experience and expertise,’ and his ‘mission’ is ‘to encourage teachers to trust their own experience more and find hard-edged ways to learn from it.’

In response to the question as to how these writers keep abreast of new developments in the field, there was again a diversity of opinion, reflecting the range of academic versus non-academic contexts in which they operate. Representing the more academic axis, HDB keeps up-to-date ‘by teaching university courses myself and disciplining myself to set aside reading time. Purposeful reading of summaries of research in edited “state of the art” volumes helps to acquire information in subfields that are of interest but not in my central focus.’ PU admits to the impossibility of keeping abreast of all current development in the field and that, despite reading as much as possible, she is sure she is missing some ‘key publications’. However, she claims that ‘on the other hand things that are really important get cited by those I *am* reading, so sooner or later I think I get most of the major stuff. But certainly not all.’

Asked about their criteria for selecting from the research evidence, HDB again positions himself within an academic and research-based discourse community, while also indicating a strong pedagogical orientation, effectively bridging the two discourses: ‘The selection of findings to inform my writing is based on degrees of (1) *validity* through triangulation of findings, (2) *relevance* of findings to pedagogy, and (3) *practicality* of those findings for classroom teachers.’ Similarly, PU looks for research that is ‘well-designed and carefully executed, with convincing evidence and logical conclusions,’ and that, moreover, is not ‘trivial’ nor easily generalizable in terms of its practical applications. JH invokes a ‘sense of plausibility’: ‘I go for what seems plausible to me. But I have to be careful (and suspicious) of my own unreliable instinct.’ And he adds, ‘There IS an element of fashion in this too, of course. Readers of a general methodology book need to know what is most “current” as well as what has been.’ Predictably, perhaps, JS takes a more experiential, even intuitive, stance: ‘Mainly, I think I write what I do and what I see other teachers doing. Informed ideas that may or may not work for others. These need to fit in with my own internal schema for how I think people learn, study, behave etc.’

On the question of ‘having an agenda’, only JS expresses an allegiance to a specific theory of learning – what he describes as a “muscular hard-edged humanism” based on honest, uncompromising feedback cycles’, and influenced by the work of Carl Rogers in particular. The others are more circumspect, and aim for balance: ‘Everyone has biases, but I try to be as fair-minded as possible in weighing relevant alternatives’ (HDB); ‘I really try hard in my own writing to be as objective as possible’ (PU); ‘In my case I write “general” methodology and I see it as my duty to try and present a balanced picture of what is going on – showing where alternative views of what is going on can be relevant’ (JH).

Asked whether they were concerned about ‘dumbing down’ or misrepresenting research findings, opinions differed. JH and HDB resist simplification and overgeneralization: ‘I worry about dumbing down all the time’ (JH); ‘I do not think we should “dumb-down” such findings, and I try to avoid it’ (HDB). On the other hand, JS and PU are more sanguine, and PU is refreshingly candid:

I think there is a valid place for practical manuals for teaching that do not encumber the reader with all the background understanding the author has acquired. (JS)

No, I don’t think this worries me. Research which is very complicated and difficult I can’t understand anyway, so I’m not about to dumb it down because I’m too dumb myself to deal with it in the first place... Abridging, paraphrasing and simplifying are valid mediating strategies which enable a lot more people to get access to the findings; but this does not mean over-simplifying or diluting the essential facts and conclusions. (PU)

Finally, when asked to what they attribute their success, one theme recurred – their capacity to address practising teachers in language that is both accessible and personally engaging – i.e.

that they have a distinctive ‘voice’. For example: ‘I avoid language that’s pedantic and academically stuffy. I talk to my readers as I would in a classroom setting or sitting down with them in conversation’ (HDB).

In one of the few comparative surveys of teachers’ guides, Stern (1983) found that they ‘frequently fail to make a clear distinction between firmly tested knowledge, research evidence, widely held opinion, personal views of the writer, and hypotheses or speculations to be tested’ (p. 478). The same charge could be levelled at the current batch of writers.

However, given the popularity of these guides, it is tempting to suppose that the reluctance of at least some of them to feature SLA research prominently may not in fact be a problem – that the guides fulfil an important function irrespective of their apparent lack of scientific rigour. This raises the vexed question as to how essential ‘firmly tested knowledge’ and ‘research evidence’ is for the purposes for which these guides are written, i.e. pre- or in-service teacher education. Some scholars, e.g. Freeman (1989), might argue that they are not:

Although applied linguistics, research in second language acquisition, and methodology all contribute to the knowledge on which language teaching is based, they are not, and must not be confused with, language teaching itself. They are, in fact, ancillary to it, and thus they should not be the primary subject matter of language teacher education. (p. 29)

However, as Freeman (1996) also argues, ‘it may be that the role of teacher education lies less in influencing teachers’ behaviour than enabling them to *rename their experience*, thus recasting their conceptions and reconstructing their classroom practice’ (p. 238) (emphasis added). Teachers’ guides might provide the material means by which this renaming process is facilitated: simply the act of putting into writing what teachers might

otherwise talk about amongst themselves could serve to mediate the transition from ‘other-regulation’ to ‘self-regulation’.

But they will only realise this mediating function if they are able to ‘mesh’ with the teacher’s developing experience-based knowledge structures. Ideally, the writers of such texts, then, should themselves be experienced teachers whose writing is transparent and whose advice is plausible, but who also have a sense of how to leverage the inexpert teacher into the target discourse community – not necessarily by simply re-packaging the findings of SLA research and applied linguistics, but by inviting the teacher to map those findings on to their own experience, and, by ‘renaming’ them, gain ownership of them.

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## **Developing as an action researcher: Convergence, divergence and historicity in the research process**

**Richard J. Sampson**

One of my first experiences with English language teaching was at a Japanese elementary school. I team-taught with a Japanese teacher of English to children ranging from six to twelve years old. Although it was a small school, it had been designated as a model for English classes. As such, we regularly conducted something known as ‘lesson study’. What would happen is this: On set days, other teachers at the school would observe our teaching, taking notes on our team-teaching, interactions with learners, as well as the children’s communication. Students also wrote comments in Japanese at the end of the lesson. Directly afterwards, we met with the observer teachers. We would then go over the learner reflections and teacher observations. We would discuss what was working, and what could be improved, such as ways of increasing opportunities for students to actively communicate with each other.

A number of years later, I began working in a very different educational context, at a university north of Tokyo. Teaching undergraduate students majoring in English for international communication, I became curious as to the interrelationships between their past and present learning experiences, their evolving identities, and their motivation to develop as English users. However, examining the literature at the time, I uncovered a large body of research that utilised surveys. From my perspective, it did little to promote student and teacher voice about situated perceptions of classroom language learning. Moreover, recalling my experiences with lesson study at the

elementary school, this kind of research seemed to ‘take’ from learners without ‘giving’ anything directly back.

Searching for a more ecological (and, I consider, ethical) approach to exploring the classroom, I came across action research. Action research sees practitioners working together with learners to explore challenges and deepen understandings of their local contexts of learning. Action researchers utilise a series of cycles for the dual purposes of improving knowing and practice. The typical process moves through *planning* (identifying an issue for investigation), *action* (deliberate intervention aimed at fostering deeper understanding of the issue), *observation* (collecting data about the action), and *reflection* (reflecting on, describing and evaluating the action and its meaning for understanding the issue) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992). I instantly felt a connection to this method due to my previous experiences with lesson study. However, it must be noted that one fundamental difference is that action research makes use of systematic analysis of collected data (Burns, 2010), rather than the more informal measures in lesson study.

Over the years, I have gained increasingly more complex understandings of the learners in my classrooms and myself as a teacher through action research projects. I recognize, though, that my conceptualisation of action research differs slightly from the standard model in a number of ways. First, action research often does not form a linear trajectory of cycles. In attempting to gain insights to a particular issue, the research can branch out into various spirals of action. Heron’s (1996) definition of convergence and divergence in cyclical research is of use here. Convergence involves moving to a ‘particular focus over a few cycles, taking it deeper, restructuring it in the light of the previous application phases in order to learn more about it’ (Heron, 1996, p. 93). Conversely, a researcher ‘can diverge over different parts or subwholes of the topic’ (Heron, 1996, p. 60). In this case, reflection on a previous cycle of the action research might suggest two or more alternative paths of intervention.

I have found that my research frequently involves both convergence and divergence. To give a concrete example: A project on which I have recently been working is exploring the socially adapted nature of classroom language learning motivation. The research is being conducted with Japanese undergraduate STEM-major (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) learners in compulsory EFL classes. I first gathered predictions from my students and information from companies about future English use. There was a large gap: Students envisaged using English for sightseeing abroad, communicating in everyday life, friendship, hobbies and pastimes; companies noted connections with overseas industry and practical, occupational English use by employees. I wanted to respect my students' ideas, yet also encourage them to think more about the meaning of their English studies connected to their STEM major. The research diverged into two parallel spirals at this point as I developed change-action – intervention above and beyond usual practice to further my/students' understandings. On the one hand, I introduced conversation cards with topics for short, pair conversations every lesson to encourage a sharing of students' interests. On the other hand, in a concurrent spiral I designed activities for students to describe, share, and critically appraise absorbed messages about English, listen to actual English needs of future employers, and watch a short near-peer role-model video of a STEM graduate student discussing his use of English (Sampson, 2017). Due to the divergence, the change-action shone light on the socially adapted nature of language learning motivation from different angles.

A related insight has been the need for iteration in analysis and a historical approach to considering outcomes. Radford's (2007) arguments sum up my own recognition of the necessity to look back at the research as a whole after its completion:

Practitioner researchers need to be analysts and critical interpreters of practice in a way that helps them to under-

stand and explain what is happening, but the approach is more likely to be historical, exploratory, interactive and reflectively analytical rather than directly interventionist or controlling. (p. 276)

Action researchers introduce change-action based on understandings of data at particular points in time, as in the examples described above when I noticed a gap between students' and employers' ideas of English use. This intervention alters the trajectories of the research. However, there may be a multitude of factors besides the introduced change-action through which outcomes emerged. As the researcher's understandings evolve over the course of a study, these factors may also become more apparent. Moreover, with converging and diverging spirals of action, there are likely insights that can be gained by drawing together different threads of the action research after the completion of data collection. In adaptation of the regular conventions for presentation of research findings, it is therefore important that action researchers be encouraged to take a narrative approach: They must detail their reasoning for decisions during the research, as well as making explicit the ways in which revised analysis promoted deeper understandings of the issue under investigation.

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# Theory, theories and practice in ELT: 'Believing and doubting'

**Graham Hall**

Debates and concerns surrounding the relationship between theory, research and practice – and theorists, researchers and teachers – in ELT are long-standing. Medgyes (2017), for example, argues that research often has little to offer teachers and that 'researchers need teachers more than teachers need researchers'. Others point to the ways that the differences in status accorded to theorists/researchers and teachers results in inequalities of power, control and influence within the profession. Meanwhile, to ask teachers to engage with theory and research findings, it is argued, is unreasonable – teachers quite simply do not have the time, energy, or access to theory and research, and are not paid to read and reflect upon it.

And yet, as Paran (2017) suggests, theory and research findings may offer teachers deeper ways of understanding teaching, learning and their own classrooms, compared to 'just' their own intuitions and experience. Furthermore, as 'principled eclecticism' or even 'postmethod pedagogy' increasingly takes hold in ELT, teachers are required to become local 'experts' who teach in a context-sensitive and location-specific manner. Although this breaks the superiority of theorists, methodologists and researchers over teachers (noted above), it also requires teachers to develop their own understandings of what they do in the classroom and why; what works, what does not, and why; and what possibilities and alternatives to their current practices are available and appropriate in their particular context. And engaging

with theory, theories (as we shall see below, the plural is important!) and research offers teachers one possible way of approaching these questions.

However, a key difficulty when engaging with the academic and methodological literature around ELT is that the ideas, theories and research findings we encounter often seem to contradict each other. For example, the recent re-evaluation of L1 use in the classroom runs counter to the previous long-term promotion of ‘English-only’ teaching in ELT; there is a lack of consensus as to the extent to which grammar should be taught explicitly in the classroom, and how this should take place; and the nature and role of practice, for example through drilling and controlled practice activities, remains disputed. Research, it seems, does not necessarily provide answers for teachers; instead, it often raises further questions and dilemmas for us to reflect on! How, therefore, might theory, theories and research be conceptualised in order that we can make sense of them in ways which help us understand and develop our own teaching?

A key consideration is that, while language teaching of course needs in some way to work with rather than against what research has uncovered about the ways in which second languages are learned, theories of L2 *learning* are not the same as theories of L2 *teaching* – thus while research might hint at universal methodological principles, it often says little about specific classroom procedures. Consequently, and as many researchers have noted, our expectation of what research can tell us about teaching should be reasonably modest.

Beyond this, however, how might we deal with theories that seem to be contradictory? For example, how might we reconcile research findings which draw on cognitive approaches to language learning with those which draw on sociocultural theory and see learning as a social process? Or how might we deal with the fact that some researchers argue that the key to language learning is comprehensible input, while others focus on output, and still more focus on interaction?

