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Humour Competency: The Role of Sociopragmatic Knowledge in Expressions of Humour in Intercultural Interactions

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The purpose of this empirical research is to evaluate learners' humour competency in terms of the role sociopragmatic knowledge plays in the enactment and comprehension of humour in intercultural interactions, and, based on the findings, to discuss the implications for humour competency training.

Sociopragmatic competence refers to the ability to recognize how broader societal rules for interactions are adapted locally, and to use these rules to participate effectively within the constraints of the local interaction (Abrams 2008). In order to develop sociopragmatic competence, learners need to decode cues at linguistic levels i.e. paralinguistic cues such as facial gestures to indicate sarcasm, prosodic cues such as pauses indicating a punch line in a joke, and discursive cues such as a joke being told in three parts. In addition, learners need to interpret layers of social meanings, including cultural references, and understand how these are embedded (e.g. in the form of assumptions and presuppositions) in particular contexts.

The empirical research is qualitative, with data taken from transcribed ethnographic interviews conducted over a period of two years, between me, a British researcher, and seven Japanese women. The data has been analysed to determine the role of sociopragmatic knowledge in the enactment and comprehension of humour in intercultural encounters. Firstly, instances of humour in the interactional data were classified according to the conversational functions (identification, clarification, enforcement or differentiation) of humour (Meyer 2000). Secondly, the instances of humour were analysed to assess the role of sociopragmatic knowledge in the achievement of these functions.

Findings suggest that expression of humour which fulfil the uniting functions of identification and clarification require less in-depth sociopragmatic knowledge in order to be successful, and so are prevalent in intercultural interactions, and that less prevalent expressions of humour which perform the dividing functions of enforcement and differentiation require in-depth sociopragmatic knowledge in order to be successful, as they pose a potential face threat.

The implications for humour competency training are that sociopragmatic knowledge should be focused on in the language classroom through awareness tasks, which require explicit knowledge, e.g. explanations of social meanings and cultural references in humorous exchanges, interpretation tasks, which involve getting learners to notice e.g. linguistic cues, and presuppositions, and communication practice tasks, such as role plays (Marra and Holmes 2007), in order for learners to develop sociopragmatic knowledge as an important part of their humour competency.

Note: This text is adapted from an abstract of the forthcoming chapter in Rucynski, J. and Prichard, C. (eds). *Bridging the Humor Barrier: Humor Competence Training in English Language Teaching*. Lexington Books.

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Application of a Cognitive Genre Model to ESAP module Design

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The following account documents the argument presented at the *Norwegian Forum for EAP* Conference in Oslo in June, 2019.

The presentation described the development and implementation of an in-sessional ESAP module that supports undergraduate International Relations (IR) students' discipline specific writing skills. This 'cooperatively' (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) developed module uses a 'cognitive genre' (Bruce, 2015) approach to course design to support students' recognition and production of explanatory and critiquing features of textual discourse - both important elements of discourse relevant to the articulation of argument in this discipline.

It has been argued that the use of the 'social genre' (Bruce, 2015) model in framing course/module design in 'narrow angle' (Widdowson, 1983) teaching contexts is effective, and that the cognitive genre model is more suited to wide-angle courses/modules where students from different disciplines study academic skills together (Bruce, 2015). However, I will argue that applying a cognitive genre model to ESAP module design is more pedagogically appropriate in my context. It allows for concentrated and repeated recognition of segmental features of discourse relevant to articulation of argument in IR texts while developing students' own articulation of such discourse features through language analysis and practice.

The application of a social genre model to ESAP module design in this context is overly ambitious in terms of outcome and potentially misleading for students writing in a subject area that seems to lack agreed consensus of what social genres communicate. Moreover, the overuse of whole genre assessment modes ('the essay') that are often assessed concurrently across other IR modules, leads to inadequate transfer of taught academic writing skills. Framing this module's outcomes and assessments around cognitive genres allows students to develop a more comprehensive awareness of the importance these features have to social genre writing tasks in their other IR modules.

I made an argument for using Cognitive Genre Theory to support and guide the development of the outcomes, syllabus and assessments for this in-sessional ESAP module. Based on the

institutional context and the bolt-on nature of the study skills support provided, I found this approach to be an effective way of ensuring students were able to transfer taught academic study skills to their specific disciplinary contexts. I would encourage others in similar pedagogic situations to think carefully about how theories of discourse analysis can connect to central features of your module's make-up during the planning stages.

