

English Language Education

Armin Berger · Helen Heaney ·  
Pia Resnik · Angelika Rieder-Bünemann ·  
Galina Savukova *Editors*

# Developing Advanced English Language Competence

A Research-Informed Approach  
at Tertiary Level

 Springer

# English Language Education

Volume 22

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Armin Berger  
Department of English and  
American Studies  
University of Vienna  
Vienna, Austria

Helen Heaney  
Department of English and  
American Studies  
University of Vienna  
Vienna, Austria

Pia Resnik  
University College of Teacher Education  
Vienna, Austria

Angelika Rieder-Bünemann  
Department of English and  
American Studies  
University of Vienna  
Vienna, Austria

Galina Savukova  
Department of English and  
American Studies  
University of Vienna  
Vienna, Austria

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*To our students*

# Foreword

In principle, English language teaching draws on a multitude of sources: linguistic ideas about what language is and how it is used, psychological ideas about how language is processed and learnt, educational ideas about the value of learning other languages and how they may be taught, political ideas about globalism and multilingualism, the century-old international traditions of EFL syllabuses and teaching techniques, and many more. Its richness and importance derive from the centrality of language in our lives, its complexity from the vast variation in the learning and teaching situations across the globe.

Yet, in practice, English language teaching has seldom touched on more than a fraction of these sources. Abstract theories have tried to rule the classroom by extrapolating from small-scale research to the whole of language teaching. Teaching methodologies have proposed drastic changes justified largely by post hoc research. The changes in English language teaching over 50 years are led more by independent revolutions of thinking within one of its sources than by the fruitful interaction between them.

Further progress should then depend on a synthesis of how theoretical concerns can be implemented in a specific teaching situation. The need is for an account of language teaching informed by both theoretical and practical concerns, showing how the different threads can come together rationally and coherently. This book represents an almost unique attempt to justify and describe a particular teaching approach, based on the idea of learner competencies, and to document its execution in a particular situation, within an ongoing process of research and evaluation.

A particular concern is advanced language learning. The discussion of this has been comparatively neglected over the years, perhaps because of the large proportion of language students who are beginners rather than advanced learners – one estimate being that 80% are beginners at any given moment – and the comparative diversity of advanced learners' language use compared to the more easily specified uses of beginners. This book tackles the needs of advanced learners as potential language teachers ranging from their pronunciation to their vocabulary.

The core of this book is the description of the English programme for prospective language teachers and literature, cultural studies, and linguistics students at the

University of Vienna in Austria, in terms of programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research. It provides a detailed portrait of the education of English students in a specific situation, not just a set of proposals but a report of how they worked out in practice.

The programme design element is situated in its historical development over the years and comprehensively details the main courses and tests, strongly committed to texts and genres. After the syllabus design ferment of the 1970s, David Wilkins' notional/functional ideas settled into the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001; 2018), which is central to the present book. The programme here presents a broad panorama from practical skills-based activities to analysis and mediation to academic identity.

The pedagogical practice element is centred around outcomes and competences, and allows for an eclectic diversity of teaching practices couched in terms of what students will be able to do rather than dictating the teachers' methods. The methods presented combine the practical issues of teaching with a progression towards description and manipulation of written and spoken language, including such rarely discussed aspects as punctuation, parody, and stage fright.

The teacher research element encourages teachers to stand back and think about their teaching rather than just carrying it out, showing how active involvement both keeps teachers motivated and contributes to the ongoing development of the programme. But it also of course provides the valuable testing ground for the success of the ideas and methods of the programme, such as the vocabulary logs and rating scales, and for how they can be extrapolated to other situations.

The book is effectively a comprehensive documentary of how forward-looking teaching integrated across a whole programme can take place in an institution, possibly unique in its combination of specificity with theoretical justification. We can all benefit from this thorough account and relate the approach to our own teaching situations. Let us hope that such painstaking studies of particular situations will become more common so that the next generation of language teaching can be based on detailed evidence of empirically supported theories and methodology rather than ruled by opinion, fashion, and fiat.

Newcastle University  
Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Vivian Cook



# Keywords

English as a foreign language  
Advanced language competence  
Research-informed language teaching  
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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Advanced English Language Competence at the Intersection of Programme Design, Pedagogical Practice, and Teacher Research: An Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
	Armin Berger	
<b>Part I The English Language Competence Programme at the University of Vienna</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Language Analysis &amp; Grammar in Use</b> . . . . .	<b>27</b>
	Gunther Kaltenböck and Helen Heaney	
<b>3</b>	<b>Integrated Language and Study Skills</b> . . . . .	<b>35</b>
	Thomas Martinek and Galina Savukova	
<b>4</b>	<b>Language in Use</b> . . . . .	<b>49</b>
	Gillian Schwarz-Peaker	
<b>5</b>	<b>English in a Professional Context</b> . . . . .	<b>61</b>
	Amy Bruno-Lindner	
<b>6</b>	<b>English for Academic Purposes</b> . . . . .	<b>73</b>
	Angelika Rieder-Bünemann	
<b>7</b>	<b>Mediation and Genre Analysis for English Teachers</b> . . . . .	<b>81</b>
	Gabrielle Smith-Dluha	
<b>8</b>	<b>Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills</b> . . . . .	<b>89</b>
	Karin Richter	
<b>9</b>	<b>The Language Lab</b> . . . . .	<b>105</b>
	Magdalena Schwarz, Maria Milchram, and Olivia Wankmüller	
<b>10</b>	<b>Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers</b> . . . . .	<b>113</b>
	Karin Richter	

<b>11</b>	<b>The Vienna English Language Test</b> .....	125
	Susanne Sweeney-Novak	
<b>12</b>	<b>The Common Final Test</b> .....	133
	Thomas Martinek and Armin Berger	
<b>Part II Teaching English to Advanced Learners</b>		
<b>13</b>	<b>Reading Below the Surface: Guiding Students to Getting More out of Texts</b> .....	145
	Lisa Nazarenko	
<b>14</b>	<b>Writing an Argumentative Essay Like Sherlock Holmes: Teaching Essay Structure with the Detective Analogy</b> .....	153
	Horst Prillinger	
<b>15</b>	<b>Teaching Punctuation in Consecutive Courses</b> .....	161
	Galina Savukova	
<b>16</b>	<b>Dealing with Stage Fright</b> .....	169
	Karin Richter	
<b>17</b>	<b>Improving Advanced Interaction Skills</b> .....	175
	Galina Savukova and Karin Richter	
<b>18</b>	<b>Fostering Awareness of Academic Writing Through Speaking: Speech Days</b> .....	185
	Brigitte Roth and Elisabeth Weitz-Polydoros	
<b>19</b>	<b>Using Text Comparison to Illustrate the Concept of Audience</b> .....	189
	Lisa Nazarenko	
<b>20</b>	<b>Text Transformation: The Art of Parody</b> .....	195
	Elisabeth Müller-Lipold	
<b>21</b>	<b>Improving Students' Writing and Mediation Skills in English in a Professional Context: Guiding Student Writers Through the Transformation of Specialist Legal Texts into Texts for Non-Specialists</b> .....	205
	Amy Bruno-Lindner	
<b>Part III Teacher Research on Learning, Teaching, and Assessment</b>		
<b>22</b>	<b>Students' Conceptions of Academic Writing in a Second Language: Perspectives of Advanced Students of English</b> .....	215
	Angelika Rieder-Bünemann and Pia Resnik	
<b>23</b>	<b>Analysing Discourse Coherence in Students' L2 Writing: Rhetorical Structure and the Use of Connectives</b> .....	237
	Barbara Schiftner-Tengg	

**24 Advanced Students’ and Lecturers’ Views on the Usefulness of Vocabulary Logs for Expanding Vocabulary . . . . . 257**  
Helen Heaney

**25 Weaving Academic Texts: An Observation of Students’ Quest for the Magic of Words in the English Language Competence Programme . . . . . 281**  
Katharina Ghamarian

**26 Assessing Oral Presentations and Interactions: From a Systematic to a Salient-Feature Approach . . . . . 297**  
Armin Berger

**27 Foreign Accent and the Role of Identity in the Adult English as a Foreign Language Pronunciation Classroom . . . . . 323**  
Karin Richter

**28 Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English: Exploring Students’ Needs . . . . . 343**  
Armin Berger

**29 Conclusion . . . . . 365**  
Armin Berger

## About the Authors

**Armin Berger** is a senior lecturer and postdoctoral researcher in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, where he acts as academic coordinator of the English Language Competence programme. His main research interests are language testing and assessment, speaking for academic purposes, washback effects on language teaching and learning, and language assessment literacy. His research on rating scale development and validation earned him the 2015 Christopher Brumfit thesis award (*Validating analytic rating scales: A multi-method approach to scaling descriptors for assessing academic speaking*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang (2015).).

**Amy Bruno-Lindner** is a senior lecturer who teaches language competence courses at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. She has developed and taught ESP and scientific writing courses at TU Wien (Vienna University of Technology) and at the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien. Her professional interests include legal English, medical English with a focus on patient communication, text mediation and audience adaptation, pronunciation teaching, and presentation skills teaching. She has co-authored two widely used coursebooks: *International legal English* (with TransLegal, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2011).) and *Introduction to international legal English* (with Matt Firth and TransLegal. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2008).).

**Katharina Ghamarian** studied English and German (teaching degree) at the University of Vienna and is now employed as a university assistant (*prae doc*) for applied linguistics at the Department of English and American Studies after joining the Uni:docs Fellowship Programme for Doctoral Candidates for her project on academic vocabulary development. Her research is mostly grounded in the areas of vocabulary learning, extramural English, independent vocabulary learning methods, and language teaching, with a strong focus on the applicability of her research to educational settings.

**Helen Heaney** studied French and German at Durham (UK) and obtained her teaching degree in English and French from Klagenfurt University (A). Her PhD was on developing a tertiary-level English reading comprehension test. She spent many years team teaching in a CLIL programme and taught ESP in diverse settings, from medical English to tourism. Between 1998 and 2012, Helen worked in the English Department at Klagenfurt University (language competence, linguistics, and teacher education). Now in Vienna, her focus is on teacher education. Helen's special interests are language testing and assessment, innovative approaches to language teaching and learning, and reading comprehension.

**Gunther Kaltenböck**, who held a professorship at the University of Vienna, where he also acted as academic coordinator of the English Language Competence programme, is currently professor of English linguistics at the University of Graz (A). His research interests lie in the areas of cognitive-functional grammar, corpus linguistics, pragmatics, variation, and change. Apart from numerous book chapters and contributions to international journals, his publications include a monograph on *It-extraposition and non-extraposition in English* (Wien: Braumüller (2004).) and several co-edited volumes, such as *New approaches to hedging* (Bingley: Emerald (2011).), *Outside the clause* (Amsterdam: Benjamins (2016).), *Insubordination: Theoretical and empirical issues* (Berlin: de Gruyter (2019).), and *Grammar and cognition: Dualistic models of language structure and language processing* (Amsterdam: Benjamins (2020).).