At the heart of this issue lies the fact that, while researchers generally commit to one particular theoretical perspective and locate their research within that particular framework, teachers face a very different set of challenges, and thus should ‘remain sceptical, still play safe and not commit themselves one way or the other, and to do what works’ (Sharwood Smith, 2008, p. 189). Beyond this, however, when trying to make sense of apparently contradictory theoretical approaches we might, according to Schumann (1983) regard theories of second language learning as if they are ‘art’, rather than ‘science’. From this perspective, contradictory ideas can coexist

as two different paintings of the language learning experience – as reality symbolized in two different ways. Viewers [i.e. teachers] can choose between the two on an aesthetic basis, favouring the picture they find to be true to their experience. Neither position is correct, they are simply alternative representations of reality. (Schumann, 1983, pp. 55-56)

The danger, of course, is that teachers could just pick and choose what they know or ‘like’ in a somewhat unprincipled way, reinforcing entrenched views and practices and not reflecting on other possibilities for their teaching. Yet this might be avoided by, in Elbow’s (2008) terms ‘playing both the believing and doubting game’ as we consider the implications of theory/theories and research in light of our own experiences and classroom realities. ‘Doubting’ involves the disciplined practice of trying to be as sceptical and analytical as possible when we encounter theories and new ideas, in order to discover hidden contradictions or weaknesses in them, particularly in relation to our own context, and especially in the case of perspectives that initially seem true or attractive (Elbow, 2008). ‘Believing’, meanwhile, involves the disciplined practice of trying to scrutinize and test unfashionable ideas for hidden virtues, in order that we might build upon

them in our teaching (Elbow, 2008). In addition to helping us develop our professional practices in appropriate ways, ‘doubting’ what is attractive or popular, and scrutinizing then, if appropriate, welcoming what is unfashionable, also helps us avoid jumping on the methodological ‘bandwagons’ which are often ascribed to ELT.

Theory, theories and research offer English language teachers an array of insights into the dilemmas we face in the classroom, but arguably also raise more questions than they answer. Engaging with research in a principled way offers us opportunities to understand what happens in our classroom more clearly, and offers us potential alternatives to our current practices. The challenge for theorists and researchers, teacher trainers and educators, and ELT managers, administrators and institutions, is how to enable teachers to navigate the links between theory, theories and practice in ways which are supportive, motivating and sustainable in their daily working lives.

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# **Section 2**

# **Research**

# **into practice**

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Relating, testing and applying theories  
in classroom settings

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# A space to write in: Process and principles in deriving practice from research

**Jill Hadfield**

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on the process of translating research into classroom practice in order to design the structure of a resource book for teachers: *Motivating Learning* (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013). It does this by analysing a reflective log detailing the writing process.

## The research

The book is based on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005, 2009), an interpretation of motivation to learn a foreign/second language which has three 'pillars':

- ***Ideal L2 Self*** – if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, this motivates us to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves.
- ***Ought-to L2 Self*** – the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess, which may bear little resemblance to the person's own wishes.
- ***L2 Learning Experience*** – the experience of being engaged in the learning process.

Most prominence in the theory was given to the construction of a vision of the Ideal L2 Self where six 'steps' are outlined:

- Creating the vision: forming a self-image of the Ideal L2 self.
- Enhancing the vision: making the vision elaborate and vivid.
- Substantiating the vision: ensuring the vision is realistic and achievable.
- Operationalising the vision: developing a route map to achieving the vision.
- Keeping the vision alive: keeping sight of the original vision.
- Counterbalancing the vision: considering the consequences of not achieving the goal.

### **The practice**

*Background: Analysing the reflective log*

As part of the requirement for a PhD thesis, I kept a reflective diary while writing *Motivating Learning*, documenting the concerns uppermost in my mind at different periods. I grouped these preoccupations into three areas: 1) those to do with **principles** and beliefs I brought with me to the writing process, e.g. the need to appeal to a range of different learning styles; 2) those to do with deliberate **procedures** or constraints I set up to facilitate writing, e.g. the use of checklists; and 3) those less deliberate and conscious **processes** which emerged during the actual writing. These broad themes were then broken down into smaller categories. This chapter focuses on the process of structuring the book and the principles of book design that emerged.

*The design process*

This involved the sketching of six different versions of a structure plan in diagrammatic form before the final version was arrived at, accompanied by a kind of internal dialogue described as an ‘*alternation of diagrammatic thinking and linear thinking*’, which I call a *diagrammalogue*. From the reflective log:

*It seems this notion of dialogue is crucial. The hidden dialogue behind every book:*

1. *Dialogue with Yourself: motivation, influence of feelings, resistance/inertia, procrastination, etc.*
2. *Dialogue with the Task – demands of the task: will it make a book – is it feasible? What will it look like?*
3. *Dialogue with the Imagined Reader – the teacher: how useful/appealing/viable will it be?*
4. *Dialogue with Research: conditions research needs to submit to, in order to become translated into workable practice. Conditions practice needs to submit to, to remain validated by research.*
5. *Dialogue with Creativity: finding a space to write in.*

The metaphors used to describe this process are all connected to the theme of a journey – by no means a straightforward one – which suggest there may be parts of the process which lead nowhere (blind alleys, impasses): a promising idea may be pursued for some time before it is discarded as unworkable. Other metaphors suggest that there is a ‘correct’ route but for some reason the designer has ‘strayed’, or been sidetracked. Finally, the process is ‘circuitous’: an idea that has been discarded may be returned to and given a new angle.

*Stages in the process: Uncovering principles*

The journey from Structure 1 to Structure 6 consisted, as we have seen, of various dialogues, sometimes imagined, sometimes real. Dialogues 2-5 came into play at different points and each gave rise to a set of ‘structuring principles’.

### **Dialogue with the Task**

Selection of material:

- Will it make a book?
- Is it feasible?
- What will it look like?

Two sets of principles emerged from this dialogue. *Inclusion Principles* centre around concerns such as:

- Feasibility: chapters should be viable, there should be enough, but not too much to write.
- Balance: the book should be in proportion.
- Extent: the book should be a reasonable number of pages.
- Coherence: the parts should make a coherent whole.

*Inspiration Principles* centre around the author's ability to actually write materials:

- Viability: the structure and chapter titles should suggest ideas for activities.
- Inspiration: the structure should inspire the author to write within it.
- Originality: the sections should suggest original types of activity.

### **Dialogue with the Imagined Reader**

Sequencing and duration of material:

- How will these activities appeal to and be useful to teachers and students?
- How will they use them? How will they fit into a syllabus?
- What concerns might the Imagined Reader have and how can we design the book to address these?

Principles emerging from this dialogue could be called *Teacher Appeal Principles*, consisting of:

### Logical principles

- Sequencing: the steps should be structured to reflect a logical teaching sequence.
- Timing: considerations of when, how often, how long?
- Syllabus fit: ease of incorporation of activities into a syllabus.

### Affective Principles

- Classroom reality: activities should take account of classroom reality.
- Teacher curiosity and enthusiasm: sections or steps should be attractive and inviting.
- Practicability: activities should be useful and do-able.

### **Dialogue with Research**

Engagement with the literature, and an ongoing dialogue with the researcher resulted in a set of *Interpretation Principles*, which addressed these questions:

#### Practice Interrogating Research

- Does this research translate directly into practice, or will it need some rearrangement/insertion/deletion of elements?
- How can the theory be (re)structured to provide classroom appeal and viability?

#### Research Interrogating Practice

- Does any reorganisation distort the research?
- Does the rearrangement remain true to the research?
- Does it interpret it in the best possible way?

This dialogue acted as a check and balance on the ongoing processes of selection sequencing and duration.

### Dialogue with Creativity

Rather than through conscious deliberation, this dialogue was expressed through the recurring metaphor of architecture. Four distinct clusters of metaphors gave rise to what I will call *Architectural Principles*:

- ‘*A solid foundation*’: Stability: the book needs a solid and stable framework which should be designed before writing begins and which is not liable to change.
- ‘*A space to write in*’: Constraints: chapters and sections should provide constraints which inspire creativity.
- ‘*Welcoming*’: Clarity: structure should be easy to navigate and inviting to the reader Aesthetics: the structure should be pleasing: ‘*balanced*’ and in ‘*proportion*’.

### Conclusion

The process of structuring a book is more chaotic and recursive than many theorists have made out. A gradual form is imposed on the design by five sets of principles emerging from hidden dialogues in the writing process. These dialogues aim to resolve problems encountered and uncover principles which are realised as constraints, defining the shape and ‘architecture’ of the book. The principles cover four sets of needs:

1. *The Inclusion Principles* fulfil basic **Publishing Needs**: considerations of viability, extent and feasibility.
2. *The Teacher Appeal Principles* focus on **Teacher Needs**, answering the questions: will the material be compatible with classroom reality and will the activities appeal to teachers and their students?
3. *The Interpretation Principles* centre on **Research vs Practice Needs**: is the practice true to the research and is the research as it stands translatable into practice?
4. Finally, both the *Inspiration Principles* and the *Architectural Principles* centre on **Author Needs**: am I inspired to



write these materials and does the structure provide constraints which engender creativity?

These four sets of needs need to be constantly held in mind and balanced during the design process.

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# Teaching pronunciation through tasks: Myth or reality?

Mayya Levkina

## Introduction

Over the last few decades, most EFL coursebooks have claimed to integrate pronunciation work into their syllabuses. However, there is no direct connection between empirical research into how to teach pronunciation and teaching practice (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Moreover, empirical research into pronunciation is mainly based on phonetic training (i.e. a series of sessions in a phonetic laboratory with the use of pronunciation exercises of perception and production) rather than L2 development of pronunciation under classroom conditions. Recently, researchers have started looking for new ways of implementing tasks in an EFL classroom, such as task sequencing (Baralt, Gilabert, & Robinson, 2014). Additionally, some researchers have drawn attention to teaching pronunciation within a task-based language framework (Gurzynski-Weiss, Solon, & Long, 2017), which teachers can implement more easily.

In this light, the main purpose of this study was to analyse how we can teach and put into practice the pronunciation of regular past forms with the use of tasks in an EFL classroom. The choice of this target item is due to the variation in pronunciation (/t/, /d/ and /ɪd/) of the orthographical representation of the past form in English *-ed*. The regular past tense endings are difficult for L2 learners to perceive and acquire even after years of immersion in the L2 environment. L2 learners tend to mispronounce them, by, for example, deleting/devoicing verb-final /t/ and /d/.

Some of the common factors contributing to L2 learners' difficulty in acquisition of regular past forms may be the following: (1) greater difficulty in perceiving /t/ and /d/ than /ld/; (2) too much language information, e.g. L2 learners may disregard regular past tense endings and rely on lexical items such as *yesterday* or *last weekend* instead; (3) lack of readiness of L2 learners to process the input and acquire the form if it is too far beyond their level (Pienemann, 1989; VanPatten, 2004). In this context, tasks may offer a solution to build the bridge between pure phonetic training and English practice in a classroom.

### **Present study**

The participants in the present study were 42 university students aged 20-22 enrolled in a course 'English for the Media' with a B1 level of proficiency as assessed by the Quick Oxford Placement Test. They were divided into two groups and were given different sequences of tasks during practice to see whether one of the sequences was more beneficial than the other one. Before treatment they were given a pre-test, which consisted of reading a radio news script which included target regular past forms of verbs. During the treatment, they were first given explicit instruction on how to pronounce regular past forms of verbs. A series of regular verbs in the past were given to them together with an empty table with three columns to fill in. They then listened to the pronunciation of the given verb forms and put them in the appropriate column (the listening was previously recorded for the present experiment). After they finished the task, they received feedback. Secondly, they practised saying some past verb forms in isolation. They also received teacher's feedback during task performance. In the following part of the treatment, they read a series of scripts with four levels of cognitive complexity, (see Table 1). One group performed the tasks in order of complexity from simple to complex, i.e. from Task 1 to Task 4, whereas the other group performed the same tasks but in a randomized order. Cognitive complexity was used here because previous studies demonstrated that its manipulation from simple to complex

was beneficial for L2 development. The post-test included the same number and type of scripts as in the pre-test (with the same number of target past forms of verbs).

**Table 1.** Task complexity distribution

<b>Task 1 x 4 times</b>	<b>Task 2 x 4 times</b>	<b>Task 3 x 4 times</b>	<b>Task 4 x 4 times</b>
+ planning time (2 min.) + here-and-now	no planning time + here-and-now	+ planning time (2 min.) - here-and-now	no planning time - here-and-now
Students had time to prepare the reading. The script was in the present.	Students had <u>no</u> time to prepare the reading. The script was in the present.	Students had time to prepare the reading. The script was in the <u>past</u> .	Students had <u>no</u> time to prepare the reading. The script was in the <u>past</u> .