[For a longer version of this paper, please contact David by email]

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Book Review

(to be published in *TESOL Quarterly*, 2020)

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Global Englishes for Language Teaching

Heath Rose and Nicola Galloway (Cambridge University Press, 2019)

The diverse, globalized uses of English as an international language (EIL) or lingua franca (ELF) have proliferated over the past few decades, but arguably this reality has not been fully reflected in commensurate changes within the teaching and learning of the language(s). Other single-volume texts have attempted to address implications for practice, for instance McKay (2002), Kirkpatrick (2007), and Matsuda (2017). In this book, the authors seek to develop their earlier conceptualization of Global Englishes for Language Teaching (GELT), particularly as expounded in Galloway and Rose (2015), with the ambitious goal of synthesizing an array of literature and research into coherent proposals for innovation and change within the profession.

The book is structured as two parts, targeted at both teachers and researchers, which serve to first introduce the conceptual framework, then present examples of research studies based on pedagogical innovation in practice, with implications for the field. The preface and chapter 1 outline the scope of the case being developed, clarifying the use of "umbrella terms" Global

Englishes and GELT and the aim of “uniting the paradigms” (p. 11), embracing discussions of nativeness, intercultural awareness and translanguaging within contemporary sociolinguistic perspectives on language and pedagogy.

Part I contains insightful summaries of extensive literature on the TESOL curriculum, SLA and innovation theory as applied to GELT goals, encapsulated here as “to prepare students to use ELF” (p. 39). The chapter on SLA, for example, could prove useful for teacher educators seeking ways to address the complex implications of the ‘multilingual turn’ for practice. The authors appear sensitive to the risks inherent in their approach, hoping to avoid “alienating teachers with our critical perspectives” (p. 29); a potential criticism they are wise to acknowledge. The question of barriers to change, or resistance to innovation, is raised throughout the book, though arguably the responses to these legitimate practical concerns could be more precise and contextualized.

In Part II, Chapter 5 presents a persuasive argument for GELT-focused research, addressing some aspects of methodology and substantive areas for future studies to explore. The following three chapters, on teaching materials, teacher education and English-Medium Instruction (EMI), form the tip of the “GELT research iceberg” (p. 222) that the authors hope will subsequently reveal significant further innovation and research-informed change. There is a considerable level of detail included here, offering points of discussion for teacher education or professional development sessions with an action research focus. However, there is a sense that the addition of a brief concluding chapter might have been useful, returning to the central issues and mission identified as the prime purpose of the book. The authors are rightly critical of others for lacking practical suggestions for the application of proposed innovations in curriculum, teaching and assessment. However, the default position here appears to be encouraging more, particularly teacher-led, action research. This call is clearly justified, yet busy practitioners may prefer to engage with some of the additional resources on offer in the companion website to the authors’ previous (2015) volume.

Rose and Galloway present a compelling, if at times assertive, case for embracing a GELT perspective on teaching and research. There are repeated calls for a ‘paradigm shift’ and a ‘GELT ideology’ to supplant those associated with standard language and native speaker norms. These arguments certainly need making, and this book articulates a persuasive message and rationale; however, for the ambivalent or sceptical practitioner, there is potential for the occasionally polemical tone to exacerbate the divides so clearly identified. Perhaps more explicit recognition could be signalled that not all readers may see the ideas proposed here as necessarily ‘innovative’ or progressive. As pertinently noted, “a degree of scepticism about change is unsurprising” (p. 191), and conflict between theory and practice endures in many real TESOL/ELT contexts. The authors make a strong claim for GELT to help bridge these perceived gaps, and for the teaching of English as global form of lingua franca communication to “continue its transformative journey” (p. 222) alongside the continuously changing needs of its learners.

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From our students

False Beginners of English In Secondary School: A Study of Three Interviews with English Teachers In Luxembourg

Alice Bindels (MA ELT Dissertation, 2019)

Summary

In this study I examined the role of English in Luxembourg and its impacts on young secondary school-aged children from the perspectives of three different English teachers. With an extended focus on classroom implications, it has become clear that false beginners of English have become a growing demographic in Luxembourgish classrooms in the past decade; these learners, compared to true beginners, hold specific needs, and have changed the norms of English teaching in Luxembourg.

The overall objectives of the study were to further our understanding of the role of English for young learners and to gain insight on the language in education policies. In order to fulfil the objectives, the study set out to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what degree have secondary school-aged children in Luxembourg been influenced by the rise of English in the past decade (2000's-2010's)?
- 2) How do teachers in Luxembourg adapt to this situation from a pedagogical stand-point?
- 3) To what extent has Luxembourg's language teaching system been impacted?

In addressing the research questions, the interviews presented in the study have provided empirical testimony which allowed for the following conclusions and directions for future research; first of all, this study has allowed us to gain insights into the change in linguistic landscape which has caused a gradual reorganisation of EFL teaching in Luxembourg. The model for the tri-language ideal in education has been called into question as it has been argued that the concept of equilingualism has become increasingly difficult to sustain for learners considering the substantial rise of English in Luxembourg, both in visibility and in use. Instead, the model of the plurilingual speaker has been proposed as an independent subject capable of choosing their preferred language of instruction and study. This model has gained in significance considering the ever-increasing creation of school offers and programmes presenting various language opportunities at different levels – notably in the English language.