**Thomas Martinek** studied English and music at the University of Vienna and the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. He holds a PhD from the University of Vienna for a dissertation titled "Narrative unrest: Aesthetics as politics in third-generation Nigerian short stories". His main research areas are foreign language teaching, postcolonial theory, Nigerian and African literature, and short story theory. He has published articles on language teaching, Ben Okri, Biyi Bandele, Wole Soyinka, and the "third generation" of Nigerian writing. Since 2005 he has taught English and music at secondary level as well as university courses in fields as diverse as language competence, cultural studies, EFL methodology, and the teaching of literature in EFL settings.

**Maria Milchram** worked as a tutor for Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills and held additional study groups organized by the student representatives at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. She also tutored students in the lecture Language in a Social Context. With the knowledge acquired during her BA studies and her interest in didactics, her focus was to develop friendly and effective learning environments in order to optimize in-class productivity and peer exchange.

**Elisabeth Müller-Lipold** is an English-German bilingual and teaches language competence and academic writing classes at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, the Vienna University of Veterinary

Medicine, and the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien. A specialist in the language of contract drafting, she looks back on many years of teaching legal English at other faculties and for companies. Since 2016, she has been working at the Language Institute of the National Defence Academy as a translator and interpreter, teacher, and examiner.

**Lisa Nazarenko MA**, was born and educated in New York City, USA, and has taught English as a foreign language since 1987 in the USA, the former USSR, Portugal, and Austria. She was a lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at the University of Vienna and in English for Specific Purposes at the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien, where she was also Didactics Advisor. Her research interests include writing skills, vocabulary development, and the connection between reading and writing skills, and she develops materials in these areas.

**Horst Prillinger** obtained a master's degree in English and Communications, a PhD in English Literature and Linguistics, and a master's degree in Library and Information Science at the University of Vienna. He has been teaching language competence classes at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna since 1996 and also taught at the University College of Teacher Education, Vienna. His professional interests include academic writing, creative writing, and communicative processes in teaching and language learning.

**Pia Resnik** is professor in ELT research and methodology at the University College of Teacher Education, Vienna/Krems, and teaches courses in linguistics and language competence in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. She holds a PhD in English linguistics from the University of Graz (A) and MAs in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies and English and American Studies. She spent research visits at Newcastle University (UK), Birkbeck College, University of London (UK), and Kasetsart University in Bangkok, Thailand. The main focus of her work is multilingualism/linguistic multi-competence, psycholinguistic aspects of SLA and, generally, individual differences in LX users of English.

**Karin Richter** holds a teaching degree in English and German and a PhD in educational linguistics from the University of Vienna. In her PhD she focused on pronunciation learning in an English-medium context. She currently works as a senior lecturer in the Department of English and American Studies, teaching a wide range of classes in the English Language Competence programme as well as in teacher education. Her research interests include second language pronunciation teaching and learning (*English-medium instruction and pronunciation: Exposure and skills development*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters (2019).), ESP, and peer feedback.

**Angelika Rieder-Bünemann** holds a teaching degree in English and Mathematics from the University of Vienna and the Vienna University of Technology, and a PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Tübingen (D), specializing in incidental vocabulary acquisition. She currently works as a senior lecturer in the Department

of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, teaching classes in teacher education, language competence, and linguistics. Her research interests include second language vocabulary acquisition, integrating e-learning in ELT, learner autonomy, and CLIL.

**Brigitte Roth** is a senior lecturer at the University College of Teacher Education, Vienna, and the University of Vienna. She teaches mainly pre-service primary and secondary school teachers. Her courses focus on creative language instruction, school practice, storytelling, and reading for young learners, and English language teaching methodology. She works in the International Office and has taken part in numerous Erasmus/Erasmus+ intensive programmes focusing on teacher education and the multilingual and intercultural classroom.

**Galina Savukova** earned her PhD in English from the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York and is now a senior lecturer in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. She has taught general and specialized English-language courses at tertiary level in four countries. Her current research interests include teaching advanced writing and speaking in academic contexts, feedback and reflective learning, and foreign language teacher education.

**Barbara Schiftner-Tengg** obtained a teaching degree in English and German from the University of Vienna. She taught German and English as a foreign language at several institutions in Austria and spent two semesters teaching German at Wabash College, Indiana, as a Fulbright language teaching assistant. She worked as a research assistant in the Centre for English Language Teaching at the University of Vienna. Her research interests focus on learner corpus research, the application of corpus findings to language teaching, and coherence and cohesion in learner writing. She currently teaches in the secondary education sector.

**Magdalena Schwarz** was a tutor for Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills from 2014 to 2018 at the Department of English and American studies at the University of Vienna. She is currently a doctoral assistant and PhD student at the same institution, where she is investigating the links between social affiliation and language variation using experiments.

**Gillian Schwarz-Peaker** is a senior lecturer at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. She obtained her master's degree in linguistics and English language teaching from the University of Leeds (UK) and has taught and developed a range of language competence courses at tertiary level. Her professional interests are in academic writing, curriculum development, and text mediation in ESP.



**Gabrielle Smith-Dluha** is a senior lecturer at the University of Vienna as well as an external lecturer at Stanford University. Originally from the Bay Area, California, a tech hub full of cultural diversity on the Pacific Rim, she is naturally very interested in topics related to digital media literacy and pluricultural competence. She obtained her MATESOL degree from San Jose State University in California and has an earlier background in World Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She loves her students, her teaching, and writing and is currently working on research related to virtual student teamwork.

**Susanne Sweeney-Novak** obtained her MA in German and English at the University of Vienna as a mature student while working as a translator and interpreter. After a brief teaching spell at secondary school, she worked in the German Department at Aston University (UK), followed by an MA in Linguistics and English Language Teaching at Nottingham University (UK). She was a lecturer in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna for many years. Her main professional interest was testing and assessment: She developed several language tests, including the Common Final Test and the Vienna English Language Test, two standardized language tests administered at the department.

**Olivia Wankmüller** worked at the University of Vienna as a university assistant (*prae doc*) with a focus on applied linguistics and as a tutor for Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills. Her special research interests are legal English, English for Professional Purposes, genre analysis, and world Englishes. Her MA thesis “Simplification and supranationality: Plain language in EU legislation summaries” provides a genre-analytical view on summarization and simplification of legal texts in the light of plain language considerations. Since 2016, she has been active as a legal researcher at Specht & Partner Attorneys at Law.

**Elisabeth Weitz-Polydoros** is a teacher educator at the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria and the University of Vienna. She specializes in foreign language acquisition, and her academic focus is on pedagogical methods for English, French, and Spanish instruction at secondary level. Her courses include English, methodology, CLIL, and drama at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

# Chapter 1

## Advanced English Language Competence at the Intersection of Programme Design, Pedagogical Practice, and Teacher Research: An Introduction



Armin Berger

**Keywords** Comprehensive case study · University of Vienna · Department of English and American Studies · Curricular perspective · Framework for advanced English competence

### 1.1 Aim and Scope of the Book

With a growing societal interest in *advanced* second language (L2) learning and use due to the implications of globalisation, internationalisation, migration, and various other social, economic, and professional forces, the topic of advancedness has become an area of scholarly concern over the past decades. What kind of knowledge and skills do advanced language users have and how do they communicate? Is an instructed setting at university particularly conducive, perhaps even essential, to advanced-level language learning? What level of proficiency can university students realistically reach after several semesters of advanced-level language education? What do tests mean when they certify fluent language use, academic language proficiency, or an excellent command of a very broad range of language? These are just a few of the questions that are of concern to researchers and practitioners in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA), language education, especially in English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) contexts, and language teacher education.

Despite a multifaceted body of literature on adult learners of English, a distinct lack of attention has been paid to *advanced* English language learning in this target group. Because of the diversity of adult learners, the literature has focused primarily on the types of adult ESL/EFL programmes and instructional strategies, ranging

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A. Berger (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [armin.berger@univie.ac.at](mailto:armin.berger@univie.ac.at)

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from basic literacy and life skills for adult immigrants and refugees (e.g., Snow & Kamhi-Stein, 2006) to vocational ESL/EFL and employability skills for professionally trained language learners (e.g., Orem, 2005). A large segment of the literature has focused on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and its instructional basis, aiming to help students cope with the writing requirements in higher education (e.g., Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Tang, 2012). Only recently have studies in SLA started to address the capacity and potential for advanced language learning and use (Byrnes, 2012; Malovrh & Benati, 2018). The research has tended to investigate advanced proficiency from a specific theoretical viewpoint, for example, cognition (e.g., Langacker, 2006), psycholinguistic processing strategies (e.g., Rah & Adone, 2010), the assumption of a critical period or the age factor (e.g., Long et al., 2018), and, linked to it, ultimate attainment (e.g., von Stutterheim & Carroll, 2006).

This volume, *Developing Advanced English Language Competence: A Research-Informed Approach at Tertiary Level*, offers a curricular and instructional perspective on the question of advancedness by providing a profile of advanced-level language development in a specific institutional context. It presents a systematic approach to developing advanced English language competence in students in the teacher education programme or majoring in linguistics, literature, or cultural studies in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. Experienced language teachers, teacher-researchers, and student tutors in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme, the language study component of all curricula offered at the department, reflect on this approach, which rests on the idea that the key actors collaborate at the intersection of (1) programme design, (2) pedagogical practice, and (3) teacher research (i.e., teacher-initiated research to improve practice).

This focus has a number of merits which are worth highlighting. Firstly, unlike other publications, which are often restricted to individual aspects of the curriculum, such as advanced-level L2 writing development (e.g., Byrnes et al., 2010), this volume presents an entire language programme with its diverse range of modules, amalgamating teaching expertise and teacher research with aspects of programme design. Secondly, the volume thus brings together three areas of English language education at tertiary level which are usually treated separately. No publication, to the best of our knowledge, deals with advanced English language competence at the intersection of these three areas. This one, in contrast, consciously seeks to transcend established professional and pedagogical boundaries. It addresses teaching-related aspects of a university language programme and accompanying research conducted in-house, as well as key issues concerning programme management, thereby illustrating how theory and practice interact dynamically in close interrelation. Thirdly, the ELC approach is an integrated approach to language teaching, combining various pedagogical models and methodologies, including, most notably, EAP, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), genre theory, text-based, literacy-based, outcomes-based, competence-based, and action-oriented language teaching. Accordingly, the book does not reflect or promote one specific pedagogical practice; instead, it seeks to advance our understanding of how various approaches and concepts interact in the setting of a tertiary-level language programme. Fourthly, few

publications combine both teachers' and researchers' perspectives. Even fewer cater to those who consider themselves to be teacher-researchers. This volume, in contrast, provides examples of teacher research into teaching, learning, and assessment, where research is understood as systematic and (self-)reflective inquiry into teaching, learning, and assessment with a view to improving one's work. Successful approaches to such inquiry can make a significant contribution to professionalising the field of language teaching in higher education, a goal that is shared by numerous language educators around the world. Such approaches also underscore the need to reconceptualise the role of practitioners, perhaps even reconsider the term 'practitioner' itself, reifying their scholarship-based identity in a university context where, as is often the case, contracts for teaching-only practitioners do not allow much room for active research. Finally, the volume integrates multiple perspectives on developing advanced English language competence. The contributors fulfil roles as language teachers, researchers, teacher-researchers, level coordinators, programme coordinators, and student tutors. Both internal and external members of staff are specialists in various fields, and their backgrounds are as varied as their professional interests, including cognitive-functional grammar, vocabulary acquisition, literature didactics, language testing, business English, and legal English, to name but a few. Different insights can emerge when those multiple perspectives are put together, resulting in an enriched understanding of language education at tertiary level.