Pre-test and post-test readings were codified according to the total number of correctly pronounced regular-*ed* past forms and the total number of correctly pronounced separate forms /t/, /d/ and /ɪd/. The results suggested that after treatment both groups significantly improved their performance of the tasks and the group which performed the tasks in sequence from simple to complex displayed slightly better results, 71.9% of correctly pronounced target forms versus 65.6%. However, when looking at the results of the three types of pronunciation separately, additional differences were also observed. The simple to complex group outperformed the other group in the case of /d/, but the randomized group performed better in the case of /t/ and /ɪd/ (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics (overall results per group)

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Total number of past forms</b>	<b>/ɪd/</b>	<b>/d/</b>	<b>/t/</b>
Group 1 ( <i>simple to complex</i> )	71.9%	22.5%	41.7%	7.6%
Group 2 ( <i>randomized</i> )	65.6%	28.9%	23.3%	12.3%

### Conclusions and further research

The study demonstrates that it is possible to implement successful L2 pronunciation practice in a classroom. However, more studies are needed to see whether other teaching methodologies and techniques may be equally efficient in the teaching of L2 pronunciation. L2 proficiency was not taken into account in the present study, but as some previous studies showed it plays a role in L2 development and therefore it would be useful to compare groups with different levels of proficiency (e.g. A2, B2, etc.). Finally, there was no control group in the present study, so no comparison is given between the experimental and the control groups to see whether by doing pre- and post-tests students may become aware of the target form and improve their performance over time without any additional practice.

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# How do teacher questions affect students' L2 task performance in EFL classrooms?

**Natsuyo Suzuki**

## Introduction

The language the teacher uses plays a significant role in the language learning of students, particularly those with a low level of English proficiency. Teachers ask a lot of questions to check students' language knowledge (display questions), e.g., “*What is the past simple form of 'go'?*” in a typical ‘initiation’, ‘response’, ‘follow-up’ (IRF) exchange. However, in real life, we ask referential questions, e.g., “*Did you enjoy your weekend?*”, to which we do not know the answers. The question arises as to whether or not display questions, which emphasize accuracy over communication, are of strategic significance in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. This study investigated whether or not different types of teacher questions affect: 1) the amount of student responses; and 2) accuracy, fluency and complexity in students' subsequent task performance.

## Display and referential questions

Teacher questions vary in different aspects, depending on what the teacher wants to elicit from the learners. Some studies have found positive effects of referential questions in terms of the length of responses, complexity and continuous interactional revisions, possibly because these questions encourage learners to exercise imagination and creativity when providing contextual information about situations, events, and actions (e.g. Long & Crookes, 1992). In contrast, in a study of an EFL class in Brunei,

Ho (2005) suggested that display questions could be purposeful and effective in eliciting specific target language and meeting institutional goals. According to another study conducted in a secondary school in Hong Kong, display questions resulted in longer and more complex utterances and were more likely to elicit continuous interactional revisions when the teacher and students negotiated their meaning over several turns (Lee, 2006). A further study found that referential questions elicited limited responses in Chinese language classes, where students tended to economize on words, giving priority to meaning for instant communication (Yang & Lyster, 2010). Finally, in a case study of two learners, no difference was found in the use of different questioning strategies over a nine-month period (Ellis, 2012).

### **The study**

The participants in this study were Junior high school students ( $n = 25$ ) aged 13-15 studying in homogeneous classes at a music college in Tokyo. They had 3.3 weekly hours of class, mainly dedicated to learning English grammar based on government authorized textbooks, but also including a 50-minute communicative class taught by a native speaker of English. The experiment was conducted using a pre- and (delayed) post-test design with two input sessions (spring and autumn). From the written pre-test, it could be seen that most students had difficulty in forming correct *do*-fronting and *wh*-questions in terms of inversion, and some students still tended to mix the be-verb and the do-verb in creating question forms and answers.

Over a period of six months, the learners were given three written tests: 1) before the experiment; 2) immediately after it had finished; and 3) one month later. Similarly, three oral tests were given: after the spring session, and before and after the autumn session. At the end of the whole experiment, learners were given follow-up questionnaires in which they were asked about their interest in the task. All conversations were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for complexity, accuracy and fluency.



The Referential Group ( $n = 12-13$ ) received only referential questions (e.g. “How was your weekend?”) from the teacher at the beginning of each lesson (approximately 20 min.), while the Display Group ( $n = 11-12$ ) had only display questions, mainly taken from the topic of the text book (e.g. “What is apple bobbing at Halloween?”). For the rest of the time (approximately 20 min.), students in both groups took part in information-gap tasks in which students used question forms: Picture Differences, which requires students to guess and spot the differences; and Personal Information Exchange, which requires students to interview each other (see Figures 1 & 2).

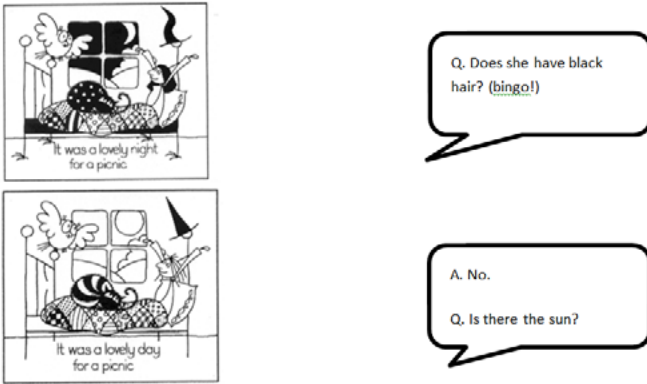


Figure 1. Picture differences



Figure 2. Personal information

## Results

### *The amount of students' responses*

Although the overall number of words elicited in response to teacher questions was small, the Referential Group produced slightly more words than the Display Group, while the Display Group produced more sentences (Table 1). As shown in previous studies, it is possible that referential questions tend to invite responses of a single word or short phrase in order not to impede the flow of communication. In fact, economizing on words may have served to prioritize meaning in order to communicate immediately without breakdowns, which is quite common in real-life conversation. Besides, it is possible to infer that low-level Japanese school students in their mid-teens found it difficult to interact with their teacher, particularly as they may see the teacher as the person who assesses their language.

**Table 1.** Number of main clauses and words produced during teacher-led question time

	<b>Referential Group</b>	<b>Display Group</b>
<b>Number of main clauses (Subject + verb)</b>	16	25
<b>Number of words in response</b>	518 words	448 words

### *Accuracy in oral and written tests*

Contrary to initial expectations, the findings showed that there were no differences between written and oral test scores for the two groups in terms of accuracy. It was predicted that display questions might act as input and prime more accurate production. However, students' accuracy in both written and oral question forms did not change over six months.

### *Task performance: Complexity and fluency*

Similarly, it was revealed that there was no significant difference

in the complexity or fluency of learners' task performance as a result of different types of teacher question. Interestingly, however, the findings showed that students performed differently on Picture Differences at different times (the spring and autumn sessions). These results are likely to be related to the pictures in the task: that is to say, even with the same type of task, different content could influence L2 task performance. A possible explanation is that the variable which affects learners' performance may be the task itself and the question forms the students used during the performance of differing task types rather than the nature of teacher-led interaction.

### **Conclusions**

In spite of limited data, this study produced two significant findings in terms of the effects of teacher questions on students' responses, accuracy, fluency and complexity in this context: 1) Referential questions invited EFL learners to economize words for smooth communication, while display questions were not necessarily effective to elicit longer or more accurate utterances. Grammar-focused tasks and simultaneous teacher feedback may be more effective in developing accuracy, but further research is needed to measure long-term gains. 2) The task type (content and topics) is more likely to be related to student performance. Surprisingly, the follow-up questionnaires revealed that 64% of the students found the Picture Differences task interesting, but only 20% thought that they were helpful for English learning. In contrast, more students (40%) thought the Personal Information Exchange task was helpful, despite the negative perception that it was not interesting. Teenage learners in this context may be inclined to believe that L2 learning does not take place just through fun activities. Therefore, it would be intriguing to explore how enjoyable tasks, using imagination and creativity affect L2 development. All in all, it would be interesting to see how the target language produced by low-level learners changes during performance of other types of tasks.

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# Cultivating language skills from the inside-out: A focus on memory

## Stephen Scott Brewer

### Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to introduce a theoretical perspective on human functioning known as ‘enaction’ (Varela, Thomson, & Rosch, 2016), and to relate this perspective to the practical importance of emphasizing memory in foreign language learning.

### Enaction theory

Perhaps one of the most vexing questions about language acquisition and learning concerns the nature of the relationship between those factors that stem from *inside* our learners and those that originate in the *outside* social world. While teaching and its correlate, learning, typically conjure up images of knowledge transmitted from outside (in the world) into our students’ minds (outside > in), enaction theory highlights the need to view learning as a process primarily rooted in our students’ endogenous processes, that is, in those processes that they, from within, bring to bear on the learning situations and opportunities afforded to them (inside > out). This take on learning becomes increasingly important as students mature and begin to exercise greater cognitive and emotional influence over their own functioning by the time they reach late childhood and early adolescence.

An enactive perspective on learning is rooted in the power of dynamic learning situations and in the post-Cartesian philosophical view that conscious human activity is not something

that the mind achieves on its own. Rather, enaction unites person (mind), action (body), and situation (world) into one global structure, while positing that all human functioning emerges from the ‘situating/situated dialectic’ (Masciotra, Roth, & Morel, 2007, p. 4). ‘Situatingly’, individuals engage their personal resources and determinants to situate themselves adaptively and make their contributions to the emerging situations they find themselves in. The possibilities that each of us enacts make up a ‘network of virtual actions’ (Masciotra et al., 2007, p. 4). Concomitantly, each of us, ‘situatedly’ and over time, develops unique ways of understanding, perceiving, and thus transforming given physical and social environments and of rendering them fields of action appropriate to our own functioning. This includes our highly diverse relationships to cultural and technical objects such as musical instruments and tools and machines of all kinds. An environment is not just ‘out there in the world’ to be perceived and experienced ‘as it is’, but rather constitutes, with reference to Hegel, a *spielraum* or ‘room to maneuver’ (Masciotra et al., p. 4). The inextricable links between our networks of virtual actions (NVA) and the *spielraums* (SR) we bring forth also comprise a unique rapport that is subject to change throughout our lives.

### **Enaction in language learning**

To illustrate enaction in the area of language acquisition and learning, we need only contrast the dramatically different ways we function or do not function linguistically depending on where we find ourselves in the world. In our homelands, we operate on the basis of magnificently refined holds (not unlike in rock-climbing) that we enact continually as the result of the rich transactions between our internal linguistic possibilities (our NVA) and the properties of the sound environment that we perceive and participate ‘through’ (the SR as we bring it forth). But how different all of this is when we are in a foreign country and do not speak the language! Given the absence of any usable linguistic resources within and a sound environment that can-

not yet be rendered a field that affords linguistic interaction, no holds can be enacted. The only way the situation can be improved is to undertake to transform it into a more intelligible *spielraum* by engaging personal resources and enacting given possibilities that are part of one's NVA. Memory in this regard plays an important role in language learning, for without the domain-related knowledge it supplies, we simply lack the critical means of establishing meaningful linguistic holds on the environment, and without such holds, there can be little if any sustained skills development.

### **Emphasis on memory**

As Bilbrough (2011) states, '[m]emory underpins every aspect of successful language learning. It is the glue that binds us to the world of language around us and within us' (p. 1). The construction, via memorization, of the holds that connect our students to their linguistic contexts both from within and without is central to our task as teachers. We can focus on this 'glue that binds' not only by linking language with students' previous knowledge and experience so that it becomes more memorable, but also by emphasizing the importance of reactivation and rehearsal and by helping students develop useful techniques and strategies for committing texts to memory.

One effective memorization activity cited by Bilbrough (2011) is based on Earl Stevick's (1980) 'Islamabad technique' where the teacher and students work together to generate a text about a topic the class is interested in (e.g. a place or a popular band). Once the topic is introduced, a volunteer from the class is asked to say something about it. The teacher uses what the student says to start building the text. Depending on the group's level, what was said could be either in the mother tongue, which the teacher translates, or in the target language, which the teacher may need or choose to reformulate to provide a more accurate, more sophisticated model. The student's idea, now well-expressed in the L2, is drilled about the room and *one* keyword goes on

the board to serve as a memory trigger for the whole sentence. This procedure – elicitation, translation/reformulation, drill, keyword on board – is repeated nine times to produce a text of ten sentences (represented by just ten words). As the students are trying to retain more and more content and language, it is important to keep reviewing everything by pointing at each word and asking students to recall the sentence it represents. Once the text is complete, students are asked to write down all of the sentences as far as they can remember them and then to compare their sentences with each other's and improve them where necessary. After a student writes all ten sentences on the board, the activity can be rounded off by having the group work together to rewrite everything so that the sentences are linked to form a coherent text, which can also be committed to memory.

Tasks and activities that strengthen memory skills foster the growth of healthy cognitive and motivational resources that students need to cope with the challenges of language learning. Students not only leave lessons with a powerful feeling of knowing something from within themselves, but come to trust their own abilities and develop stronger beliefs in their potential to learn. Such beliefs are an important dimension of the endogenous processes that, from an enactive perspective, are at the heart of effective learning.

