The bulletin of research, scholarship, teaching and development activity
From The Sussex Centre for Language Studies
University of Sussex, u.k.
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Learning transfer from an In-sessional ESAP module to International Relations and Development students’ core disciplinary writing assignments: Teaching semantic gravity to support cumulative knowledge building

David Munn  D.Munn@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract

Supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in higher education to become aware of, and develop, the academic and knowledge practices of their chosen disciplines is a key role of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioner. The transfer of this knowledge from the contexts of an EAP course or module to students’ disciplinary concerns points to the success of these teaching interventions (James, 2014).

This action research project investigates International Relations and Development (IR & D) undergraduate students’ learning transfer of Semantic Gravity (SG) in Legitimation Code Theory, which was taught in an in-sessional English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) module, to students’ disciplinary writing assignments. SG presents a lens to view knowledge practices of writing in students’ subject disciplines. It helps to make knowledge displayed in a text ‘visible’, through ‘meaning-making profiles’ (Kirk, 2017), to those trying to understand and organise written work to the expected standards of their academic discipline (Martin, Maton & Doran, 2020). Teaching SG in the ESAP module aims to help students visualise, and, in turn, compose their own written arguments in line with the expected standards of their academic discipline.

The researcher interviewed three students that had taken the ESAP module and, combined with a textual analysis of writing assignments produced for their core IR & D modules, the study reveals important pedagogical considerations for supporting students’ cumulative knowledge building (Maton, 2013). The results indicate that students are able to demonstrate understanding and application of taught features of SG to written work produced for their IR and development modules. The researcher’s recommendations to improve teaching practice in the ESAP module include differentiation of semantic wave profiles for a wider selection of essay question types; a precise semantic wave profile to help differentiate knowledge types within IR texts; and potential to embed SG into the students’ subject teachings as an effective way of supporting cumulative knowledge building.

This article is to be published shortly in The Journal of Academic Language and Learning
Researching Protest Literacies: Literacy as Protest in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro

Jamie Duncan

Publisher book description (Routledge 2021)

By focusing on the textually mediated reactions of local residents, social movements, and media producers to policy changes implemented in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, this book studies the development of literacy as a tool to mobilize, perform, and disseminate protest. Researching Protest Literacies presents a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and extensive archival research to analyse how traditional and technology-driven literacy practices informed a new cycle of social protest in favelas from 2006-2016. Chapters trace nuanced interactions, document changing power balances, and in doing so conceptualize five forms of literacy used to enact social change - campaigning literacies, memorial literacies, media-activist literacies, arts-activist literacies, and demonstration literacies. Building on these, the study posits protest literacies as a new way of researching the role of contemporary literacy in protest.

This insightful monograph would be of interest to doctoral students, researchers, and scholars involved in the fields of literacy studies, arts education, and social movement studies, as well as those looking into research methods in education and international literacies more broadly.


Note: Jamie Duncan completed his MA in English Language Teaching at Sussex in 2010 and completed his PhD at Lancaster University. His academic research is situated within the ethnographic and historical traditions of the New Literacy Studies and his professional background includes work in the UK (including for SCLS as a language tutor) and Brazil across the fields of social housing, adult education, and applied linguistics.
Creating opportunities to better understand mainland Chinese students’ engagement at postgraduate level in the international university in the UK: tales from the staffroom and classroom

Catherine Rogers and Katrina Jia

Catherine.Rogers@sussex.ac.uk     A.Jia@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract

Many Chinese students have long struggled to adapt to and engage in a teaching and learning approach that is centred around a Socratic / ‘Western’ model which values debate and discussion, underpinned largely by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978). Moreover, engagement is still often measured solely by their linguistic output, often seen through the lens of the deficit model (Jones, 2018; Marlina, 2009; Ryan, 2012; Sequiera, 2018; Song, 2016; Tian and Lowe, 2013; Xiao, 2006). With this as a backdrop, Catherine Rogers and Katrina Jia started their collaboration in 2018 with the aim of re-evaluating assumptions of Chinese students, in order to have a better understanding of international students’ engagement in the internationalised university. The result of their collaborative project were published as a chapter in Innovations in Internationalisation at Home (Cambridge Scholars Publishing) in April 2021.