With its focus on an Austrian university context, the volume is concerned with the topical issue of developing advanced English language competence from a highly situated point of view. In this sense, the volume represents a case study of advanced-level English development in an instructional setting. It draws on the acknowledged benefits of case studies and their potential to provide a thick description of a complex phenomenon embedded within a specific context, capable of generating new insights into the target phenomenon (Duff, 2008). The localness of the focus, however, does not diminish its relevance. The volume seeks to contribute to improving the accessibility and transparency of higher education systems. The approach presented here can also serve as a catalyst for more discussion on the topic or a source of inspiration for others. Overall, it reflects the current need and desire in English language teaching theory and practice to engage with local approaches and concepts so as to develop a more inclusive and contextualised view of English language education globally. Before the focus of this introduction shifts towards the specific ELC approach, some positioning of this approach and its underlying assumptions is worthwhile.

## 1.2 Perspectives on Advanced Language Competence

The notion of advanced language competence has been conceptualised in a number of different ways. The pertinent research in SLA has focused primarily on the potential and capacity for language learning at advanced levels. While some 15 years ago the knowledge of what constitutes advancedness was very patchy and tentative

(Byrnes, 2006), the theoretical basis for understanding advanced language learning and use has grown considerably, integrating cognitive, social, semantic, and textual aspects of acquisition. The increased interest in advancedness from a wider range of perspectives recently manifested itself in a handbook publication on the topic, *The Handbook of Advanced Proficiency in Second Language Acquisition* (Malovrh & Benati, 2018), which brings together various approaches to investigating advanced L2 language development and use. It reviews specific theoretical frameworks which address advanced-level language development, such as systemic functional linguistics, psycholinguistics, generative grammar, and interaction-driven approaches. It covers individual and context-related factors influencing advanced performance and how it is assessed. The handbook profiles advanced L2 performance linguistically across phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic, and pragmatic domains. Finally, it also explores advanced language proficiency across genres and contexts by discussing topics such as cultural literacy, interlanguage pragmatics, and advanced writing. Synthesising the multiple perspectives in this handbook, we could characterise advancedness as a learner's knowledge and control of a large repertoire of linguistic resources to be used in a number of situations and for various purposes.

In the context of ESL/EFL, one of the most recent developments that has drawn new attention to the advanced language learner, particularly in Europe, was the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020). A framework such as the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) presents a possible route to advanced L2 proficiency, one that is particularly attractive in ESL/EFL contexts, conceptualising as it does language use, competences, and the processes involved in language teaching and learning. The core of this framework is a taxonomy of communicative language activities and strategies along with the competences that language users draw on in such activities, as well as a set of common reference levels and illustrative descriptors defining proficiency from Pre-A1, a level "at which the learner has not yet acquired a generative capacity, but relies upon a repertoire of words and formulaic expressions" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 243), to C2, a level termed "mastery" (p. 37). Thus, the notion of advancedness is captured functionally by a horizontal and a vertical dimension, with advanced learners being able to perform an ever-increasing number of communicative activities in various domains in increasingly complex and sophisticated ways. The C levels, covering the advanced range of the proficiency spectrum, are characterised by language use typical of "proficient users," subdivided into "effective operational proficiency" (C1) and "mastery" (C2). In addition to a focus on argument, effective social discourse, and language awareness, the advanced levels are characterised by a high degree of control, fluency, and flexibility in language use. While level C1 is globally defined as "good access to a broad range of language, which allows fluent, spontaneous communication," level C2 reflects the "degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 36). Whereas the C levels in the original document (Council of Europe, 2001) have been criticised for being clearly underspecified (Green, 2012) and thus inadequate, for example, to describe the language skills and

proficiency required to follow a university course (see North, 2014), the CEFR *Companion Volume* updated the illustrative descriptors with the express purpose of enriching the description of advanced proficiency, particularly at level C2 (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 22). Indeed, a number of illustrative descriptors were added to the top levels for which no descriptor had been available in the original document. In addition, a multitude of new descriptors for mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural competence contribute to defining the ability of advanced language users and learners.

In tertiary education, in particular, advanced language proficiency is often associated with central aspects of EAP. From this perspective, advancedness is expressed in terms of the skills and abilities required to cope with the linguistic demands of an English-speaking university context, sometimes in relation to general academic purposes, possibly coupled with a certain cut score on an internationally recognised proficiency test such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language or the International English Language Testing System, and sometimes in relation to a specific area of study. The focus in EAP is on language skills relevant to academic study, such as advanced listening comprehension, fluency development, presentation skills, discussion skills, critical reading, and academic writing, as well as academic study skills, such as note taking, avoiding plagiarism, and library skills. Especially when academic writing is in focus, the notion of genre has come to play a crucial role (e.g., Bhatia, 2002; Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990). Understanding the move structure of research articles, case studies, reports, proposals, book reviews, and other academic genres, as well as understanding how the specific academic community uses and shapes them, forms an integral part of advanced language learning in university settings. Within this perspective, progression can be captured by a development from pragmatic approaches to understanding and adopting the accepted conventions towards a critical approach involving an awareness of why the conventions exist and when it makes sense to challenge and flout them (Catterall, 2010).

The discussion of advanced language proficiency has also featured prominently in the context of teacher education, not least through work on teacher cognition and teacher knowledge (e.g., Freeman, 2016; Freeman et al., 2015). In this context, advancedness has been discussed not so much in terms of a high level of general English proficiency as in terms of the ability to use English specifically for teaching purposes. Whereas language teaching competence is traditionally associated with a high level of general English proficiency, the inextricability of language proficiency and teaching ability has recently been challenged. Freeman (2017), for example, debunks the common assumption that advanced proficiency automatically means more effective teaching, characterising it as an aspect of ‘native-speakerism’ (Holliday, 2006), which posits that native speakers are better language teachers than non-native speakers, and that improving teachers’ language proficiency will suffice to improve their ability to teach the language effectively. Instead, advancedness is related to the mastery of the particular English that teachers need in order to be able to conduct their lessons effectively, a construct referred to as *English-for-Teaching* (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015; Young et al., 2014). Teachers use specific language knowledge, guided by the curriculum and situated in the social and

pedagogical interactions in the classroom, to manage their lessons, to understand and communicate lesson content, and to assess their students and give them feedback (Freeman et al., 2015). In this ESP view, advancedness is expressed in highly contextualised terms, foregrounding its discipline-specific nature as well as the identities, social relationships, and power relations characteristic of such contexts.

This volume consolidates the different perspectives on advancedness outlined above. Advanced learners of English at the Department of English and American Studies can be characterised as highly proficient language users, controlling a vast repertoire of linguistic resources for a wide range of communicative activities, including reception, production, interaction, and mediation, in many academic and professional, particularly instructional, contexts. They can produce stylistically appropriate texts for various purposes and audiences, as well as adapt texts to make them accessible to different target groups. Graduates have an in-depth awareness of the central aspects that are involved in mastering a language and are able to reflect, analyse, and evaluate their own and other people's language use. The remainder of this introduction first provides some more information on the institutional background and then elaborates on the curricular perspective that this volume offers.

### 1.3 The Institutional Context

With about 3500 active students and more than 100 members of staff, the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, is among the largest in Europe. It offers two bachelor's and three master's degrees. The Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English and American Studies is designed to enable students to engage critically with the English language in general and Anglophone literatures and cultures specifically. After an introductory and orientation period (*Studieneingangs- und Orientierungsphase*) with introductory lectures in linguistics, literary studies, and cultural and media studies, the programme moves towards a deeper exploration of these disciplines and their applied issues. Students learn about geographical, social, historical, and functional variants of the English language, examine representative texts from different periods of Anglophone literatures, and encounter various aspects of the cultural and social history of English-speaking countries. The Bachelor of Education (BEd) prepares students for their future roles as teachers of English as a foreign language at secondary level. The programme is designed to give them a basic grounding in the core areas of language teaching, linguistics, literature, and cultural studies. The knowledge and qualifications gained enable them to understand the complexity of teaching and learning processes, justify their pedagogical practices, and critically reflect on their experiences. The master's programme (MA) in English Language and Linguistics combines a range of approaches to the study of English, including research areas such as functional cognitive linguistics, educational linguistics, English as a lingua franca, and historical linguistics. The MA in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures offers students the opportunity to identify, analyse, and critically engage with



complex cultural phenomena of the Anglophone area, and to apply their knowledge in inter-, multi-, and transcultural situations. Students can specialise in different subject areas, such as British, Irish, and New English Literatures, North American cultures and literatures, and cultural and media studies, with a special focus on transfer processes in culture and media. Finally, the Master of Education (MEd) continues the focus of the bachelor's programme on teaching English as a foreign language and extends it to conducting research in educational contexts. Further information about these degrees is set out on the departmental website (Department of English and American Studies, [n.d.](#)).

What all curricula have in common is their orientation towards advanced language competence. All students, regardless of their degree focus, attend a number of language competence courses provided by the ELC programme, starting at level B2+ according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). The aim of this programme is to teach high-level language courses based on the latest linguistic and didactic research, exploiting a range of teaching methods where the focus is not only on advanced proficiency but also on raising students' awareness of effective language use. Not only do the courses develop students' language skills in a functional sense, they also promote broad linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic knowledge as well as metalinguistic awareness, which enables students to communicate highly successfully in various contexts.

The ELC programme is run by a team of nine internal members of staff, most of them senior lecturers, who are highly qualified and experienced teachers of English as a foreign language at tertiary level. They all have roles as programme, module, or course coordinators, whose responsibility it is to implement quality assurance measures, maintain consistency in courses with up to 12 parallel sections per semester, provide teaching and learning resources, develop test tasks, review course syllabi, schedule regular meetings with colleagues, and instruct new team members. Around 15 external members of staff with temporary part-time contracts support the ELC programme, most of whom also teach in other tertiary institutions. Now that the institutional context has been outlined, the ELC approach and the specific perspective of this volume are described in more detail.

## **1.4 A Curricular Perspective on Advanced Language Competence**

Integrating different notions of advancedness, this volume addresses the topic from a curricular and instructional perspective. University language departments in particular grant students advanced status according to the aims and objectives specified in their curricula. In this vein, the volume provides a profile of advanced-level language development in the form of a curricular progression, pedagogical activities, and research deemed conducive to developing advanced English language competence. More specifically, the focus is on advancedness as conceptualised in the ELC



programme at the University of Vienna, thus on advanced-level language learning and teaching in an instructed EFL setting in tertiary education. What is unique about this approach is that it brings together three areas of English language education that are usually treated separately: programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research. These three areas form the framework within which the development of advanced English language competence is seen as unfolding, based on the idea that the key actors collaborate at the intersection of these areas in a mutually rewarding relationship. Figure 1.1 illustrates this framework.