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# Algerian teachers' and learners' beliefs about learner autonomy

## Ouacila Ait Eljoudi

### Introduction

Language learning beliefs are central to language learning and teaching and have been an area of interest since the mid-1980s. A large amount of research has been done in this field (e.g. Borg & Al Busaidi, 2012). Rilly (1996, cited in White, 2008) states that “if there is a misfit between what learners believe and the beliefs embedded in the instructional structure in which they are enrolled, there is bound to be some degree of friction or dysfunction” (p. 123). In other words, teachers should attempt to uncover and understand their learners' beliefs. This study aims to compare beliefs about learner autonomy with teaching practices.

Little (2007) defines learner autonomy as ‘the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her/his learners' autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning’ (p. 18). In this study, learner autonomy is defined as the cooperation between students and teachers in order to achieve the ultimate learning goal. Potential mismatches between learner and teacher expectations in an Algerian context may also be relevant to other ELT contexts.

### The context of the study

This study took place in Algeria at Abderahmane Mira Bejaia University. Questionnaires (provided upon request) were used to obtain information about learner beliefs related to autonomy

and actual behavior from 336 third year Bachelor's degree students enrolled in supplementary English classes (242 girls and 94 boys), and ten teachers from the Department of English.

### Results and discussion

The results of the survey indicate that learner autonomy is not put into practice even if it is considered highly desirable by both teachers and learners. For example, responses to an item on the learner questionnaire (see Figure 1) show that 66% of learners consider teachers' input as definitive and do not do any independent study.

3. When you receive input from teachers, do you...?

a. Try to do extra research to find out more about the topic.  
b. Restructure the teacher input as knowledge to reproduce in exams.

Please explain your choices. ....

Figure 1. Question 2.3 on the learner questionnaire

However, responses in the teacher questionnaire (see Figure 2) indicate that 60% of teachers would encourage self-dependent learning.

6. Do you want your learners to depend on their own abilities while learning?

a. Yes  
b. No

If yes, please say why.....

Figure 2. Question 2.6 on the teacher questionnaire

There also seems to be a mismatch between teachers' and learners' stated beliefs about learner autonomy and what they actually do. For instance, teachers were asked to choose from the following options to best describe the teacher's role:

- a) an imparter of knowledge
- b) a guide and controller
- c) a facilitator

The majority (70%) of teachers consider themselves to be 'facilitators'. Conversely, 70% of learners indicate that they rely on the teacher to solve their learning problems, indicating that while teachers perceive themselves as facilitators and learners believe they are active participants, this is not reflected in practice. Nevertheless, both learners and teachers regard learner autonomy highly and consider it a desirable attribute. These findings are consistent with studies in other contexts, e.g. Yoshiyuki (2011, cited in Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 7) compared English language teachers' (positive) theoretical views about the value of learner autonomy with their (less positive) reported classroom practices and found a substantial gap between the two.

Concerning their understanding of learner autonomy, both groups stated that this is a matter of collaboration between teachers and learners, but when it comes to their current classroom practices, the learners tend to prefer doing tasks alone and at their own pace. Regarding teachers' and learners' attitudes towards learner involvement in the choice of classroom activities, both groups were very enthusiastic about the importance of self-reliance but when asked about their current practices they revealed that this was not the norm. Thus, our results are in line with those of Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012, p. 15) study, in which the teachers were more positive about the desirability of the students' involvement than they were about its feasibility (objectives, assessment, and materials).

As for teachers' and learners' perceptions of their own roles, both groups demonstrate very positive attitudes. The teachers tend to perceive their own roles as facilitators, and the learners as those who take the initiative without being asked to do so. However, once again stated beliefs and reality clash. This is most probably due to the fact that traditionally the role of the learner is less active and the teacher's role is one of authority.

The most prominent observations include: a) learners' expectations of learning the target language via teacher-centered instruction; b) the lack of intrinsic motivation to learn independently; and c) the institutional constraints on the improvement of learner autonomy (the means). Our results coincide with Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012, p. 20), who highlighted a range of factors related to learners, the institution, types of instruction, and knowledge delivery which limited the extent to which they felt they were able to promote learner autonomy.

### **Implications of the study**

Our research findings suggest that there is a mismatch between teachers' and learners' beliefs about learner autonomy and their actual practices. In order to promote autonomy, the creation of a safe environment which can promote the learners' involvement is essential. Some suggestions for achieving this might include the following:

- Integrating cooperative learning into classroom practice (see Cohen, Brody, & Sapon-Shevi, 2004, and Berbar, this volume, ch. 12) can be a very effective tool that encourages the development of learner autonomy. Cooperative learning encourages greater learner-centeredness and learner direction in the classroom (Crandall, 1999, p. 238) and is beneficial for both teachers' and learners' autonomy, which are interrelated.
- Self-assessment (see Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012) is highly recommended for the promotion of learner autonomy.

Self-assessment is said to benefit not only teachers and learners but also instruction as a whole (see Kadri, this volume, ch. 13); learners develop a sense of self-reliance as they monitor their own progress, and teachers are supported and share their rationale and tasks with learners. Thus, instruction is more highly valued.

- Strategy training may further contribute to learner autonomy. According to Rukthong (2008, cited in Rungwaraphong, 2012, p. 174), what prevents learners from learning autonomously is their limited knowledge of strategies. Guiding students through techniques for learning shows that learning is process-oriented, not product-oriented, and the classroom becomes a place where learners are given incentives to promote lifelong-learning skills (Rungwaraphong, 2012, p. 175).
- Tailoring the use of the coursebook, by providing learners with a choice of what to cover depending on their needs, can also help to contribute to teacher autonomy. In other words, the Ministry of Education could allow teachers the flexibility to supplement the coursebook with other tasks and materials more relevant to learners' needs and preferences.

## **Conclusion**

The gap between what teachers and learners believe regarding learner autonomy and their classroom practices may be related to limits on the promotion of learner autonomy, e.g. instructional constraints (materials), time pressure, class size, and learners' motivation to adapt to the ways of teaching and learning, as well as students' habits of reliance on teachers acquired during previous learning experiences. Desirability and positive beliefs about learner autonomy are not enough to ensure its implementation and practice. For this reason, I would propose integrating teacher and learner autonomy training. To conclude, there is no

good or bad learner, but there is a strategic autonomous learner and non-strategic, non-autonomous learner.

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# Metaphorical competence in Italian EFL students: An empirical study

Chiara Astrid Gebbia

## Introduction

Due to their creative nature, metaphors enrich languages. However, metaphorical expressions may differ from one language/culture to another. Developing in a certain cultural environment, languages acquire a specificity that is usually conveyed by figurative expressions. A major difficulty in learning metaphors is therefore their cultural dependence, leading to different expressions for the same concept.

When teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the cultural specificity of the language is as essential as the grammatical system. Although it is possible for students to observe cultural references through culture-bound idioms, it is difficult to find their equivalents in other languages and students lack confidence in using them correctly. Consequently, while their autonomous discourse is grammatically appropriate, it can sound unnatural and over-literal (Danesi, 1993, p. 490).

Due to their illusory arbitrariness, metaphorical expressions are commonly presented as exceptions to be learnt by heart. In fact, most idioms are motivated by conceptual metaphors (CMs). Far from being mere rhetorical devices, metaphors are a process of the mind by which we conceive abstract concepts through concrete, physical ones (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 454-455). For instance, the expression 'I cannot *digest* those *claims*' is motivated by the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD: the concrete concept (FOOD) – a physical

experience we are familiar with – is used to understand the abstract one (IDEAS).

As a systematic production of our brain, pervasive in everyday language and life, CMs are applied constantly and automatically. If metaphors are a means of cognition, we can presume that focusing on metaphors can help students to think in terms of the new culture.

### **Data collection**

As metaphors are ubiquitous and important, Danesi (1993, p. 489) points out that metaphorical competence, namely the ability to comprehend and produce metaphors in a language, should be included in the teaching/learning process. In order to test this claim, I examined the receptive metaphorical competence (comprehension only) of 230 Italian EFL learners at the University of Palermo. The sample consisted of 184 first-year undergraduate students and 46 second-year Master's students on Modern Languages degree courses.

Participants were given a questionnaire which included phrasal verbs, idioms and collocations based on conventional CMs that have a literal and a figurative meaning, the latter coming from the former. For instance, I used the expression *to regain ground* that has both a literal meaning (to advance toward a location) and a metaphorical one (to make progress, to become more successful). Being so deep-rooted in language and applied unconsciously, they are perceived as mere literal expressions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 454-455). The metaphors used primarily concerned the semantic field of the BODY which is the most frequent one in figurative reasoning, providing the physical basis for abstract concepts (e.g. to get on someone's *nerves*; to get out of *hand*; to catch someone *red-handed*; to get cold *feet*).

In order to test the ability of the participants to understand the metaphorical nature of the expressions, three possible answers were provided for each question: two were metaphori-



cal, one right **(a)** and one wrong **(b)**, and one was a literal paraphrase of the expression given **(c)** (cf. Danesi, 1993, p. 495). The latter may be triggered if the students translate the expression into their native tongue, Italian. To understand how conventional metaphors may mislead the participants, let us have a look at this example:

*'After the last game, the Indian team seems determined to regain ground'* means that:

- a) The Indian team wants *to become more successful than the other teams it is competing with*.
- b) The Indian team wants to be prepared for other matches.
- c) The Indian team is determined to go faster and pass the other team.

If the students do not understand the metaphorical nature of *to regain ground*, they may interpret it as a literal expression **(c)**. Indeed, the context of a football game may suggest the idea of advancing or moving toward a location. In order to disguise the fact that the literal alternative was always wrong, respondents were asked to answer items concerning basic lexical elements (*to give lectures; to lead to*), as in the following example involving the false friend *unlikely*:

*'It's unlikely that the thieves will be caught'* means that:

- a) The fact that the thieves will be caught is scarcely possible.
- b) People don't like the fact that the thieves will be caught.
- c) The fact that the thieves will be caught is highly probable.

## Results and discussion

Results suggest that, although students were able to understand the metaphorical nature of the expressions, only a minority of the sample possessed an adequate metaphorical competence:<sup>1</sup> 35.8% of the undergraduate students and 39.1% of the Master's students (Table 1). Surprisingly, the results of the two test groups were analogous, suggesting that they did not have the opportunity to access the metaphorical structure of the TL during their studies.

This lack of awareness of metaphorical reasoning shows that whilst native speakers possess an innate metaphorical competence, EFL learners do not naturally achieve it. Therefore, it should be developed through a specific syllabus consisting of noticing activities that focus on frequent idioms that have a metaphorical motivation, e.g. those relying on concepts like BODY, FOOD, ANIMALS, MONEY, and so on (Pedrazzini, 2016, pp. 113-121).

**Table 1.** Students with an adequate metaphorical competence

Degree course	Adequate metaphorical competence	
<b>Undergraduate students</b>	N.	66/184
	%	35.8%
<b>Master's students</b>	N.	18/46
	%	39.1%

Raising awareness of the metaphorical motivations that underlie many figurative expressions may facilitate recall and retention. More practically, vocabulary-learning activities can emphasise the concrete concepts used to express and think about an abstract domain (Andreou & Galantomos, 2008). For instance, we can arrange the idioms concerning ANGER according to

<sup>1</sup> I calculated the score of the metaphorical questions and the score of the non-metaphorical ones separately. The maximum score that a student could achieve for the first ones was 130, whilst the maximum score for the second ones was 20. The overall score achievable in a single test was 150. I therefore considered 70/130 as a sufficient metaphorical score.

the conceptual metaphor that motivates them: ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER, represented linguistically in expressions like *to hit the ceiling*, *smoke coming out of one's ears*, and so on. In such metaphors, the body is conceived as a container and the emotions as fluids held within. When the intensity of emotion increases, if the internal pressure is too high, the level of the fluid in the container rises, the fluid overflows or the container explodes (Kövecses, 2010, pp. 123-124).

Simply put, drawing the students' attention to non-arbitrary characteristics makes idioms more memorable. They may also benefit from noticing activities about the repetitive phonetic features of figurative expressions: alliteration (*it takes two to tango*, *to play a part*), assonance (*hit and miss*), or rhyme (*wear and tear*) (Pedrazzini, 2016, pp. 113-121).

### **Conclusion**

Speakers use languages appropriately from the grammatical point of view and creatively to express feelings, thoughts and culture-related reality. Solely linguistic and communicative competences do not ensure a high level of proficiency. Consequently, metaphorical competence should be enhanced by means of specific awareness-raising activities, as they are likely to facilitate the learning of Target Language (TL) figurative language. Since English is rich in idioms, mastering them constitutes an important aspect of the language. Although further research is required, it seems plausible that raising students' awareness of the CMs that motivate idioms may bring culture into EFL classrooms and sensitize learners to the way the TL conceptualizes reality.

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# Facilitating teacher research using IRIS: A digital repository of Instruments used for Research in Second Languages

**Sophie Thompson, Emma  
Marsden and Luke Plonsky**

## Introduction

The ELTRIA conference presented some of the wide and varied ongoing studies into language learning and teaching. Whilst there is a huge amount of research seeking to inform pedagogy, many teachers struggle to engage with it. Part of the reason for this is likely to be lack of time, with teachers experiencing increasing pressure and workloads. Another barrier is accessibility with much research being behind a paywall. These issues result in teachers finding it hard to access and use research findings, as many teachers simply do not have time to sift through journals to find relevant research and then create new sets of material based on it. The IRIS repository does both of these tasks, by holding research details and materials, to facilitate accessibility and applicability of research by teachers.