Note: Catherine and Katrina recently presented their work as part of the Language and Culture series hosted by SCLS, where they discussed their findings and also touched upon issues triggered by China’s recent education crackdown of private English language provision and the introduction of a third child policy.

References


FROM OUR STUDENTS

Teachers' and students' perceptions of oral error correction in the EFL classroom

Helen Gibb

Doctorate in Education Thesis summary

This thesis focuses on the oral error correction (OEC) offered by teachers and the teacher and student perceptions of OEC. It is presented within the field of English language teaching, utilising discussions from other modern language research. Different schools of thought exist regarding the importance of correctness in light of English as a Lingua Franca, and the need for standardised accepted norms. For teachers this provides a quandary of what constitutes an error, and how (if at all) these could be corrected. Whilst there has been much research into the causes of linguistic errors and the ways in which teachers respond to them, there has been comparatively little research into perceptions regarding OEC. The aim of this study is to provide a teacher and student narrative on OEC in a UK context using qualitative data collection.

The research presented shows that students are largely more receptive to explicit correction; however, much of the current research has found that implicit correction is more widely used. The students expressed a desire to be corrected and felt it has a positive developmental influence overall; nevertheless, the teachers mostly believed intelligibility and
communication were more important than linguistic correctness. Many of the teachers stated OEC was not something they consciously devoted time to, but it occurred ad hoc often in response to communication breakdown. Although the teachers did not entirely agree with each other regarding the impact of OEC, they all considered the student before responding. The findings of this research demonstrate not only the complexity of providing correction during interactions, but also the lack of consensus in how and when to provide it. If these differences are acknowledged, teachers and students can negotiate their understanding and perceptions of OEC so teaching and learning can occur to the satisfaction of both parties.

Supervisors: Andrew Blair (SCLS) and Nigel Marshall (Education)

Note: Helen submitted her thesis in September 2020, had her viva in December 2020, and was awarded her Doctorate in March 2021.

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**How EAP is changing the nature of EFL teacher identity and redefining teacher roles and competencies**

**Corinna Gough**

**MA Dissertation Abstract**

This study focusses on how EAP is changing the nature of language teacher identity and redefining teacher roles and competencies. It examines experienced EAP teachers working in the field and seeks to find out how they view themselves by exploring the beliefs they hold about key issues concerning EAP based on their experiences. It explores areas such as EAP knowledge base, EAP practitioner roles and teaching goals, as well as EAP teacher training and development. Data was collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews from six experienced EAP practitioners working at Sussex University, UK.

The findings show practitioners who (despite the precarity of the role), hold a strong collective identity with EAP and who are eager to broaden their knowledge and expand their services within the wider institution. The findings provide insight into the knowledge base of experienced EAP teachers, showing them to have built and developed such knowledge
through previous EFL experience, peer support and a genuine passion for the role, as well as a strong motivation to improve and further interact in development opportunities to widen the scope of their field. It is concluded that more training and development opportunities (both formal and informal), must be on offer across the EAP practitioner field, as well as better collaboration across all departments to produce a greater understanding of EAP and the breadth of its practice.

Supervisor: James Greenough

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**Exploring multilingual teacher perceptions and beliefs of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**

Sam Vernon

MA Dissertation Abstract

Global realities of language use and the growing area of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research is placing increasing pressure on teachers, curriculum designers and language assessments to readdress traditional approaches to ELT. The paper explores the perceptions of multilingual teachers towards such realities and ELF through two interviews separated via a reflective period including exposure to ELF-related literature. Drawing on in-depth interview data, this paper explores initial attitudes of teachers in individual contexts and any changes in perceptions that occur during the reflective period.

Despite an overall acceptance of global realities on consequences for ELT and willingness to adapt both materials and practices to match local needs, there is a clear need to supplement teacher ELF-awareness raising with collaborative, supportive, empirical and tangible teaching recommendations and practices. Without, a number of hesitancies persist with regards to implementation, error correction, standardisation and language assessment criteria.

Supervisor: Andrew Blair
Details of the *Language and Culture* series and other events are available on the SCLS web pages:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/newsandevents/seminars

Previous editions of *LP3* (2012-2020):

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/research

For contributions or ideas for future editions please contact:

Andrew Blair:  A.M.Blair@sussex.ac.uk
Webmaster Matthew Platts:  M.R.Platts@sussex.ac.uk

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