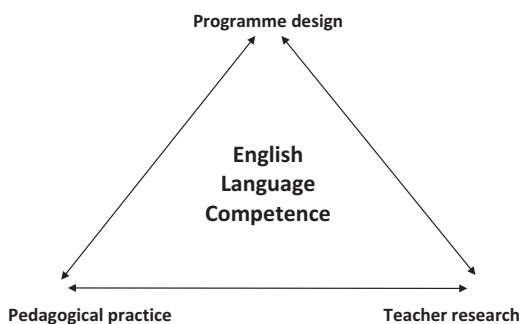
Within this triangle, advanced English language education at tertiary level is the focus or, conversely, advanced language competence provides the lens through which links between programme design, language teaching, and teacher research will be established.

### 1.4.1 Programme Design

The ELC programme in its current form is the result of more than 20 years of curricular development. Historically speaking, three major periods of reform can be distinguished, each one representing an advance over the previous one. Prior to the turn of the millennium, language teaching in the Department of English and American Studies was a rather independent and isolated undertaking of individual lecturers. The programme, which was not called ELC back then, consisted of six successive courses, with content specifications being limited to a general overall topic for each course, such as different aspects of grammar, essay writing, or translation. Apart from a common focus, there was no standardisation; lecturers decided on the contents, objectives, and assessment procedures themselves. There was also a pronunciation course including a weekly language lab.

The second period commenced after a major curriculum reform in 2002. The core of the language programme was transformed into a three-level structure, with each level consisting of two courses: Integrated Language and Study Skills 1 & 2, Language in Use 1 & 2, and Advanced Integrated Language and Study Skills 1 & 2 (Sweeney-Novak, 2006). The first level was *skills-based*, focusing on skills and

**Fig. 1.1** A framework for developing advanced English language competence



strategies required in an academic context; the second level was *skills- and discourse-based*, aiming to develop students' understanding of characteristic features of various discourse formats and effective communication; and the third level was *skills- and text-based*, featuring advanced text analysis and translation. In addition, students selected a topic-specific course, specialising, for example, in translation, advanced oral skills, academic English, or language for specific purposes. A significant milestone in this period was the implementation of a standardised reading and writing test for students at the end of their first year: the Common Final Test (see Martinek & Berger, this volume; Sweeney-Novak, 2006). Another milestone was a test to ensure that students have a minimum level of proficiency before entering the programme: First, a commercially available test was used; for some time now, the test has been developed in-house (see Sweeney-Novak, this volume). One of the major achievements in this period was the production of syllabus documents for every course or module, specifying their rationale, aims, objectives, structure, content, teaching methods, and assessment procedures.

The third period has resulted in the current programme. Figure 1.2 provides an overview of all ELC courses as they feature in the various degree programmes. Although some of the courses have retained the original titles, the course concepts have changed profoundly over the years.

The most recent curriculum reform in 2015 introduced two new courses specifically designed for future teachers of English: Mediation and Genre Analysis for English Teachers (see Smith-Dluha, this volume) and Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (see Richter, "Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers," this volume). Thanks to a dedicated and hard-working team, this period is characterised by an unprecedented commitment towards professionalism, a deliberate effort to encourage teacher research, and a new sense of institutional identity (not least because of the new name ELC). Routinely performed quality assurance activities include, inter alia, rater training, benchmarking sessions, syllabus reviews, staff seminars, and annual retreats to discuss specific issues, reflect on the status-quo, and create a vision for the future of the programme.

Part I of the volume provides a description of the ELC programme with more detailed information about the course syllabi and the rationales behind them. Each contribution, authored by former or current module or course coordinators, is divided into (1) the curricular and theoretical context, (2) the main contents and teaching methods, (3) feedback and assessment, and (4) challenges and future directions. Taken together, these chapters provide a descriptive account of the curricular trajectory towards advanced ability levels.

Kaltenböck and Heaney describe the introductory lectures on English grammar, Language Analysis (LA) and Grammar in Use (GIU), which are designed to give students an overview of the concepts and terminology used in grammatical analysis. Students learn to identify and name the individual parts of syntactic structures, use a variety of resources to find answers to grammar problems, talk informedly about key grammatical categories, and explain and evaluate their use in specific contexts. As such, the two lectures are the foundation for all other ELC courses, but are also relevant to the linguistics, literature, and cultural studies courses. The authors point

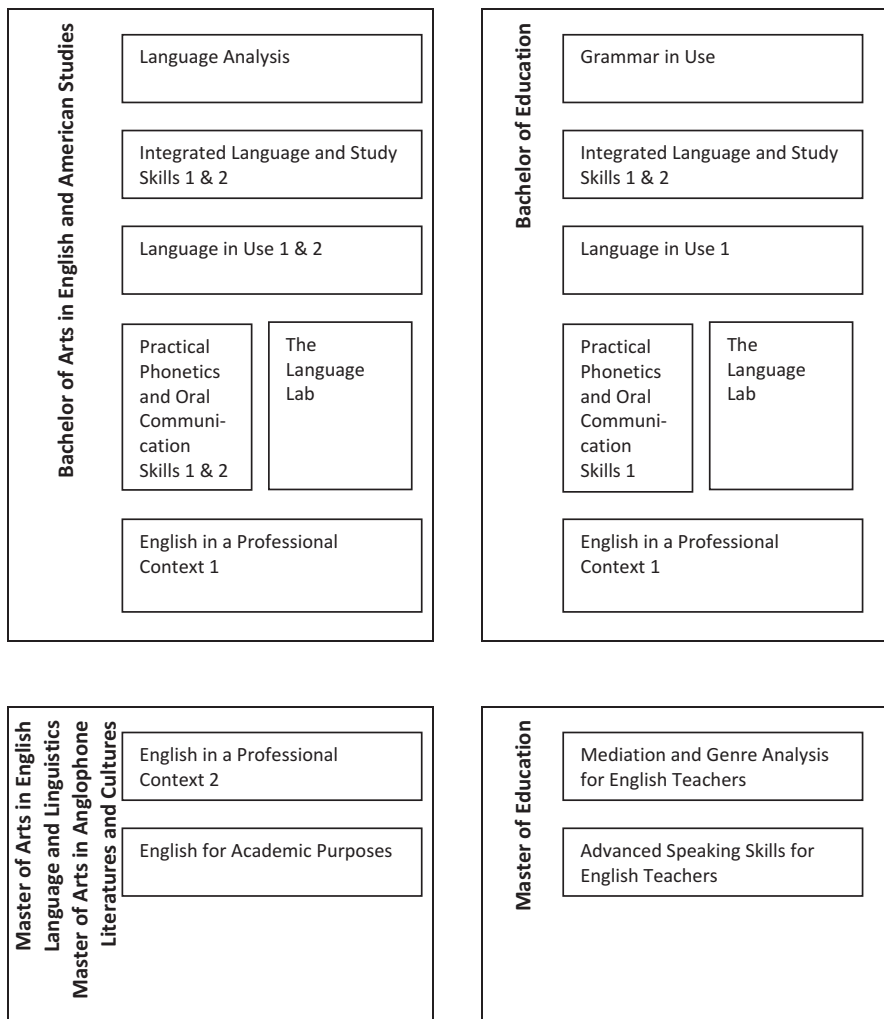


Fig. 1.2 Overview of English Language Competence (ELC) courses

out that the lectures are special in that they combine theoretical knowledge and practical application, include a text/corpus-based perspective, integrate form and function, introduce a view of grammar as a dynamic system, and, despite the lecture format, have a strong interactive component.

Martinek and Savukova introduce Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS), the first two-course ELC module with continuous assessment, where attendance is compulsory and the number of participants is limited to 25 per class, as is the case with all other courses described below. The focus is on integrated language skills and independent study skills as relevant in academic settings, as well as vocabulary development and remedial grammar in selected areas. Students work on text

comprehension and on the production of well-organised and stylistically appropriate argumentative essays. Martinek and Savukova outline a teaching approach where aspects of the writing process, the product, and genre form a dynamic relationship, which has proved to be particularly useful for students transitioning from intermediate language learning at secondary level to advanced language learning at tertiary level.

While ILSS reflects a skills- and outcomes-based approach to language teaching, the Language in Use (LIU) module centres around the concept of text as the starting point for teaching and learning. Schwarz-Peaker describes a text-based approach, where text is understood in a broad sense, encompassing any meaningful written or spoken stretch of language that represents a unified whole. The aim of the module is to help students understand *what* and *how* texts mean in their social contexts, and how a text's purpose, audience, and context interact with lexical, grammatical, and stylistic choices. While the module initially concentrates on text analysis, the focus gradually shifts to text transformation, which involves activities such as changing or adapting a text to make it more appropriate, relevant, or accessible to a different audience, thereby addressing what the CEFR *Companion Volume* refers to as “mediating a text” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91).

The focus on text analysis and transformation is continued in the English in a Professional Context (EPCO) module described by Bruno-Lindner. Unlike in LIU, however, the genres and texts are taken from specific occupational domains such as business, law, science, technology, or medicine, and the focus is on the language and skills specific to these domains. As such, the approach is akin to teaching ESP. Bruno-Lindner emphasises that while the subject area provides the carrier content, the real content, that is the specific language teaching points, are transferable language skills that can be applied in various professional settings. In particular, the module helps students prepare for a future role as language mediators in the workplace. The focus gradually shifts from text analysis to text production and text mediation, especially transforming specialist texts into texts that are accessible to laypeople.

Rieder-Bünemann provides an account of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a module specific to MA students, which helps them to function effectively in academic disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, as well as supports them in the process of preparing and writing their MA theses. Focusing on the discipline-specific nature of academic discourse, the approach is related to teaching English for Specific Academic Purposes. What makes the course special is its tripartite syllabus model covering authorial identity or voice from the perspective of both readers and writers of academic texts, genre conventions within the specific academic discourse community, and textual competence that is sensitive to the L2 learning context. Adopting a social-constructivist view of academic writing, the course considers student genres to be legitimate and independent entities in their own right, and learning to write academic texts in an L2 is viewed as equivalent to learning a language within the language.

Building on the approaches taken in LIU, EPCO, and EAP, Smith-Dluha discusses the rationale behind Mediation and Genre Analysis for English Teachers

(MAGNET), a recently developed course in the MED programme intended for pre-service teachers of English. It is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to cope productively and receptively with a wide range of specialised educational text types. Particular emphasis is placed on the mediation of texts: on the skills required to communicate to somebody else the content of a text to which they may not have access otherwise, as well as to facilitate access to knowledge and ideas for others, which are key concepts in teaching. As Smith-Dluha points out, the focus of MAGNET is not so much on pedagogical knowledge, for example in terms of how different genres are presented to learners or which activities are useful for teaching such genres, but rather on content knowledge and discourse competence, especially in terms of the parameters that shape educational texts and how these parameters affect linguistic encoding and text structure.