## What is IRIS?

IRIS ([www.iris-database.org](http://www.iris-database.org)) is a digital repository of data collection materials. IRIS aims to improve the openness and replicability of second-language research, thereby increasing opportunities for teacher-led research. IRIS now holds over 3,200 sets of materials, and has had over 18,700 downloads from students, teachers and researchers. The data collection instruments held here can be used or adapted to undertake research within different contexts and classrooms. They include communicative tasks, questionnaires, interview protocols, observation schedules, various teaching

tasks for intervention studies (e.g. Processing Instruction) and software scripts for experiments. All materials on IRIS have been used to collect data for peer-reviewed publications.

### **How can IRIS help teachers to engage in research?**

One of the principal goals of IRIS is to make research instruments more accessible, allowing teachers to conduct research in their own classrooms more easily. Teachers can look for materials using a wide range of search terms, enabling them to search for specific materials (e.g. questionnaire, picture description, listening tests, gap fill), research areas (e.g. motivation, error correction), languages (e.g. Spanish, Japanese), or participant characteristics (e.g. beginner, intermediate), among many other parameters. Teachers can search for tools relating to specific questions about the nature and effectiveness of ELT, for example: assessing learners' needs; effective feedback; motivating students; classroom interaction; students' willingness to communicate; eliciting specific aspects of language, such as pragmatics or the passive voice; designing and evaluating language teaching materials.

### **What are some areas we could research in our classrooms?**

Some suggested areas/questions which emerged from our talk at the ELTRIA conference were: Why are my students sometimes unwilling to communicate in class? How do my learners feel about learning English? Why are my learners studying English? What motivates them? Are the materials I use communicative enough? What kind of feedback should I give during tasks? How does using a more difficult task affect my learners' use of the target language? Group work or pair work: Which solves problems better?

Each language teacher and classroom is unique, therefore, the questions a particular teacher will have may differ from those of another teacher. The examples above outline some common themes raised by teachers but do not by any means cover the wide variety of areas a teacher may wish to investigate. IRIS is able to facilitate research into all of these questions and many more.

### **How can IRIS help us to answer some of the questions we have about our classrooms/learners?**

The materials on IRIS are free and downloadable. Any teacher can search on IRIS for materials relating to their area of interest, the language they teach, the first language of their students, the proficiency of their students, the skill they want to practise/investigate, etc. These instruments can then be used as they come, or adapted for specific contexts. During the demonstration at the ELTRIA conference, we looked at some of the common questions listed above and how IRIS could help to answer them. Here is a summarised example:

*Why are my students sometimes unwilling to communicate in class?*  
For this question we searched for ‘willingness to communicate’ in IRIS and after searching through the hits found material from Cao and Philp (2006). The instrument they used is an interview/self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire could be used as part of a diagnostic session at the start of a course or as part of an ongoing reflection process throughout a course. The questionnaire asks students to assign a percentage of time that they would like to spend doing a particular activity in another language (English in the case of this study). This questionnaire could be used as it is, or adapted by the teacher, or adapted by the students so that they can choose activities of particular relevance to them. This could be done as a one-off activity, or across a course or even across classes and teachers.

### **Possible applications**

Some of the following areas for discussion were raised during our presentation at the ELTRIA conference.

#### *Application of IRIS for teacher training*

The use of IRIS for continuing professional development and training was discussed. It was great to see that a number of trainers in the audience could see that IRIS would facilitate training and planned to use it in their courses. The Open Accessible Summa-

ries In Language Studies (OASIS, [www.oasis-database.org](http://www.oasis-database.org)) initiative will provide summaries of journal articles linked to IRIS materials to allow teachers to quickly find out the background to a piece of research and download its material. By providing access to the material as well as the details of the research, teachers are able to see how research was done and then apply it to their own contexts. This will allow teachers to engage in education research quickly and efficiently. OASIS will be international, covering a wide range of languages and research questions.

### *Use of IRIS in higher education (HE)*

For those educators working in HE, there are applications for IRIS in research methods and library skills training. Since presenting at the ELTRIA conference, we have developed three short demo videos introducing IRIS and demonstrating how to search for materials and how to upload materials. These are easily found on our website. The new demo videos allow tutors to demonstrate IRIS to students without having to already be very familiar with the site. Students can use IRIS to search for studies by research material type, to find materials they can adapt, and to find data they can practise analysing.

The discussion about how IRIS could be used with HE student audiences raised concerns about data sharing. Would the availability of data on IRIS result in cheating/fabrication of data? The data on IRIS could be used for research methods training in the same way as most course books and statistics classes use existing data. The data available online in statistics guides and websites also have the same risks. However, it is most likely that the benefits outweigh the risks. A wide variety of data allows for a wider variety of statistics practice during training. Across research in general, data sharing also facilitates meta-analysis, further comparisons, replications, and increases transparency and potentially research rigour as a result.

You can follow IRIS on Facebook for updates on new materials and for news on open science: <https://www.facebook.com/irisdatabase/>



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# **Section 3** **Practice** **into research**

Exploring practical issues and questions  
in the classroom

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# Demotivation and dropout: Why do learners 'give up' on English?

**Matthew Evans**

## Introduction

Language learning can be a frustrating experience. Conjugations, idioms, genders; the path to communicative competence is, in any language, a challenging and at times unrewarding slog. At what point do learners decide that it simply is not worth it? Demotivation and dropout are serious problems, both for language schools and their students. Of course, learners sometimes reach a level that they are content to have reached, and make an informed and rational decision not to continue studying. As teachers we should not begrudge them this choice. On other occasions, however, the parting between a learner and their institution is less than amicable, and can bring with it notions of failure: the learner feels that they have failed their teacher, or that their teacher has failed them. Often, this initial decision to drop out of a course can be manifested as a lasting – and frequently unwarranted – distaste for the language itself. In an attempt to shed some light on this issue and to generate discussion on how teachers can deal with the problem of demotivation, I invited learners to share their thoughts on the language-learning process.

## Results and discussion

As part of a larger project, ex-learners of English from a large university language school in Catalonia completed an online questionnaire on motivation; based on profiles extracted from

this questionnaire, six of those who had dropped out were selected to take part in a 30-minute interview. Apart from asking why they had decided to stop learning English, I used an interview protocol based on ideas discussed in Ushioda (1996) and Busse and Walter (2013) to capture their motivational state towards the end of the course, as well as their views on the most powerful demotives in- and outside the classroom.

Those interviewed were from a group that had expressed no desire to return to English study in future. It is curious, then, that of the six ex-students interviewed, five mentioned a lack of time as the main reason behind their decision not to re-enrol. Participants commonly noted that they were too busy to come to class, had other priorities, no time to dedicate to self-study, or some combination of the three. Assuming that most of us do not keep one schedule for our entire adult lives, a lack of time would seem a strange impetus to dissuade a student from ever studying again. In fact, this is often a default answer used by interviewees to avoid delving any further into the true cause. When told as much, the same five participants cited a range of other reasons, chief among which were in-class demotives:

*The dynamic of the class was terrible. Every day it was the same thing, long monologues from the teacher and practice exercises. Nothing ever changed.* (Interviewee C, 23 years old, CEFR B2)

*I don't know why we had so many tests. It's really demotivating if you're not very bright.* (Interviewee B, 54 years old, CEFR A2)

Among the other demotives mentioned were classmates' behaviour, a strong focus on passing an exam (official or the school's own), and the prevalence in class of what students described as 'waste of time' activities. Interestingly, four participants also noted the inconvenient timetabling of classes. Interviewee B states:

*By the time you arrive home from the school it's 10 [p.m.], and you hardly have a chance to relax. It's a lot more appealing to just not go. (Interviewee B, 54 years old, CEFR A2)*

Similar to the 'lack of time' initially cited by participants, this too is a curious finding in that schedules do not change throughout the year; when students begin the course in September with a presumably high level of motivation, they do so in the knowledge that the class timetable will be static. What can we learn from these confusing responses? Perhaps that, instead of lack of time/other commitments being the reason students drop out of language courses, they are merely indicators of the process of demotivation at work: As the experience of learning a language becomes less rewarding, it will naturally lose priority over other commitments in the student's life. That is not to say that it is not important – the wary teacher will recognise these signals as such and hopefully act on them, perhaps by implementing a study-buddy system, as recommended by Jung (2011), or by engaging students in 'noticing exercises' to demonstrate progress and to set goals (Richards, 2008). Similarly, teachers could also do well to be sensitive to demotivating incidents in the classroom. One student recalled with clarity an experience two years previous, which they noted as the point at which they began to feel demotivated:

*There was a grammar point we had to learn, it was about the passive, and we had a test... There were some of us who had no idea, but the class was moving too fast. We did the test even though we knew we'd fail; it was terrible. (Interviewee F, 25 years old, CEFR B1)*

Indeed, four out of the six interviewees recalled specific instances like the one above, even without prompting. It seems that such experiences can have a lasting effect on the student's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982): learners' beliefs about their abilities to

cope with the proposed task, in this case language learning. Low self-efficacy may act as the trigger that allows other demotives such as ‘stagnation’ and ‘teaching methods’ to have more of an effect than they otherwise would.

### Conclusion

What can we as teachers do in the face of such a vicious cycle of demotivation? First, we can strive to be more mindful of our students’ needs and mental states, perhaps moving beyond the traditional start-of-year needs analysis towards a more continuous pattern of reflection and evaluation. Second, we may need to take a more active role in showing our students their progress or explaining our rationale so that they do not necessarily perceive activities as a ‘waste of time’. Finally, we must acknowledge that, interesting though the comments from these participants are, they are not *our* learners. Research in our own classroom, with our own learners, is surely the most reliable way to know what really demotivates them, and what we can do to help them.

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# The use of cooperative learning in EFL classrooms

**Katia Berbar**

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, research on cooperative learning in higher educational settings has become very popular. Numerous studies have shown the gargantuan potential of this instructional method for both teachers and students. Yet, many teachers are reluctant to incorporate this approach into their teaching. Successful application requires teachers' understanding of cooperative learning features and ways to assess students' involvement. This chapter sets out to guide novice cooperative learning practitioners. It outlines the characteristics of cooperative learning, and provides some suggestions regarding its implementation in EFL classrooms.

## **Definition of cooperative learning**

Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991), pioneers in cooperative learning research, define this pedagogical practice as 'the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning' (p. 12). Unlike traditional learning groups, students who work cooperatively exchange information, help and encourage each other to learn, and join efforts in order to achieve identical learning outcomes that are advantageous to all group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 68).

Not all forms of peer learning involve cooperative efforts. To be truly cooperative, groups require the presence of five indis-

pensable elements: (1) positive interdependence; (2) face-to-face promotive interaction; (3) individual accountability; (4) social skills; and (5) group processing (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 16).

#### *Positive interdependence*

In truly cooperative learning contexts, students must ‘believe that they sink or swim together’ (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 16). That is, the success of a cooperative group depends upon the successful contribution of each member. This noteworthy element of cooperation, known as positive interdependence, can be created by dividing the task into pieces or assigning roles to group members (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 17). The cooperative strategy *Jigsaw II*, designed to teach reading, is a fine example of positive interdependence. Each group member receives a different piece of information to read. Students with the same topic meet to exchange information, then return to their original groups to share their findings. After group instruction, students take individual tests. Finally, team scores are computed based on individual test performance.

#### *Face-to-face promotive interaction*

Unlike pseudo groups where students work individually and contribute only at the end of the assignment, cooperative groups provide team members with opportunities to share ideas, promote each other’s learning, and offer constructive feedback. This facet of cooperative learning, referred to as face-to-face promotive interaction, helps team members build group relationships (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 30).

#### *Individual accountability*

To ensure the equal participation of all group members, teachers should structure individual accountability. This aspect of cooperation refers to the assessment of individual contributions to the accomplishment of the group’s goals (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 19). Individual accountability can be built in by choosing one



student randomly and questioning him/her on the material the group has studied (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 20). The cooperative activity *Numbered Heads Together™*, developed by Kagan, promotes individual accountability. The teacher forms groups of four members, numbers students from 1 to 4, and asks a question. Group members confer to ensure that everyone knows the answer. The teacher selects a number at random and students with that number are expected to answer.

### *Social skills*

Successful cooperation necessitates the use of social skills. Such skills include leadership, making decisions, building trust, communication, and resolving conflicts. Not all students are born with the capacity to work in cooperation; therefore, teachers should explain the importance and the effective use of social skills (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 21). In order to teach active listening, for instance, teachers can incorporate *Think-Pair-Share*. This cooperative structure requires students to reflect individually on a question, pair up with a partner to exchange ideas, and share the answers with the class.