The directions to adopt for future research could certainly look further into in-classroom situations with consideration to the very complex relationship between language attitudes and the pedagogical challenges. I believe this area of research could benefit from an interdisciplinary approach looking into sociological and ethnographic aspects of the question as a link between attitudes and behaviour still remain to be made more directly.

I had become interested in the practice of teaching English to younger learners, specifically teenagers. Applying this notion to my own cultural context, it occurred to me that English teaching starts the moment Luxembourgish students begin their teenage years. Following a discussion with a teacher-friend of mine, who pointed out that most teenagers already have a pronounced notion of English by the time they start learning it, I was determined to gain more insight into the implications of teaching this demographic. After an initial foray into the concept of false beginners of English, I realised that an extended analysis on the role of English in Luxembourg as well as its progress in importance was needed. I then recalled the Mapping English in Luxembourg conference that was held at the University of Luxembourg where I pursued my undergraduate studies, which painted the ideal starting point for my study.

Ultimately, I decided to conduct interviews with English teachers for the purpose of uncovering current, authentic opinions on my area of interest, and construct a study around those opinions as representative of (some) tendencies towards ELT in Luxembourg. The topic I chose is a complex one; it is part of a broader understanding of plurilingual competence and English as an international language, which made it challenging to narrow down much further. Yet, I hope that this study succeeded in indicating an explorative stance on the topic, which would allow for my nuanced findings and encourage further debate. The diversity of learners, teaching objectives and expectations is striking; what I hope to have shown with this study is the extent to which the triglossic Luxembourgish-German-French paradigm has been stretched through its contact with English. The model for Luxembourgish language and culture identity is an ever expanding one which, without a doubt, will continue to be researched and discussed.

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***A Personal Account on Developing Evaluative Judgement and a Reflection
on Why it Can Be Used to Challenge the Deficit Model***

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Summary

This paper offers a student perspective on the self-efficacy that is associated with the development of evaluative judgement, observed through the course of a foundation year programme. This reflective account focuses in particular on the way feedback was received at different points in the programme, and how guided thinking has had a significant positive impact on the learning process.

My foundation year allowed me to expand my own self-efficacy through the development of evaluative judgement by creating internalised self-assessment criteria. This led to a deeper understanding of the feedback I was receiving and instead of ‘mistakes’ seeming negative, they could be viewed as positive opportunities for development. Many of the patterns I found within my own journey into developing evaluative judgement became evident through guided thinking, and when I began reading more of the literature I noticed that my journey was not unique.

What my tutors and I saw in my progress was the norm when people are exposed to these types of guided self-orientated learning techniques, the benefits of which are many and multi-faceted. Having the opportunity to develop these skills is not only leading to real and lasting improvements in my results, it has also given me a higher appreciation of the intellectual journey I am on. It has enabled me to challenge my assumption that I was somehow ‘deficient’ and this has freed me to take my learning to new and higher places.

Full version of this article available in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*, Volume 2 (2019), pp 3-6. <https://jfyn.co.uk/index.php/ukfyn/article/view/35/30>

About the Author

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Research on English Language Teaching seminar

Work in progress: Reflections on Using Video in Teaching Practice

**Dan Sumner (Sussex) D.L.Sumner@sussex.ac.uk and Teti Dragas
(University of Durham; via video link)**

This talk focused on the filming of teaching practice on practical teacher education programmes (English Language Teaching) in two universities, Sussex and Durham. It explores the benefits it can bring to students’/trainees’ reflection and how the use of modern technologies, such as GoPro 360 cameras, can further enhance these benefits.

Video in teacher education is not ‘new’ to research but still relatively under-explored, and in-context studies which discuss its use in practice are important to discuss, particularly as new technology is continually creating more effective recording possibilities. Aside from the benefits filming TP can bring to trainees in relation to affording them with key opportunities to self-review, there are many benefits it can bring that have the potential to transform the

‘traditional’ supervisor-feedback loop, which can allow for more opportunities for reflection rather than reaction.

This research project was initially inspired by the Q and A part of Nikki Fořtová’s talk, ‘Striking the balance’, at last year’s *Future of Training* conference, at International House London, when the filming of teaching practice was discussed and how technology, such as 360 cameras, could be used for this purpose. The research attempts to explore the affordances that filming teaching practice can bring for trainees and trainers, as well as compare the use of static cameras with GoPro 360 cameras. The research is a comparative and explorative study, comparing a range of data (quantitative and qualitative), approaches and video equipment drawn from the experiences of trainees and trainers across both contexts where the equipment and approach vary.

(November 2019)

Details of future *Language and Culture* or *Research on ELT* talks are available on the SCLS website:

Sussex Centre for Language Studies: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/>

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