Richter's first contribution is concerned with Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills (PPOCS), a module focusing on spoken production and interaction, which is usually taken alongside LIU. PPOCS 1 elaborates on the main aspects of English pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels. Richter positions the course in view of recent debates about the global spread of English and its role as a lingua franca, pointing to the particular needs and attitudes of a very specific student population. She stresses that the aim of the course is not so much perfect imitation of the model accent but rather a high level of phonological control, clarity, and precision, as well as natural and appropriate pronunciation in different communicative situations, along with the ability to exploit pronunciation to convey finer shades of meaning. PPOCS 2 focuses on formal presentation and interactive speaking skills, with a special emphasis on interaction management. The contribution clearly highlights the crucial role of feedback and guidance in developing advanced-level speaking skills.

Schwarz, Milchram, and Wankmüller present the language lab, a weekly student-led tutorial accompanying the PPOCS 1 course. While PPOCS 1 is more input-oriented, the language lab provides the opportunity for students to practise their pronunciation skills through computer-assisted listening and speaking activities, face-to-face interactions with a tutor, and group work with peers. Although the term 'language lab' might be reminiscent of audio-lingual or behaviourist approaches to pronunciation learning, the authors clearly show that the lab offers much more than just record-and-play-back functions. In particular, the communicative activities and the interaction and feedback components reflect more communicative and constructivist-oriented models of pronunciation learning.

Richter's second contribution discusses Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (ASSET), the companion course to MAGNET, specifically designed to develop the presentation, interaction, and mediation skills of pre-service teachers of English in the MED programme. The course is based on the informed assumption that a high level of general proficiency is not sufficient for teachers to prepare and conduct their lessons effectively: Teachers also need to develop an understanding of instruction as a distinct language use domain along with the functional language skills required in that domain. In this sense, ASSET adopts an ESP-based approach to teaching speaking. It discusses characteristic features of classroom discourse and

provides ample opportunity for practising how to make effective use of intonation, voice, turn-taking devices, and lexico-grammatical means to interact successfully in teaching contexts. Richter also stresses the course's emphasis on mediation, particularly in relation to facilitating understanding and communication between others, which includes processes such as managing interaction, supporting collaboration, and encouraging conceptual talk.

The remaining chapters in Part I describe two standardised language tests developed and administered in-house. Sweeney-Novak presents the rationale behind the Vienna English Language Test (VELT), a test designed to ensure that students have a minimum level of linguistic competence before entering the ELC programme. Sweeney-Novak's contribution clearly reflects the basic tension between the validity of testing a relatively narrowly defined construct using multiple-choice items, on the one hand, and the practical need to test several hundred students per semester in an efficient way, on the other. Martinek and Berger then outline the specifications for the Common Final Test (CFT), a reading and writing test taken by all students at the end of ILSS 2. After describing the test purpose, the test construct, and the test methods, the authors address issues of test development and validation. In particular, they consider rating scale validation, rater training, and benchmarking to be important measures of quality assurance. Both tests serve an important gatekeeping function, ensuring high levels of proficiency and achievement. The CFT also has positive washback effects on teaching and learning, which is remarkable given that the resources allocated to language testing, as is often the case in tertiary language education, are extremely limited.

What this brief summary of the chapters in Part I of the volume shows is that the ELC programme is horizontally and vertically aligned so as to assure consistent quality standards and allow for coherent progression through the programme. The horizontal dimension refers to the vast range of (communicative) activities, strategies, and competences, as well as declarative and academic knowledge, deemed relevant in our department; the vertical dimension comprises the ascending sequence of courses representing progress in those categories. Broadly speaking, advancedness is expressed in terms of progression along both dimensions: Advanced students are able to perform a growing number of activities in increasingly sophisticated ways. More specifically, the curricular progression towards more advanced levels of language competence can be summarised along several other continua: Firstly, the programme reflects the tendency that, as proficiency advances, the focus shifts from linguistic aspects such as accuracy, range, and appropriateness to communicative impact and effectiveness. This tendency is reflected both within and across the course modules, most directly in the assessment criteria. For example, the lower bands of the rating scales used in the final oral examinations in PPOCS 2 and ASSET largely refer to linguistic appropriateness, errors, planning, and repair, whereas the higher bands mostly pertain to the skilled use of language and the communicative effect, as expressed by traits such as consistent control, automaticity, ease, flexibility, and skilful use of communicative means (see Berger, 2020). This kind of progression can also be seen across the course modules: LA and GIU have a strong focus on the formal aspects of grammar, ILSS centres on the form and

structure of argumentation, while LIU and EPCO revolve around the implications and effects of specific linguistic choices.

Secondly, progression in the ELC programme is associated with a shift of focus from reception and production to interaction and mediation, both within and across the course modules. Whereas the foundation courses ILSS 1 and 2, for example, address advanced-level reading and essay writing skills, EPCO and MAGNET concentrate on text transformation and strategies to adapt texts for different audiences or purposes. The course module in between, LIU, marks the transition from text analysis to text transformation. This progression seems logical and intuitive, with receptive and productive processes being a prerequisite for mediation.

Another continuum along which advanced-level language learners develop throughout the programme stretches between academic skills and academic identity. In relation to writing, for instance, the lower-level courses such as ILSS tend to follow a skills-based approach, helping students to develop the required writing skills to produce coherent, cohesive, and focused texts typical of academic settings, including, for example, paragraphing, presenting facts, integrating other people's opinions into one's own argument, and citing. Higher-level courses such as EAP, by comparison, foster a richer and more holistic view of academic writing as a social practice, with a strong focus on the role of identity and voice as academic writers (see Rieder-Bünemann & Resnik, [this volume](#)).

Finally, within the strong text-based teaching paradigm in the ELC programme, another dimension of growth is what Byrnes (2012, p. 511) terms an “evolving genre-based literacy.” In an effort to foster a multicompetent literacy foregrounding the humanistically oriented objectives of tertiary foreign language programmes, she proposes a genre-based curricular progression in advanced foreign language writing development from (1) recounting, reporting, and narrative genres in real-life situations to (2) genres that focus on more metaphorical construals of life, characterised by a higher degree of lexical density and syntactic complexity, where the actors involved engage with public and institutional matters taking comparative and contrastive stances, and (3) genres which involve both human and abstract entities in textual spaces, presenting logical arguments in ever more varied and sophisticated ways in a wider range of disciplinary and content areas (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 511–512). Broadly reflecting this trajectory, the sequence of genres produced and/or analysed in the ELC programme includes an opinion essay about general-interest topics on the basis of the writers' own ideas, knowledge, and experience in ILSS 1; an opinion essay integrating data and views from various external sources in ILSS 2; speeches, advertisements, and reviews in LIU 1; more complex (persuasive) literary and non-literary texts in LIU 2; highly specialised texts from different professional domains in EPCO and MAGNET; and academic texts relevant to the humanities and social sciences in EAP. A similar upward trajectory can be seen in relation to the oral presentation genres used throughout the programme: In ILSS 1, students give short presentations on a topic relevant to their peers, for example finding resources in Vienna that can help students practise their English; in ILSS 2, students typically give a group presentation discussing divergent views on a controversial topic of general interest; in PPOCS 2 and ASSET, where there is a distinct focus on



genre-specific presentation skills and impact strategies, students give a short academic presentation on a topic related to communication, critically evaluating theoretical concepts or definitions, the findings of a research paper, the findings of their own original research, or the results of their analysis of a speech, performance, or text; in EPCO, students present an academic poster on the results of their genre-analysis project carried out in groups; and in EAP, finally, students deliver a fully fledged academic presentation on an analysis of an academic text type, followed by a question-and-answer session. As pointed out by Byrnes et al. (2010), whereas a lack of appropriately sequenced progressions may severely limit the potential for growth, principled progressions such as the ones outlined above can greatly facilitate the development of writing and speaking competence.

### 1.4.2 Pedagogical Practice

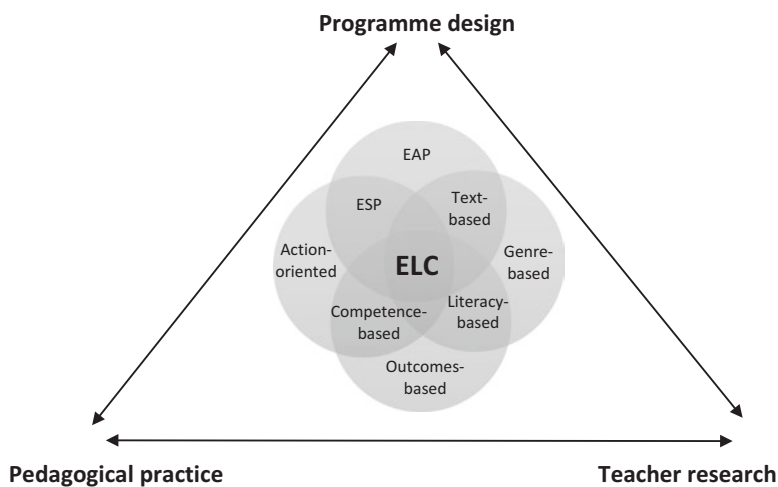
What the brief summary of the chapters in the first part of the volume also shows is that no single one of the common approaches that have informed the teaching of English as a foreign language can adequately capture the ELC concept. For example, the approach underlying ILSS could be summarised as *outcomes- and competence-based*. Key syllabus documents and practices alike are informed by criterion-referenced learning outcomes in relation to the writing of cohesive and coherent essays, high-level reading comprehension skills, and awareness of appropriate, context-sensitive language use. This outcomes-based conceptualisation of the syllabus is linked to the concept of *constructive alignment* (Biggs, 2003), a three-step process of describing the intended learning outcomes and success criteria, engaging learners in activities that are likely to produce the intended outcomes, and assessing whether and how well the learners meet the criteria. While the pre-defined learning outcomes are the glue that holds the pedagogical practice in ILSS together, such an approach is less suitable for a syllabus that aims to develop students' understanding of how people actually communicate in a wide range of contexts. LIU and EPCO, therefore, favour a *text-based* approach, where the concepts of text and genre form the starting point for tasks, activities, and assessments. The two modules aim to develop the students' control of the features and patterns of various text types so as to participate effectively in these texts, both receptively and productively (see Feez, 1998). The strong textual basis in LIU and EPCO is counterbalanced by a focus on other real-life tasks in PPOCS 2 and ASSET. These two courses are informed by the CEFR's *action-oriented* approach in that the syllabi are constructed around carefully selected language functions, reflecting the idea that communication is a purposeful social activity and language learners are social agents who have to accomplish certain tasks "in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment, and within a particular field of action" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9). Whereas the action-oriented approach foregrounds the real-world communicative needs in different domains, it does not adequately capture a range of additional abilities deemed characteristic of advanced language learners in our



context, namely to analyse, interpret, and transform discourse. Such competences, together with the ability to reflect on how discourse is constructed and how it relates to the culture that gave rise to it, feature more prominently in what is commonly subsumed under the heading of *literacy-based* language teaching. ELC courses follow a literacy-based approach in the sense that they place great emphasis not only on *knowing* the language, but also on knowing *about* the language, the use of meta-language, form-function relationships, and metacommunicative awareness – characteristic features of literacy-based language teaching (Kern, 2012). The framework presented above can now be extended to include the main pedagogical approaches underlying the ELC programme.