### *Group processing*

At the end of a cooperative activity, teachers should allow time for group processing. Students need to identify the group's strengths and weaknesses, and look for ways to improve future performances (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 22). This can be achieved by giving each team a group processing form (see Appendix), or having team members keep a joint cooperative learning diary where they record their behaviors and evaluate the quality of the group's work (Árnadóttir, 2014, p. 18).

## **Guidelines for cooperative learning implementation**

Implementing cooperative learning in EFL classrooms is a challenging task. Thus, the following guidelines intend to help teachers who want to inject this approach into their teaching.

*Group size*

In order to structure individual accountability, group size ought to be small (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 20). Smaller group size maximizes participation, reduces conflicts, and encourages communication and interaction among members. The optimal group size for cooperative learning is four members (Macpherson, 2000-2007, p. 6). This size provides sufficient diversity of ideas and opportunities to work in pairs.

*Group formation*

Two questions arise during cooperative learning integration: 1) Should the groups be homogeneous or heterogeneous? 2) Who should form the groups? To answer the first question, Johnson et al. (1991) encourage teachers to use heterogeneous mixed-ability grouping (p. 60). This type of grouping can improve the outcomes of all group members since it allows low-achievers to learn from their peers, and provides high-achievers with opportunities to rehearse the material being studied.

As for the second question, observations suggest that during cooperative efforts students tend to select the teams. According to Johnson et al. (1991), however, student-selected groups are not very successful due to their homogeneous nature. To solve the problem, the authors recommend teachers to organize the teams using random grouping (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 61). One effective technique consists of assigning numbers (e.g. 1-4) to students and grouping them according to their numbers (Ramírez Salas, 2005, p. 8). All students with number 2, for instance, are grouped together.

*Assessment of cooperative efforts*

To guarantee individual accountability and encourage participation, Johnson et al. (1991) advise teachers to assess both group work and individual efforts. One major obstacle teachers face while implementing cooperative learning is the assessment of individual participation. To achieve individual fair assessment,

the authors counsel teachers to test students individually, use random oral questioning, or walk around the class, observe the groups working, and record individual participation (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 20). Teachers can also incorporate peer assessment. Group members are in the best position to assess their teammates' contributions because they know exactly who participated and who did not.

### Conclusion

Unlike traditional instruction, cooperative learning promotes interaction, enhances academic achievement, and fosters students' responsibility. Teachers are, therefore, encouraged to integrate this instructional practice in EFL classrooms. For cooperative learning to be effective, its basic components should be properly implemented. Thus, it is important to train EFL teachers to teach through cooperative learning.

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**Appendix**

*Group processing form*

<b>Reflect on the way your team cooperated today.</b>	<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>
We took turns to share ideas.		
We listened attentively and valued all the ideas.		
We involved everyone and divided the task equitably.		
We encouraged each other to complete the task.		
We used quiet voices while completing the task.		
We completed the task on time.		
We did best at .....		
Next time, we could improve at .....		

# **Student self-assessment vs teacher assessment: The issue of accuracy in EFL classrooms**

**Nawal Kadri**

## **Introduction**

Self-assessment is often described in terms of the active participatory role of students and the formative nature of this process. It is defined as an ongoing process through which students engage in constant review and identification of their own strengths and weaknesses with a view to improving learning (Gardner, 2000; Pierce, 1999). This formative process is highly recommended because it represents a powerful metacognitive stimulus that raises awareness of current and target situations; it also develops critical thinking skills as students reflect on their progress. This builds a sense of ownership and responsibility in students as they manage their learning by themselves. Teachers are also affected by students' involvement and collaboration. As an innovative tool for teaching, self-assessment reinforces instruction by stimulating discussion through which teachers can diagnose needs and gaps in students' knowledge.

We should highlight here that self-assessment is only beneficial when implemented under appropriate conditions (Goodrich, 1996, cited in Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013, p. 564). The first step towards the realisation of self-assessment is raising awareness of the value of this formative process; both students and teachers need to understand the importance of reviewing one's work to determine progress. Another condition is access to assessment criteria. Students should have a clear grasp of the standards that condition their performance. Otherwise, they may have difficul-

ties identifying gaps in their abilities. As self-assessment is an ongoing process, assessment skills cannot all be learnt at once, they need scaffolding. Consequently, this should be an overt part of instruction. Last but not least, during the self-assessment process, students should be guided and provided with feedback. They need to judge the significance of their own judgments and use that feedback to make subsequent improvement.

### **The study**

Various studies have been undertaken to consider the validity and reliability of students' self-assessment in EFL classrooms. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the Algerian context, little if no research has been done to investigate this issue. This chapter seeks to address the following question: 'To what extent do students' self-grading and teacher's grading correspond?' It specifically aims to examine the degree of accuracy of students' self-appraisal and identify possible explanations for any discrepancy between students' judgments and those of the teacher.

The present investigation was carried out in Algeria. Twenty-six EFL students (2 males and 24 females) from the University of Bejaia participated in the study. To answer the research question, assessments students made of their written work were compared against those generated by the teacher across two different assignments (to write a paragraph, then an essay) in an EFL writing course. At the end of each assignment, students were invited to self-assess their work to determine their achievement. The assessments were facilitated by a criterion-based assessment grid as shown in Figure 1.

The criteria that made up the assessment grid represent the aspects of academic writing that form a good written composition (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Students used the assessment grid to grade their performance. Their work was subsequently marked by their teacher (the researcher) using the same assessment grid to allow comparison between the grades obtained at the end of each assignment. In addition to the teacher's scores, students received constructive feedback on each performance.

The teacher highlighted students' errors and made comments on the four areas of assessment included in the assessment grid.

Full Name:		Text:		Date:		
Assessment Criteria		Assessment Scale				
		Excellent 2	Good 1.5	Fair 1	Poor 0.5	Missing 0
<b>Layout</b>	Indentation					
<b>Organisation</b>	Number of paragraphs					
	Structure					
<b>Content</b>	Unity					
	Development					
	Coherence					
	Originality & Creativity					
<b>Language</b>	Vocabulary					
	Grammar					
	Mechanics					

**Figure 1.** Assessment grid for EFL writing

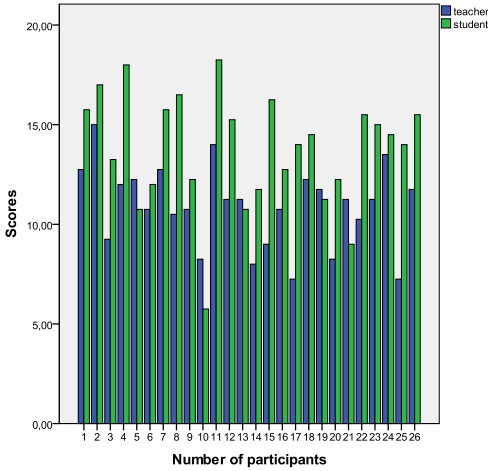
In order to understand self-assessment from the students' perspective, participants were encouraged to write a reflective journal at the end of each writing assignment, where they reflected on the assessment experience and expressed their attitudes and feelings towards the process using English.

## Results

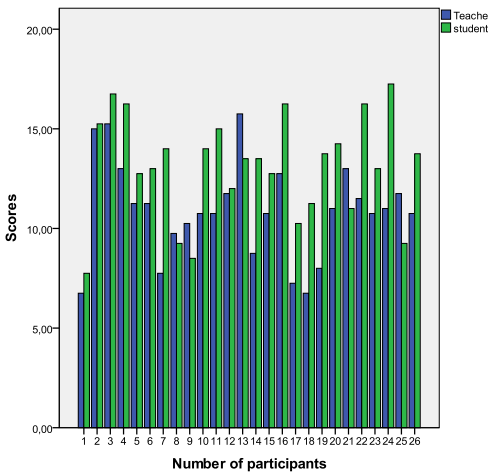
Using statistical processing software (SPSS), students' individual scores for each assignment were compared with those generated by their teacher. The overall means for both students' scores and teacher's grades were then computed to test their significance. The results are displayed below.

Figure 2 (assignment 1) shows that students' grades seem to be higher than those assigned by the teacher. Students' scores vary between 5.75 and 18.25 ( $M=13.75$ ), whereas the teacher's

grades range between 7.25 and 15 (M=10.89). Figure 3 (assignment 2) demonstrates almost similar results. Student-generated scores are again higher than the teacher’s grades. Students’ scores vary between 7.75 and 17.25 (M=13.10), whereas teacher-generated grades range between 6.76 and 15.75 (M=10.80).



**Figure 2.** Student vs teacher assessments (assignment 1)



**Figure 3.** Student vs teacher assessments (assignment 2)



## Discussion

The statistics displayed in Figures 2 and 3 show great disagreement between the scores generated by the students and their teacher for the two assignments. The findings suggest that students are unable to accurately assess the quality of their work, as most of them tended to overestimate their performance.

Analysis of the students' reflective journals helped with further understanding and interpreting students' tendency to inflate their scores and with the identification of potential reasons. It was clear from students' descriptions of their learning experience that this was the first time they had been encouraged to assess their work by themselves, which was new and strange for them. As these learners had never been instructed or trained in the skills required to accurately judge their performance, this may be one of the major reasons for students' overestimation of the quality of their work. A further difficulty was the learners' low proficiency level and lack of knowledge of writing conventions, which inevitably hindered them from identifying their mistakes. Moreover, student expectations are a factor that explains the lack of effort made to understand the assessment process: assessment is considered to be solely the teacher's responsibility. It is worth noting that established pedagogical norms at the University of Bejaia do not encourage the development of self-assessment as writing is still taught and assessed in a traditional way. The syllabus and teaching methods represent one of the major challenges for the successful implementation of self-assessment.

## Conclusion

Drawing on these results, this chapter highlights the need to integrate self-assessment into EFL classroom practices. Self-assessment can be implemented in EFL writing classrooms by:

- Reconsidering the syllabus of EFL writing
- Integrating self-assessment into EFL writing instruction

- Raising both teachers' and students' awareness of the importance of engaging students in the process of assessment
- Training and providing support in developing the skills necessary for accurate self-assessment
- Adopting models of self-assessment suggested in the literature
- Providing students with constructive feedback
- Using reflective journals as a tool to identify students' attitudes, needs and expectations

This chapter shows how students demonstrated poor accuracy in their self-assessments even after receiving feedback. Nevertheless, the study was limited by sample size and restricted time period, so further research is necessary to provide more generalizable results.

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# **An ethnographic study of the linguistic practices of newly arrived migrant children in a Cypriot primary school**

**Alexandra Georgiou**

## **Introduction**

Over the last four years, Cyprus has experienced a new wave of migration. This tendency is closely associated with conflicts in the Middle East, poverty and persecution. Newly arrived migrant (NAM) children are often marginalized and struggle to learn the new language not only because of linguistic differences but also because of the difficulties of their life journeys. Drawing on concepts from the sociocultural theory of learning (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1987), this chapter presents and discusses some of the good practices that children and their teachers developed so as to learn the new language (Greek) and become members of the school community. Even though it does not deal with English, this chapter discusses an increasingly common and extremely important phenomenon: the language learning and teaching of newly-arrived children with a different home language from that of their host country.

## **Taking a sociocultural approach to language learning**

According to SCT, ‘all human-made objects are artifacts’ (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2010, p.2). Vygotsky (1978) referred to the social element of learning, which occurs through interaction and, specifically, when assistance is given. In a learning group, every child can offer his/her expertise and help construct each other’s knowledge. Therefore considering language not only as a bounded system but also as a tool that has a social purpose

provides a useful framework to approach language learning. The social purpose of language is not only the achievement of communication but also the understanding of its linguistic constructions (Ochs, 1996), which eventually will lead to language awareness. This chapter interprets language learning as a socially constructed activity as it focuses on children working collaboratively.

### **Methodology**

My study is located within the qualitative approach as it allows me to interpret my participants' lived experiences and practices in a classroom setting (Hammersley, 1990). The research tools used to collect data were: participant observations, field notes, interviews (with majority-minority children, two teachers, one head teacher, three asylum centre administrators and two school translators), classroom recordings, and collection of artifacts (samples of student work, pictures of them interacting with each other or producing materials, school records, and textbooks).

### **Context**

The study focuses on two classes (Year 5 and Year 6, totalling 30 children aged 10-11,) including seven NAM children. The school was located on the outskirts of a Cypriot town where most of the children were monolingual in Greek. Due to this fact, the teachers reported behavioural problems between the Greek-Cypriot children (GC) and NAM children and the need to create appropriate conditions to develop trust and understanding among the children. This represented a sacrifice of part of their teaching hours to allocate periods during which the NAM children had the opportunity to share their life experiences and discuss with their classmates what brought them to Cyprus.

At the moment, the NAM children reside at the Asylum Reception Centre, which is near the school where the research was conducted. Some of them live with one parent as the other may not be alive or is in another country. Table 1 summarises the chil-

dren's linguistic and cultural characteristics and some family information.

**Table 1.** NAM children: Biographical data of NAM as Greek language learners

Name	Years in Cypriot school	Education in home country	Country - home language	School year	Age	Religion	Language(s) used with peers and teachers
Ayuf	1 year, 5 months	yes	Somalia - Arabic	5	10	Muslim	Greek, Cypriot, Arabic, English
Mahan	1 year, 5 months	no	Yemen - Arabic	5	10	Muslim	Greek, Cypriot, Arabic, English
Mahmut	4 months	yes	Iran - Farsi	5	10	Muslim & Christian	Greek, Cypriot, Farsi, English, Arabic
Nama	1 year, 5 months	yes	Somalia - Arabic	6	11	Muslim	Greek, Cypriot, Arabic, English
Maya	4 months	interrupted	Iraq - Arabic	6	12	Muslim	Greek, Cypriot, Arabic, English
Taraf	4 months	yes	Syria - Arabic	6	11	Christian	Greek, Cypriot, Arabic, English
Amin	4 years	interrupted	Egypt - Arabic	6	12	Christian	Greek, Cypriot, Arabic, English

A thematic analysis of the data suggested some good practices that I believe to be important in terms of language learning, presented in the following section.

## Results

### *Children's practices*

#### 1. Codeswitching

The first good practice was codeswitching, which is the use of more than one language in order to communicate. Based on my audio recordings and field notes, the NAM children were switching from Arabic to Greek or vice versa, whenever they felt that one linguistic code was insufficient to communicate their meaning. In an audio recording, Taraf and Maya switched between Arabic and Greek to solve a math task and to understand

the meaning of a word (equals-ίσον). The alternation between the two languages was useful for the development of their vocabulary.

## 2. Assistance from more expert others

Another good practice that seemed to support children's language learning was the fact that the more knowledgeable children – in this case the GC children – were assisting NAM children by guiding them in their tasks or explaining the language forms to them. In one entry in my field notes, I observed that the teacher gave the children their reading homework but Maya did not seem to understand what she had to read at home. Marianna (GC) realised this and circled the specific passage for Maya. She also explained the meaning of some Greek words to her by drawing pictures.

### *Teachers' practices*

#### 1. Making children's languages visible

The two teachers were very sensitive to valuing children's languages and trying to make them visible. One practice was allowing children to use their home languages during lessons and encouraging them to give answers in their own language when they could not express themselves in Greek. Another practice consisted of classroom displays representing the class's linguistic plurality. Children's work was illustrated in both Greek and Arabic and every sign was also presented in both languages.

#### 2. Valuing children's cultures

Teachers used children's traditional myths and stories translated into Greek in order to learn about these children's background but also to teach the target language (Greek). Furthermore, some of the children's mothers were invited to the school to cook with the children and share their cuisine. Learning the names of, for example, herbs, in both languages was an indicator that children were not only learning about a new culture but were also developing their linguistic awareness.

## Conclusion

Examining how a group of refugee children tries to make sense of a new language and participate in a new classroom community creates opportunities for further discussions on how the primary sector in one European country (Cyprus) is coping with this. This study should prove to be of particular importance when it comes to teaching implications for the language learning of marginalized groups of people. One such teaching implication is the incorporation of minority children's languages and cultures into the school curriculum. Allowing children to make their voices heard will also foster the learning of their target language as, according to Cummins (1981), children that are empowered by their school experiences succeed academically. Presenting some of the findings of this empirical research from a sociocultural point of view contributes to an understanding of how meaningful interactions and perhaps language learning take place under such specific conditions.

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# The facilitative role of reflective approaches to developing interactional competence in EFL contexts

**Seiko Harumi**

## **Introduction**

My ELTRIA presentation reported on the research findings from an action research project in a Japanese EFL context focussing on the use of classroom talk by Japanese EFL learners. While the issue of learner reticence in Asian EFL contexts has been widely discussed over the past few decades (King, 2013), effective practical pedagogical approaches to raising learners' awareness of interactional features of spoken discourse are under-investigated. The project focussed on ways Japanese EFL learners can increase their awareness of interactional features such as phonological and prosodic aspects of the L2 through a reflective approach (Goh & Burns, 2012) by participating in a 12-week speaking class.

## **Classroom talk and a learner-centred reflective approach**

Japanese EFL learners' passivity in oral interaction has frequently been observed and causes stem from multiple factors, such as linguistic, psychological and interactional problems (Harumi, 2011). In particular, learners' unwillingness to communicate and their lack of confidence in L2 speech have been highlighted (Yashima, 2002). Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical studies exploring ways to facilitate learners' active oral interaction through learner-centred approaches. Jenkins (2002) addresses this issue by asserting the importance of listening to learners' needs as expressed in their own words. In parallel, Goh and Burns (2012) specify channels of communication which are

often absent in speaking activities and claim that ‘learners are often not encouraged to self-regulate their learning by planning, monitoring and evaluating their own performances’ (p. 3). They also state that ‘There were also few opportunities for them to develop greater knowledge about themselves as second language speakers’ (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 3). As a possible approach to facilitate spoken interaction, this exploratory study aimed to create opportunities for learners to be more critically aware of L2 interactional features and responsible for their own study. Thus, learner-centred reflective approaches (Goh & Burns, 2012) were adopted, giving learners opportunities to interact with their own discourse through self-analysis of their recorded L2 speech.

### **The study**

The participants were 85 Japanese learners of English, 52 females and 33 males, enrolled on a tertiary oral communication class, whose proficiency level was equivalent to B1-B2 in the CEFR. This study was also designed to promote learner autonomy in the development of speaking skills and proposed a learner-centred approach to producing a syllabus for a full academic year. The study aimed to elicit learners’ perceptions of their own L2 speech and also to sensitise them to L2 interactional features. For this, ‘planning a unit of work using seven stages of the teaching-speaking cycle’ (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 64) was adopted as a main framework. The elements included in this speaking cycle were: (1) focus learners’ attention on speaking; (2) give input and guide planning; (3) conduct speaking tasks; (4) focus on language skills and strategies; (5) repeat speaking tasks; (6) direct learners’ reflection on learning; and (7) facilitate feedback on learning.

In order to include these elements, this study incorporated initial self-evaluation of learners’ own speech. The questionnaire asked learners to self-analyse their specific needs for improvement and what they felt they were good at in L2 speech after a three-hour introductory session on phonological and interactional elements in the L2. The key features introduced

were the overall sound system, along with British phonemic symbols, connected speech, intonation, rhythm and sentence stress, and frequently used key words that appear in the course book, *New Headway Pronunciation* (Bowler, Cunningham, Moor, & Parminter, 2002). This introductory session aimed to make learners understand the fundamental L2 interactional features and support their reflections on their own speech. After this initial stage, they were given a weekly task to prepare a one-minute talk on a broad common topic and then analyse their self-recorded speech, taking interactional features learnt in class into account. Next, they shared their prepared talks in a small weekly group session. The self-recorded audio data was submitted twice during the term, along with self-analysis sheets given to learners which had check points for three broad areas of L2 speech, based on the results of the initial self-assessments: sound level, prosodic features, and confidence in expressing ideas. The study consequently examined how the learners' speaking skills and interactional features learnt in class improved over the 12 weeks.

### **Findings**

Findings at the initial stage of this study suggested that students were more critically aware of their difficulties at the segmental level, specifically in the production of sounds such as /l/, /r/, /θ/, /ð/, /æ/, /ə/ and /w/ rather than in suprasegmental areas such as intonation and rhythm. Their responses also showed that they were aware of various aspects of L2 speech difficulties, including their L1-influenced use of vowel-stretches at word-endings, the use of linking words, pitch, and lack of confidence. This suggests that their specific observations have the potential to be more fully incorporated into actual practice, particularly in syllabus design and more focused classroom activities.

Over the 12 weeks, learners' focus and awareness of their L2 speech shifted from the level of sound to more prosodic features of speech such as flow and rhythm of talk, and in particular the use of pauses to improve fluency. They also identified speci-

fic sounds (/l/, /r/, /θ/, /ə/) which still demand further training in extended and spontaneous spoken interaction. Overall, learners' confidence levels in speech were raised and their analytical skills improved. The majority (82.5%) of students found this learning experience involving self-reflective approaches constructive. One particular student mentioned the positive experience of interacting with her own L2 discourse rather than just by exposure to descriptions of its use, and that raising awareness of phonological features helped her gain phonological and interactional knowledge. If only for a very short time, learners' continuous involvement in analysis of their own spoken discourse appears to have raised their awareness of their pronunciation and more prosodic aspects of L2 speech and also of the difficulty of mastering these prosodic features. This should therefore serve as an incentive for them to proceed to the subsequent steps of the speaking-cycle framework outlined above.

### **Pedagogical implications**

This project was valuable as action research since it provided good opportunities for learners, and also for the teacher, to see how much learners are aware of their own classroom talk as well as the kind of elements of spoken discourse which can be practiced both within and outside the classroom. Above all, learners' overall awareness of L2 spoken discourse and their speaking skills were partially improved. Although this implies that it is difficult for learners to attain competence in prosodic features over short periods of time, their awareness of the importance of these features in speaking was raised. In the ELTRIA talk, we shared some ideas about the existence of 'groupism' among Japanese EFL learners in which group dynamics within particular educational contexts can possibly affect their confidence, interactional style and degree of oral participation within a class. This cultural and contextual aspect needs to be carefully taken into account and further examined when individual students' reflections on their own speech are brought into the classroom,

along with ways they can put their reflections into use when interacting with their peers. Following the effects of long-term classroom practice within different contexts and research into gaining competence in prosodic features in spoken discourse would provide further insights.

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# **ADAPS: A resource for solving the challenge of locating, preparing, displaying, and reusing academic reading texts for learners**

**Ralph L. Rose**

## **Introduction**

Authentic texts have been argued to be necessary in academic reading skills development (cf. Gilmore, 2011). This poses several problems for teachers. Locating suitable or timely texts may be challenging. Once a suitable text is found, analyzing it with respect to established linguistic theory and preparing it for pedagogical presentation is time-consuming. Finally, once prepared, the texts may be unable to be shared widely because of licensing restrictions on the source texts and thus they cannot be easily reused.

This chapter describes a resource that is designed to address these issues. The resource depends on well-established research on vocabulary (Coxhead, 2000; West, 1953) and text structure (Wolf & Gibson, 2005). Furthermore, it is designed to take advantage of text highlighting, which benefits learners in numerous ways (Chun & Plass, 1997): It increases incidental learning of vocabulary, text comprehension, and engagement time with text.

## **How does ADAPS work?**

The resource is called ADAPS (Academic Document Annotation and Presentation Schema) and incorporates a schema for the annotation of various linguistic features of academic texts as well as the capability to customize the display of these features via highlighting of the relevant linguistic features. The schema is defined in XML – a widely-used markup language – for the document

definition and description. The display capability is dependent on a JavaScript library and stylesheets for interactive visual presentation of documents.

Selected academic reading texts are manually annotated using the schema to indicate the status of General Service List vocabulary (GSL: West, 1953) and Academic Word List vocabulary (AWL: Coxhead, 2000), technical terms and their associated in-text definitions, anaphoric relations, as well as logical connections (following the logical connector hierarchy defined in Wolf & Gibson, 2005). Once processed, the XML text for a given article might look as shown in Figure 1.

```

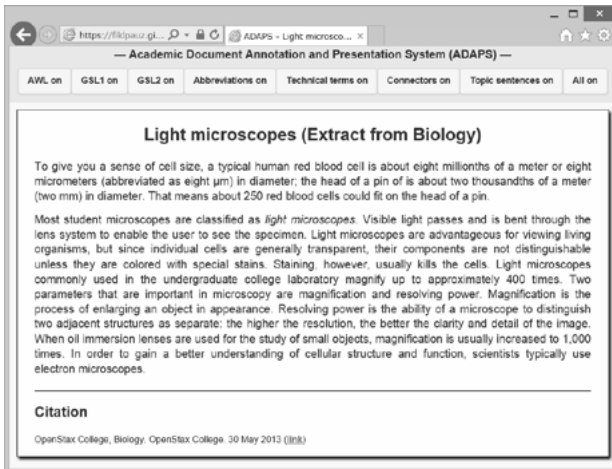
598 <sentence par-function="supporting" id="p08-s06">
599 <t id="p08-s06-t01">1</t>
600 <punc>.</punc>
601 <connector id="p08-s06-c01" type="condition" info=
602 "p08-s06-t03:p08-s06-t14,p08-s06-t15:p08-s06-t20">
603 <t id="p08-s06-t02" type="GSL-1">if</t>
604 </connector>
605 <anaphor id="p08-s06-a01" info="p07-s01-t04:p07-s01-t12">
606 <t id="p08-s06-t03" type="GSL-1">the</t>
607 <t id="p08-s06-t04">stack</t>
608 </anaphor>
609 <t id="p08-s06-t05" type="GSL-1">of</t>
610 <t id="p08-s06-t06" type="GSL-2">cards</t>
611 <t id="p08-s06-t07" type="GSL-1">is</t>
612 <t id="p08-s06-t08" type="GSL-2">empty</t>
613 <punc>.</punc>
614 <t id="p08-s06-t09" type="GSL-1">or</t>
615 <anaphor id="p08-s06-a02" info="p07-s01-t04:p07-s01-t12">
616 <t id="p08-s06-t10" type="GSL-1">it</t>
617 </anaphor>
618 <t id="p08-s06-t11" type="GSL-1">only</t>

```

**Figure 1.** Sample XML annotation for an academic text

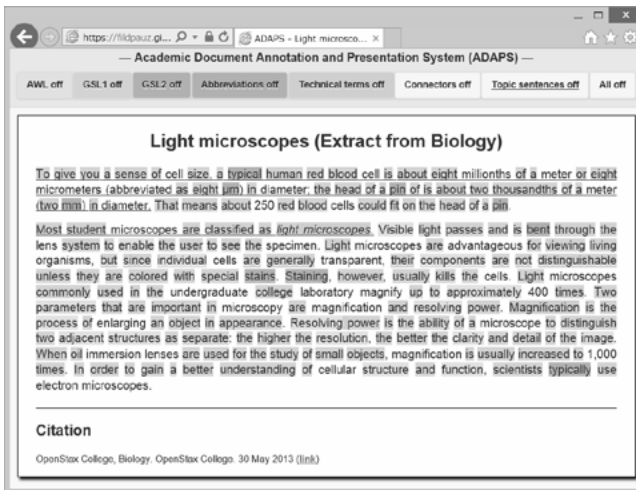
This document definition can then be processed by ADAPS scripts to transform it into a html-formatted web page which can display the linguistic features of the text interactively. This is illustrated in Figure 2, where the top row of buttons corresponds to various linguistic features. Each button may be toggled as desired to highlight the respective features in color.