As can be seen in Fig. 1.3, the ELC approach is an integrated approach to language teaching. It combines various pedagogical models and methodologies, including EAP, ESP, genre theory, text-based, literacy-based, outcomes-based, competence-based, and action-oriented language teaching. Accordingly, the programme is not based on one specific set of assumptions or paradigm; instead, it integrates various approaches which interact in the setting of a tertiary-level language programme. While some might consider the absence of a unified theoretical model to be a weakness, describing the approach as atheoretical or not sufficiently principled (e.g., Leki et al., 2008), such an eclectic approach offers the pragmatic flexibility that is necessary for being responsive to the specific needs of the local context. (A third version of this framework, which specifies the interplay between design, practice, and research, is given in Fig. 29.1 in the concluding chapter of this volume.)

The examples of pedagogical practice presented in Part II of the volume offer a snapshot of the programme's diversity in teaching methods, activities, and materials. Although the programme is horizontally and vertically aligned, the lecturers are used to and proud of their individual agency. The contributions illustrate how



**Fig. 1.3** An extended framework for developing advanced English language competence

individual teachers apply the principle of freedom of teaching within a standardised curriculum. The contributions are grouped according to the communicative activities they target: written reception and production, spoken production and interaction, and text analysis and mediation. Each chapter is organised into (1) a contextualisation, (2) objectives, (3) the procedure, and (4) an evaluation.

The first three contributions address written reception and production. Nazarenko presents a learning tool that helps students gain a fuller understanding of written texts. This tool guides the reading process, activates top-down processing, and draws the students' attention to features that often go unnoticed in a more superficial reading of the text. Prillinger, in turn, provides an account of a creative approach to teaching essay structure by drawing an analogy between argumentative essays and detective stories, thereby successfully curbing the tendency of less advanced students to prioritise form over communicative function. Finally, Savukova describes a coherent way of teaching a linguistic competence that normally receives little attention: punctuation. She explains how she helps her students understand the inherent links between punctuation, sentence structure, and the development of ideas across sentences, using a thoughtfully scaffolded bottom-up approach that gradually shifts from deductive to inductive methods.

The next three contributions in Part II are related to spoken production and interaction. Richter discusses another issue which usually receives little attention in language teaching but may greatly affect students' grades in oral examinations, namely the fear of public speaking. She presents a sequence of activities designed to make students experience stage fright in a controlled setting, reflect on it, and find ways of alleviating it. Savukova and Richter then describe two consecutive teaching sessions on advanced interaction skills, including effective turn-taking and producing longer persuasive turns, especially in spontaneous, unplanned discussions. Roth and Weitz-Polydoros present a procedure for practising ad-hoc speeches on different topics, which aims at fostering students' awareness of academic writing by drawing on some similarities between oral presentation and writing tasks.

The remaining contributions in Part II focus on text analysis and mediation. Nazarenko describes a lesson on the notion of audience, using texts that are all related to the same information but differ in terms of how the information is presented to varying target groups. Müller-Lipold gives an account of how she integrates parody into her teaching, encouraging students to imitate an author's style in one of the writing assignments. Finally, Bruno-Lindner outlines a number of tasks aiming to raise students' awareness of the differences between specialist and non-specialist texts. The focus there is on mediation strategies such as explaining a concept to a new audience and simplifying a text.

### 1.4.3 *Teacher Research*

Besides programme design and pedagogical practice, the third cornerstone of the ELC approach is teacher research. In fact, one motivation for compiling this volume was the growing need and desire for teachers in tertiary language education to engage in research, thereby reconceptualising their traditional role and identity. While some writers have made a strong case for increased teacher engagement in development, scholarship, and research (e.g., Borg, 2013), remarkably little has been written from the practitioners' perspective, either theoretically or practically (Ding & Bruce, 2017). This is particularly true in relation to teacher involvement in programme management and research activity: Curriculum design is usually considered to be the responsibility of programme managers, and research is typically associated with researchers rather than teachers (Coombe & Sheetz, 2015). However, the identity and agency of university language teachers is changing, given the social, political, and economic influences on tertiary language education in recent years. In addition to their core activity of teaching, practitioners are increasingly being encouraged to engage in additional academic and managerial responsibilities, a form of practitioner development which is considered vital for both individuals and the profession as a whole (Ding & Bruce, 2017). We therefore contend that a publication from the perspective of practitioners addressing the interplay between programme design, language teaching, and their own research is long overdue.

Our working definition of teacher research is based on Borg (2015), who describes it as “systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, individually or collaboratively, in their own professional contexts, which aims to enhance teachers’ understandings of some aspect of their own work, and is made public in some way” (p. 105). The contributions in Part III of the volume subscribe to this understanding, reflecting the overall aim of the research to yield insights that are socially useful, either because they help our students to develop advanced English language competence or because they are beneficial to other practitioners in similar contexts. Part III contains different types of studies: teacher research relevant to day-to-day classroom practice, studies on learner beliefs, validation research on testing and assessment procedures, and a study relating to programme design. Methodologically, the research is inclusive, encompassing the range of both qualitative and quantitative approaches that is typical of teacher research (e.g., Borg, 2015).

Adopting a contextual, student-centred approach, Rieder-Bünemann and Resnik investigate advanced learners’ conceptions of academic L2 writing in English. Using guided reflections and questionnaire data, they identify students’ perceived challenges of academic writing prior to attending the EAP course, compare them to the students’ impressions about academic writing in the first language, and observe changes in perception at the end of the EAP course. The authors show that even advanced learners of English face considerable challenges when it comes to academic writing, supporting the view that learning to write academically in a foreign language is similar to learning another language within the language. At the same time, the results show that targeted input and support can change learners’

perceptions significantly and help students become more competent and confident members of the academic community. Such studies are highly useful for students and teachers alike, underlining the importance of aligning pedagogical practice with learner needs and beliefs.

Schiftner-Tengg explores an aspect of L2 writing which was perceived as a major challenge in Rieder-Bünemann and Resnik's study, namely rhetorical structure. More specifically, taking a discourse-sensitive approach, Schiftner-Tengg addresses the question of whether and how connectives contribute to the coherence of student writing produced in the context of ILSS. Her analytical framework is innovative in that it combines three layers of analysis: global coherence ratings, the connectives used, and a text's coherence structure. The findings show that it is not so much the number as the type of connectives that contribute to the perceived coherence in a learner text, and whether relations are marked in a text depends on the type of relation, which suggests that the use of connectives is secondary to the underlying meaning relations. These results have important implications for teaching not just in ILSS but especially in contexts where there is a tendency to teach connectives either as the main means of indicating relational structure or dissociated from the meaning relations they signal.

Heaney investigates the perceived effectiveness of a learning tool used in ILSS and LIU, the so-called vocabulary log. The idea of this tool is for students to keep an individualised written record of some of their work on learning unfamiliar vocabulary items. Students are encouraged to experiment with new strategies for planning, discovering, recording, and consolidating vocabulary knowledge. Heaney presents the results of an online survey, showing that the lecturers generally have a higher opinion of the utility of this tool than the students. She suggests that raising students' awareness of the purpose of individual tasks and a more efficient use of diagnostic tools could further improve the vocabulary learning component. Heaney's contribution is a notable example of how teacher research employs student feedback to evaluate and improve the teaching instruments used in the programme.

In another study related to vocabulary, Ghamarian offers a diachronic perspective on vocabulary development throughout the ELC programme. She analyses written performances of students as they progress from ILSS 1 to ILSS 2 and EAP. Employing corpus analytic methods, she determines the distribution of academic, high-frequency, technical, and low-frequency vocabulary. The findings show that students' use of academic and technical language generally increases as they progress through the programme. At the same time, there are individual differences in developmental patterns. As the results of this small-scale study defy generalisation, Ghamarian calls for more longitudinal corpus research on vocabulary development to support students in their efforts to increase lexical range and control.

Berger's research is concerned with advanced-level speaking assessment. It is a comparative study of two types of rating scales designed for PPOCS 2: One distinguishes between the scale bands by means of interdependent, abstract qualifiers (e.g., *some*, *many*, *most*); the other one uses independent, concrete performance features to differentiate the bands. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed to determine the effectiveness of the scales. Many-facet Rasch analysis

shows that although raters are able to develop a shared understanding of abstract descriptor formulations, concrete performance features can be interpreted more easily. Retrospective group interviews with raters confirm the superiority of concrete distinctions over abstract ones. Such studies offer valuable insights into our assessment procedures; they are part of important validation research which language programmes, if professionalism is taken seriously, should routinely perform.

In her contribution on foreign accent and the role of identity in the adult EFL pronunciation classroom, Richter addresses an issue that has long been acknowledged as an influential factor in advanced L2 learning, exploring the relationship between identity perceptions and achievement in pronunciation learning in the context of PPOCS 1. The findings indicate that the link between identity and achievement in pronunciation learning is not as strong as one could assume in the light of much of the literature. Trying to approximate a model accent seems to extend rather than change the learners' identity. However, as Richter aptly points out, the focus of the study is highly specific, involving a non-representative group of learners; generalisations are therefore hardly possible. In terms of teaching, Richter suggests that learners could use specific role models rather than a number of different native speakers of English.

Berger's second contribution is situated in the context of designing the course syllabus for ASSET, which conceptualises teacher language proficiency as a specialised set of language abilities required in addition to general communicative ability. The survey study explores the perceived needs of pre-service teachers of English in relation to speaking ability for classroom purposes. The results show that learning needs seem to exist particularly in relation to three areas: giving feedback, mediating, and scaffolding. The study was instrumental in designing the ASSET syllabus; it also offers possible implications for characterising teacher language competence more generally.

Taken together, the chapters in Part III reflect the trend in higher education towards research-informed language teaching as well as the growing conviction that teachers are not just passive consumers of research done by others but active producers of expert knowledge in the areas of teaching, research, and programme design.

## **1.5 Relevance of the Book**

To conclude this introductory chapter, a final word should be said about the relevance of this book. The volume represents a curricular and instructional approach to developing advanced English competence at the intersection of programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research. The curricular, pedagogical, and research activities are linked to a specific group of teachers catering to a special group of advanced EFL learners in a particular university context. However, although the ELC approach is highly situated, it has relevance beyond the bounds of the local context. In fact, the setting of a specific tertiary-level language programme provides an ideal locus for revealing and exploring the symbiosis between

programme design, teaching, and research in advanced language education. It also provides a concrete basis for understanding the dynamics, interactions, and complexities of a system in action, and the implications of the programme for students, teachers, and programme managers can be revealed. In this view, the holistic and in-depth characterisation of the curricular concept, the illustrative examples of pedagogical practice, and the presentation of programme-specific teacher research can benefit other university language programmes regardless of any conceptual or contextual differences. The volume presents a unique, but possibly not uncommon, perspective on some key issues in tertiary language education by (1) establishing a clear relationship between programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research, (2) making curricular thinking, pedagogical practice, and assessment criteria transparent, (3) providing a descriptive definition of curricular progression, (4) operationalising this progression through pedagogical practice and assessment, (5) demonstrating horizontal and vertical alignment across programme modules, (6) illustrating pedagogical practice in a programme that encourages standardisation without uniformity, (7) addressing challenges for both students and lecturers as well as suggesting future directions, (8) extending the roles of language teachers to curriculum designers and module coordinators, and (9) redefining teacher identities by integrating teacher research into a programme where teaching-only contracts are the norm. All this seriously challenges a commonly held view that language competence programmes merely function as auxiliary units within larger departments and accords such programmes the scholarly status they deserve. Viewed in that light, the ELC approach has wider currency not although but *because* it is highly situated. By presenting a local approach, the volume contributes to developing a more comprehensive and contextualised view of English language education worldwide. I would like to conclude with Byrnes's (2012, p. 516) assertion that clear, context-sensitive, and transparent links between the curriculum, teaching, and assessment practices are the basis for an articulated educational philosophy, which in turn provides a basis for developing advanced L2 competence.