**Figure 2.** Sample display of ADAPS-processed article with no highlighting

Alternatively, if desired, all of the features may be enabled at once, by clicking ‘All on’. This is illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Sample display of ADAPS-processed article with all linguistic features highlighted (‘All on’)

When linguistic features are highlighted, certain additional functions are possible. For example, when academic vocabulary is highlighted, moving the mouse cursor over a word will enable

le a pop-up containing the definition of the word. For abbreviations or technical terms, the pop-up indicates what the in-text definition of that item is. Finally, for connectors, the pop-up shows which two sentences in the text are being connected along with the connector's category (e.g. similarity, cause, temporal sequence; as defined in Wolf & Gibson, 2005).

Admittedly, this display schema removes texts from their original display contexts and arguably makes them semi-authentic. But the primary purpose of ADAPS is not to present authentic texts, per se, but rather to ease the presentation (and hence learner noticing) of the linguistic features of authentic source texts. In any case, the authentic text is just one click away via the citation at the bottom of each text.

### **Using ADAPS**

ADAPS has been released in a beta form and comprises a selection of 96 texts (32,433 words total), mostly from STEM-related fields. This includes 22,804 GSL-1 tokens, 1,722 GSL-2 tokens, and 6,146 AWL tokens. It also includes 140 technical terms, 44 abbreviations, 700 logical connectors (representing all 11 categories defined by Wolf & Gibson, 2005), and 1,204 anaphors. All of the texts are selected from open licence sources (e.g. Wikipedia, PLoS ONE, OpenStax College), so they are freely accessible to anyone over the Internet. Furthermore, because the texts are all open licence texts, they may be freely reproduced by teachers as well as learners.

Several possibilities for use are envisioned. Some of these uses are possible even when there is minimal or no computer access in the classroom. For example, a teacher may customize the display of the text as desired for their lesson and then print copies for all the students. Or, the teacher may display a text on a screen during a lesson and highlight different features as desired throughout the lesson. Alternatively, learners may be encouraged to access the texts on their own and practise reading with them, highlighting features as desired to deepen their comprehension of the text and awareness of various features.

### **Future developments**

While the texts which have been annotated with ADAPS are freely available for use and download (<https://fildpauz.github.io/adaps>), further improvements are planned. The display features are fully compatible with desktop computer systems, but are not fully implemented for mobile devices. Therefore, future plans include improving this compatibility. In addition more texts will be added to the current list. But teachers may create their own documents via manual annotation by checking the instructions at the GitHub project site (<https://github.com/fildpauz/adaps>).

Other plans include the creation of index pages that link to specific features across various texts so that certain linguistic features can be navigated more easily. Also, there are plans to carry out some effectiveness research to investigate how ADAPS may have its best impact for teachers and learners. Initially, it is necessary to confirm that attested benefits of highlighting—increased vocabulary learning, text comprehension, and engagement time—are realized. Further, teachers should be surveyed to gauge their perception of whether ADAPS eases their text preparation responsibilities.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, ADAPS solves certain problems for teachers with authentic texts as follows. Rather than face the burden of locating texts, the texts are preselected to suit pedagogical purposes; that is, to exemplify various features. Rather than face the burden of preparing texts, the linguistic analyses and annotation have already been completed, following established research on vocabulary and logical text structure. Instead of taking time to prepare texts for display, a flexible, dynamic, and customizable presentation system already exists which depends on research on text-highlighting. Finally, to enable the reuse and free distribution of texts, only open licence texts have been selected.

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# Exploring how language is used in specialized discourse: Pedagogical and practical applications in the ESP classroom

Jean Marguerite Jimenez  
and Ida Ruffolo

## Introduction

The increasing concern for protecting the environment has led hotels to disclose their sustainability policies on their websites to promote their green responsibility (Jones, Hillier, & Comfort, 2014). Corpus-based research has been conducted to examine how the language used to present information on sustainability attempts to raise tourists' ecological awareness (Ruffolo, 2015) through the use of a specific discourse (Frandsen & Johansen, 2001). Understanding how environmental reports are perceived by potential customers can provide practical implications for current and future operators of the field.

In the ESP classroom, the use of corpus-based discourse analysis can offer learners new opportunities to discover language-related issues of particular interest to them (Bárcena, Read, & Arus, 2013) through activities created to explore how language is used to express different meanings in specialized discourse. This chapter illustrates an example that can easily be adapted to other ESP contexts.

## Study aims

The aim of this didactic activity was to enhance students' language awareness and critical thinking skills by investigating the language adopted by hoteliers when expressing environmental concern and understand how the intended message is perceived by readers with different academic backgrounds. Two groups of students,

specifically Business and Tourism graduate students attending ESP courses, were asked to carry out the same activity. The students' proficiency level ranged from B1 to C1 and the mean age was 22.

### Method

Corpus linguistics was introduced on a theoretical and practical level, followed by a discussion of the text genre the students would be examining. Authentic examples of texts that focus on sustainable discourse were provided before moving onto the hands-on sessions during which the students analyzed the *UK Green Hotel Corpus*. This corpus, previously compiled by the teachers, includes websites of hotels located in the UK that have been awarded the Green Tourism Scheme label. It consists of a total of 34 files (40,355 tokens), compiled by including the website homepage plus sections on environmental sustainability.

Both the corpus and the concordancing program AntConc, user-friendly free downloadable software, were uploaded onto the computers in the laboratory. Students had to perform tasks involving both quantitative and qualitative analysis:

- create a wordlist, disregarding function words and proper names and focusing only on content words;
- create concordance lines (i.e. lines taken from the corpus);
- reflect on the use of pronouns;
- identify linguistic elements used;
- examine semantic categories;
- investigate the collocates of selected keywords;
- carry out a qualitative analysis.

### Results

After learners familiarized themselves with the texts by creating a wordlist and concordance lines, the focus shifted specifically to pronouns, which are particularly important for 'ego-targeting'. The large majority chose to analyze *we/our*. Over half of them believed that the writers used these pronouns to empha-

size what the hotels are doing for the environment and for their guests' well-being (exclusive we), while roughly a third believed that *we/our* was inclusive, i.e. used to involve the reader. Finally, for a small group of students *we/our* simply served the purpose of attracting tourists (sustainability as a marketing strategy).

The next step involved identifying the most prevalent linguistic elements and explaining the writer's purpose for using these categories. There were interesting differences and similarities between the two groups. For Tourism students, adjectives highlighted the advantages of using natural resources, nouns were used to inform and raise awareness on sustainability, and verbs were aimed at emphasizing the hotels' intentions to preserve the environment. Business students, instead, felt that adjectives reflected the customer's role, nouns expressed the hotels' determination to reduce their environmental impact, and verbs were proof of the hotels' sustainable actions.

The students then identified the semantic categories prevalent in the corpus (Table 1), providing extracts from the corpus to support their answers, e.g. '*We use fantastic local produce and support many small artisan producers*' (promoting local life); '*we create rather than consume*' (minimizing waste). One student observed: '*The writers try to underline the most important aspects of the territory where the hotel is located, the most important activities aimed at improving the local environment or providing a social benefit to people living in the area.*'

**Table 1.** Semantic categories (adapted from the Green Tourism Scheme)

	Tourism	Business
Promoting local life	70%	67%
Encouraging the use of public transport	19%	2%
Minimizing waste	63%	26%
Being efficient	44%	7%
Giving something back	15%	–
Winners of environmental awards	22%	16%
Other (economic interests)	–	2%

The collocational analysis was conducted by focusing on the word *environment* and examining the top ten content collocates (Table 2). Based on the list of collocates, students were asked to reflect on the idea that these hotels are trying to transmit, supporting their answers with examples from the corpus. Both groups found that the writers used nouns such as *responsibility* and *impact*, as well as *future* to underline the actions undertaken for the environment. They also had the impression that the writers wanted readers to focus on the hotels' commitments in protecting and preserving the environment for future generations. Moreover, overall, students believed that the hotels' intention is to show that they are respecting the local environment and producing social and local benefits. To further personalize their analysis, students could choose other keywords and create a list of collocates for each of them.

**Table 2.** Content collocates of *environment*

Frequency	Collocate <sup>1</sup>
18	Impact
12	We
15	Our
10	Local
8	Natural
5	Award*
5	Responsibilit*
4	Future
4	Hotel*
4	Provid*

Their last task was to summarize the message that these hotels are trying to promote. Students were encouraged to consider whether they had been engaged as readers and whether the writers had convinced them, again using corpus extracts to support their answers. Table 3 summarizes their conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> The base form of a word followed by an asterisk includes all words beginning with that base form.



**Table 3.** Message conveyed and reader's role

		Tourism	Business
Promoting themselves by focusing on environmental protection	Readers have an active role. Message credible.	52%	51%
	Readers have a passive role. Message credible.	–	14%
Promoting quality of their services	Readers have an active role. Message credible.	11%	5%
Hotel promotion	Readers have an active role. Message of sustainability not credible.	7%	–
	Readers have a passive role. Message of sustainability not credible.	18%	18%
No answer		11%	12%

Here are two examples of the students' comments:

*I trust them because they are trying to highlight the importance of preserving the local natural environment, their commitments...showing some concrete actions. The reader feels directly involved in what the writers are talking about.* (Tourism)

*They focus on sustainable and economic aspects, but there is too much repetition of the term sustainability so feels like brainwashing. The reader is passive, he is invited to follow the hotel's sustainability policies with no active participation in decision-making.* (Business)

### Conclusion

This activity proved to be useful in facilitating the learners' process of search and discovery, as well as stimulating discussion within their field of interest. In fact, the students agreed that the corpus tools helped them understand the underlying dis-

course and encouraged them to use a critical approach to the reading of texts.

It seems that different academic backgrounds influenced how students approached the texts. The Tourism students had a wider perspective and explored a greater range of words, probably because they were more familiar with sustainability. The Business students, instead, chose mostly economic-oriented terms when asked to further investigate the corpus. Overall, however, there were no noticeable differences in the message perceived by the two groups, although there was disagreement among students on the credibility of the message.

Students found that the hotels attempt to create a positive image as ecologically responsible companies, focusing on minimizing waste and promoting local life. However, they believe that the hotels need to improve the language used. In some cases, the promoters rely on the label without providing enough information, which, in the students' view, is the same as not providing potential customers with any information at all.

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## Further information

For more information about The International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), the benefits of membership and how to join, please consult the website: <https://www.iatefl.org/>

The IATEFL Research Special Interest Group (ReSIG) offers resources and opportunities to members and non-members, including useful links, video recordings and free downloadable publications. To learn more about ReSIG, follow this link: <http://resig.weebly.com/>

Information about past and future editions of the ELTRIA conference is available here: [http://www.eim.ub.edu/eltria/index\\_en.php](http://www.eim.ub.edu/eltria/index_en.php)







## **ELT RESEARCH IN ACTION: Bridging the Gap between Research and Classroom Practice**

This book is based on the ELT Research in Action Conference (ELTRIA). Organised by the Escola d'Idiomes Moderns (School of Modern Languages) at the University of Barcelona, the conference took place on the 21-22 April, 2017 and included more than 40 talks and plenaries by presenters from over twenty different countries. The ELTRIA conference was aimed at teachers wishing to be more actively engaged with research in ELT and provided an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to come together to share experiences and common goals.

This volume is a collection of chapters that summarise and reflect on a selection of the ELTRIA presentations. Divided into three sections, it provides an overview of some of the current debates in the research-practice divide, reviews projects that translate theory into classroom practice, and summarises research that addresses practical classroom issues at grassroots level. The book is relevant to teachers and researchers alike and aims to contribute to bridging the gap between research and practice in ELT.