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**Part I**  
**The English Language Competence**  
**Programme at the University of Vienna**

# Chapter 2

## Language Analysis & Grammar in Use



Gunther Kaltenböck and Helen Heaney

**Keywords** Advanced English grammar · Descriptive grammar · Corpus-based grammar teaching · Grammar as a dynamic system · Lecture format

### 2.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

This chapter outlines two introductory lectures on English grammar, Language Analysis (LA) and Grammar in Use (GIU), which are part of the English Language Competence (ELC) programme offered by the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. Although LA is for students pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English and American Studies and GIU is for students in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme, they both share the same overall objectives and are therefore discussed together here. As the titles suggest, they are both about grammar and analysing English sentences with respect to their component parts. More specifically, they provide an overview of fundamental grammatical terms and concepts used for describing English sentences and texts. In doing so, the lectures demonstrate how grammar is used for communication and how language structures can be explained and evaluated in context, reflecting the general goal of giving students a better understanding of the concept of grammar. Other aims include students being able to (i) identify and name individual parts of syntactic structures, (ii) talk informedly about key grammatical categories and explain their

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G. Kaltenböck (✉)

Department of English Studies, University of Graz, Graz, Austria  
e-mail: [gunther.kaltenboeck@uni-graz.at](mailto:gunther.kaltenboeck@uni-graz.at)

H. Heaney

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [helen.heaney@univie.ac.at](mailto:helen.heaney@univie.ac.at)

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use in a given context, (iii) evaluate the appropriate use of grammar in specific contexts, and (iv) make independent and judicious use of a variety of resources to find answers to grammar issues. These introductory lectures thus provide an important foundation for language classes and linguistics courses alike.

As introductory grammar courses, the lectures draw on a long-standing tradition of English grammar teaching and introductory grammar literature. Leaving aside here reference grammars (e.g., Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk et al., 1985) and the wide-ranging area of grammar teaching methodology (e.g., Batstone, 1994), the publications on this topic generally fall into two main strands: introductory grammar textbooks and grammar practice books. The former provide a comprehensive overview of grammatical structures and the corresponding terminology, they are typically aimed at linguistics students at tertiary level, often very much form-focused, and may be tied to specific linguistic frameworks (such as generative grammar). Typical examples of this type are Collins and Hollo (2017) or Depraetere and Langford (2019). The latter are proficiency practice books, often on select grammar topics, which contain brief explanations and numerous examples, with the focus being on the appropriate use of specific grammatical structures. Typical examples of this type are Hewings (2005) and Vince (2009). Our lectures straddle both strands in that they attempt to provide a fairly comprehensive overview of the concepts and terms involved in grammatical description while still incorporating a number of practical usage questions. After all, the lectures are part of the ELC programme and not pure linguistics courses.

What makes the lectures special is not only their combination of theoretical knowledge and practical application but also a range of other characteristics, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

## 2.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

The aim of most tertiary-level grammar courses is, not surprisingly, to provide a fairly comprehensive coverage of the main topics of English grammar. And our lectures are no exception to that, as can be seen from the overview of teaching units in Table 2.1, which are given for GIU but are very similar for LA. However, where our lectures differ from more traditional grammar courses is in a number of characteristics, which are briefly outlined below. These are (i) including a text/corpus-based perspective, (ii) integrating form and function, (iii) incorporating an interactive component, and (iv) introducing a view of grammar as a dynamic system.

### 2.2.1 *Including a Text/Corpus-Based Perspective*

Although the focus is on analysing sentence structure, the use of specific grammatical constructions can only be fully understood in context (see Aarts et al., 2018, p. 8). Using authentic text extracts (both literary and non-literary) and

**Table 2.1** Contents of GIU by teaching unit

Unit	Topics
1	<b>The nature of the beast: what exactly is grammar?</b> Definition, collocation, prescriptive-descriptive
2	<b>A bird's eye view: the grammatical landscape</b> Constituents, sentence, clause, syntactic categories
3	<b>The skeleton of the message: syntactic functions</b> Subject, predicate, object, complement, adjunct
4	<b>Talking about 'things': the Noun Phrase</b> Types of noun, NP structure, determiner, relative clause
5	<b>Talking about 'events': the Verb Phrase</b> Situation types, VP structure, progressive aspect
6	<b>Expressing time: tense</b> Past & present, present perfect, past perfect, future
7	<b>Taking a stance: modality</b> Types of modality, modals, clause types
8	<b>Elaborating the message: AdjP, AdvP, PP</b> Adjective phrase, adverb phrase, prepositional phrase, gradience
9	<b>Expanding the structure: the complex sentence 1</b> Sentence types, finite subordinate clauses
10	<b>Expanding the structure: the complex sentence 2</b> Non-finite subordinate clauses
11	<b>Organising the message: information packaging 1</b> Principles of information packaging, passive
12	<b>Organising the message: information packaging 2</b> Existential <i>there</i> , inversion, clefts, indirect object shift, extraposition

corpora can be particularly useful in this respect. While the lectures are not intended to provide a systematic introduction to corpus linguistics, they try to familiarise students with the advantages of using online corpora. Therefore, at crucial points in the lectures, select usage questions are illustrated with the help of the *British National Corpus* (Davies, 2004-) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (Davies, 2008-). These large-scale corpora have the advantage of being freely available online and very user-friendly.

Using corpora for grammatical analysis has several advantages. Not only do they provide examples of actual language use with context (or rather co-text), they also offer information on frequency of occurrence in different text types (such as spoken and written). Take, for instance, *if*-clauses, where the corpora can be used to demonstrate that the string “if I was” (e.g., *If I was rich*) is frequently attested in spoken language. And corpora are, of course, the perfect resource for illustrating collocation patterns, such as adverbs collocating with certain verbs (e.g., *to rain heavily*) or adjectives (e.g., *extremely/pretty good*), or dependent prepositions (e.g., *to abide by, aghast at*).

Using corpora also fundamentally changes the role of the students, who are no longer just passive recipients of quasi god-given “rules” as decreed by some nebulous grammar authority. Instead they can become “researchers” in their own right

with the potential of uncovering grammatical patterns and regularities themselves (see Kaltenböck & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2005; see also Sect. 2.3).

### 2.2.2 *Integrating Form and Function*

Despite the necessary focus on the formal aspects of grammar and the ability to identify basic grammatical structures, it is an explicit aim of the lectures not to lose sight of the meaning side of grammar (see Kaltenböck, 1998). After all, that is what grammar is all about at the end of the day: making meaning and communicating ideas. Meaning is incorporated in a variety of ways, from explicitly talking about it to focussing students' attention on it in discrimination exercises (e.g., what is the difference in meaning between *Madonna comes to Vienna in June* vs. *Madonna is coming to Vienna in June*) and discussing short literary and non-literary texts (see Sect. 2.1 above).

Particular emphasis is also given to providing cognitive-functional explanations rather than just random lists of uses. A case in point is the progressive aspect, for which grammar books often provide a taxonomy of seemingly unrelated uses such as “change in progress,” “habitual actions,” “regrettable habit with *always*.” All these different uses can, however, equally (and more plausibly) be accounted for by assuming an underlying abstract meaning of the progressive aspect in the form of a “temporal frame” (e.g., Leech, 2004) and its various interactions with different situation types (i.e., the lexical aspect), as expressed, for instance, by state and event verbs (e.g., Depraetere & Langford, 2019).

Finally, the question why we use certain constructions rather than others is also explored in two lecture units dedicated to the principle of information packaging (for an overview, see, for example, Kaltenböck, 2019). By looking beyond the sentence at how a structure fits in with the larger text in terms of given and new information, students get a sense that the choice of a particular construction (such as *Mary gave John the book* vs. *Mary gave the book to John*) is not random but conditioned by contextual factors (amongst others).

### 2.2.3 *Incorporating an Interactive Component*

Given the traditional lecture format and large number of participants, active student participation and interaction among students are necessarily limited. This represents a challenge for a grammar course, which needs at least some element of practice to avoid becoming too theoretical. We try to overcome this problem by incorporating some interactive elements. Firstly, active student participation is encouraged by inductive teaching, for instance in the form of mini-tasks for reflection and interaction with fellow students in the lecture. Secondly, “discovery/exploratory learning” (e.g., Bernardini, 2004) is promoted with the help of corpora, which put the students

in the position of a researcher and foster learner independence (see Sect. 2.1 above). Finally, a weekly face-to-face tutorial is offered with an experienced student tutor for revising and consolidating the lecture content.

### 2.2.4 *Introducing a View of Grammar as a Dynamic System*

Our lectures, finally, also aim to convey a view of grammar that contrasts starkly with the prescriptive norms that students were typically exposed to at school. Rather than providing them with a taxonomic list of fixed rules, we try to raise awareness for the essentially dynamic nature of the grammatical system. The following dynamic characteristics are particularly important for the purpose of our lectures.

First and foremost, the boundaries of grammatical categories are not clear-cut but fuzzy. This phenomenon is usually referred to by the concept of *gradience*, which allows for prototypical and peripheral members of a category as well as for cases which are indeterminate between two categories. Next, in order to determine membership in a particular syntactic class (e.g., adjective) and for syntactic analysis more generally, we have to engage in *syntactic argumentation*. This implies making a case for a particular analysis by providing appropriate evidence for it (e.g., syntactic tests, a set of properties; see Aarts, 2017). For instance, is *many* an adjective or a determiner? Then, the grammatical system adapts to the changing communicative needs of speakers over time. Consequently, membership in a syntactic class is not fixed but may change, as is illustrated by the case of *fun*, which started out as a noun but is now also used as an adjective (e.g., *a fun story*). Finally, grammar adapts to the communicative needs of the specific situation. In other words, the grammatical choices we make are conditioned by parameters such as degree of formality, text type (e.g., spoken or written), the speaker and the audience, and regional variation, to name but a few.

This view of grammar as an adaptive, dynamic system has important consequences for the role of the learners: They will hopefully see grammar no longer as just a list of fixed abstract rules but more as a network of choices, which depend on a number of parameters. In this way, syntactic analysis becomes more of a problem-solving activity, rather than an exercise in memorising rules. It requires students to argue a particular analysis and provide evidence for it, which, in turn, is beneficial for learner independence and autonomy.

## 2.3 Feedback and Assessment

The types of feedback given and the assessment methods used are essentially determined by the format of each course as a lecture with potentially over 300 registered participants (albeit with voluntary attendance). During the interactive group work as well as before and after the 90-min sessions, the lecturer can answer questions; in

the weekly tutorials, which are voluntary and can only cater for much smaller numbers, the student tutor does the same. The lecturer's office hours, the department's coaching programme, and self-regulated study groups round off the opportunities for face-to-face feedback. An innovative approach to providing real-time feedback to everybody present in the lecture involves audience-response systems, such as the use of word clouds to see which concepts students found most difficult or interesting or selection items to determine which concept should be explained again at the beginning of the next lecture.

The unit-based forums on Moodle, the university's online learning platform, are designed for the discussion of specific open points. The rationale behind these is that students help themselves and each other by answering each other's questions. The student tutor only steps in if additional explanations are required. Tasks are provided for further exploration and consolidation in the accompanying lecture handout, with answers made available on Moodle with a time lag. There are also online exercises with automatic feedback, and recommendations for further on- and offline resources for self-study are promoted in the lecture handout and on Moodle with a view to supporting learning autonomy. As the last type of selected-response-type feedback (i.e., predetermined by the compiler rather than focusing on students' specific wishes), there is a mock exam on Moodle, which simulates the format and timing of the end-of-course examination.

Without going into the administrative issues which mean that certain aspects of the final tests for the two courses differ quite substantially, what they have in common is that both consist of 45 multiple-option items to be answered in 45 min. Out of the three to maybe six or seven responses given, at least one is correct and at least one is incorrect. Together, the correct responses add up to one point per item. Content-wise, the three main areas covered are (i) matching labels for specified grammatical features to examples (or vice versa), (ii) identifying grammatical concepts in a given example, and (iii) matching explanations to examples in relation to the meaning and use of grammatical concepts. Students may come and look at their exams in the lecturer's office hours.

## 2.4 Challenges and Future Directions

We will discuss some of the challenges and future directions in reverse order, so to speak, starting with the type of assessment and feedback, continuing with the teaching methods and content, and rounding off our chapter in relation to the broader context of the lectures.

Although students who have attended an Austrian school are more familiar with selected response formats now that there is a standardised and centralised school-leaving examination, they probably have not had so much exposure to multiple-option items. As a correct answer is "cancelled out" by an incorrect answer, too much guessing could be detrimental, although the score per item cannot fall below zero. Furthermore, students who come to look at their exams often prove to have

chosen two responses within an item which contradict each other directly, again suggesting that guesswork is at play. It could be advantageous for test takers' examination strategies to rewrite items to indicate how many correct responses there are. As for improving opportunities for feedback, student numbers continue to be challenging, and it is difficult to see how more detailed advice on individual students' weak points can be provided without compromising test security.

Teaching-wise, developments in the pipeline may well help compensate for some of the challenges described above. University-wide, new resources have been made available for the current buzzwords of tertiary education, such as blended learning (e.g., Sharma, 2010) and flipped classrooms (e.g., Bergman & Sams, 2012), with concept videos being produced for the introductory lectures, which explain some of the more difficult grammatical features and technical/didactic support being provided for flipped-classroom scenarios. As both lectures are already more interactive than students might expect, continuing along the path we have set out on is an attractive proposition.

Finally, to turn to the broader context of grammar in use, research aligning “key language points ... for grammar, vocabulary, discourse markers and functions” (British Council, n.d.) to the different levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) could be used to tweak the focus in some of the units in both lectures to emphasise those areas of grammar which have been shown to be particularly pertinent at levels B2+, the expected student entry level, and above (see also Milanovic & Saville, 2012-). Some students also need reminding in ILSS 1, the first language course in the ELC programme, that they have learnt (or are learning) about complex grammar in LA or GIU which could be immediately useful for improving their own writing skills. Although complicated by the fact that the terminology used in the two lectures does not overlap completely, it would surely be advantageous for lecturers in the ILSS module to exploit the synergies between the lectures and continuous-assessment courses more explicitly.

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# Chapter 3

## Integrated Language and Study Skills



Thomas Martinek and Galina Savukova

**Keywords** Teaching academic writing · Teaching academic reading · Feed-forward strategies · Writing as a process · Argumentative essay

### 3.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS) is the first language module in the English Language Competence (ELC) program at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna. ILSS 1 is taken by first-year undergraduates in their second semester after they have successfully completed the introductory phase of their studies (*Studieneingangs- und Orientierungsphase*, or *StEOP*) and passed the Vienna English Language Test (VELT, see Sweeney-Novak, [this volume](#)), which ensures a minimum level of B2+ according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001). ILSS 2 is taken upon successful completion of ILSS 1.

The ILSS module facilitates vertical coherence between upper-secondary and tertiary education as well as within the two undergraduate study programs offered at the department: Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English and American Studies and Bachelor of Education (BEd) in English. ILSS 1 assists learners in transitioning from school to university by honing their language skills and developing study strategies relevant in academic settings. Emphasis is placed on producing cohesive and coherent written texts, refining high-level reading comprehension skills, expanding

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T. Martinek (✉) · G. Savukova

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [thomas.martinek@univie.ac.at](mailto:thomas.martinek@univie.ac.at); [galina.savukova@univie.ac.at](mailto:galina.savukova@univie.ac.at)

vocabulary, and fostering awareness of appropriate, context-sensitive language use, in particular of register variation. The genre on which students focus in written text production – an argumentative essay – was deliberately chosen to forge a link with foreign-language teaching in Austrian schools at upper-secondary level, where an ‘opinion essay’ is one of the text types potentially included in the English school-leaving examination.

As up to 12 parallel ILSS courses are offered each semester, it is crucial for ILSS level coordinators and lecturers to achieve horizontal coherence. Lecturers’ meetings are held at the beginning of each semester, providing members of the team with the opportunity to exchange views on recent developments in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching methodology, to receive updates on curricular and administrative requirements, to exchange course materials, and to troubleshoot. Rater training sessions, similarly held once a semester, focus on salient features of the ILSS rating scales, on analyzing selected test performances by students, and on defining benchmark texts with a view to increasing inter- and intra-rater reliability (for a detailed discussion of rater standardization and reliability, see Ackermann & Kennedy, 2010; Gorsuch & Griffiee, 2018). The level coordinators also continuously update the ILSS ‘metacourse’ on the university’s e-learning platform Moodle, which facilitates communication and exchange of materials among ILSS lecturers by complementing face-to-face interaction.

While a substantial amount of course material is provided and horizontal coherence is monitored by the level coordinators, individual lecturers develop their own teaching units. They adapt various approaches that subscribe to the principles of communicative language teaching and target advanced language learners striving to develop their communicative language competences as outlined in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 101–130) and the *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 129–142). One of the commonly used methods is integrating work on several skills into one teaching unit, which ensures that students are exposed to authentic materials, language, and interaction in order to “gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language” (Oxford, 2001, p. 11) as employed in academic communication.

Not only are several skills frequently addressed within a single ILSS session, but also work on a particular skill may integrate components from various theoretical and methodological approaches. For instance, ILSS writing practice takes place at what Cislaru calls the “process-product interface” (2015, p. 1). The ILSS writing component addresses the “real-time dynamics of the writing process” while also focusing on “the product anchored in its formal dimensions and its pragmatic functions” (Cislaru, 2015, p. 13) and acknowledging that writing, like all acts of communicating meaning, is “always *situated* within specific social practices within specific Discourses” (Gee, 2000, p. 189). In agreement with Racelis and Matsuda’s suggestion (2013, p. 390), ILSS writing pedagogy conceives of process, product, and genre approaches as complementary rather than conflicting notions; elements from these three approaches are synthesized along the lines of Badger and White’s “process genre approach” (2000, pp. 157–160).

## 3.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

In the course of ILSS 1, students identify and develop complex lines of argument, tailoring their own texts to an academic community of readers. The study skills component of the course assists them in finding appropriate tools for this. Thus, the course helps learners to redefine their voice in their new learning environment, where precision, logic, and flexibility are key.

In ILSS 2, in addition to refining the reading, writing, and study skills acquired in the previous semester, students learn to process material from external academic sources so as to smoothly integrate salient points into their own texts. In the Common Final Test (CFT), a standardized advanced reading and writing test at the end of ILSS 2 (see Martinek & Berger, [this volume](#)), students are expected to demonstrate the competences necessary to engage in a dialogue with the academic community, which is a prerequisite for linguistics, literature, and cultural studies courses offered at the department.

Even though ILSS units frequently integrate work on various skills, the specific aims and objectives were formulated for separate language and study skills. One crucial aim is to develop high-level reading strategies, which include skimming, scanning, identifying structural devices and textual development, differentiating between main ideas and supporting details, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and inferring meaning from context.

These reading objectives are related to the ILSS writing aims: as students are increasingly able to follow complex informative and argumentative texts, they become aware of the need to examine sources critically before integrating citations into their own line of argumentation. During the ILSS module, students acquire skills of presenting reasoned and well-structured arguments in coherent, cohesive, and focused texts: they learn to develop ideas logically, to use organizational patterns (e.g., paragraphing, structuring information, signposting) effectively, to express their opinion and support it with examples from their own knowledge and experience and/or with relevant evidence from a range of academic sources, including quotations and quantitative data. Thus, they learn to summarize, paraphrase, cite, compare, contrast, evaluate, and challenge ideas.

In order to effectively use varied, appropriate, and accurate language in their texts, students need to expand their vocabulary, increase their knowledge of grammar, and heighten their awareness of style and register. The study skills component of ILSS aims to develop students' ability to reflect on their own language competence, to address their individual language needs, and to form independent study habits. Various activities and links provided on Moodle, as well as a 'Toolkit' which suggests select self-study and reference materials, serve this purpose, assisting students with locating relevant resources. A central factor fostering learner autonomy is keeping a vocabulary log throughout the semester: students are required to follow a set of standardized instructions, which nevertheless provide substantial room for an individualized approach and creativity (see Heaney, [this volume](#)).

As speaking and listening are the main focus of the Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills courses (see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)), the ILSS module does not prioritize these skills but integrates speaking and listening practice into reading, writing, and vocabulary tasks. For instance, students have to create a vocabulary handout to accompany group presentations and discussions, where they aim to present a topic or argument concisely and fluently. Other vocabulary tasks frequently rely on audio and video materials. Thus, students expand their vocabulary in tandem with honing their listening and speaking skills.

ILSS lecturers incorporate a wide range of teaching methods, interaction formats, and course materials to ensure that all types of learners are potentially able to achieve the course aims. For instance, in addition to tasks focusing on specific reading skills, texts are frequently perused with a view to identifying the line of argument, rhetorical moves, and useful lexical or grammatical items that students can employ in their own writing. The findings are then compared in groups to extend student talking time, to help learners to negotiate meaning, to improve their grasp of terminology, and to develop their fluency in discussing texts at an advanced level.

During ILSS writing practice, elements from product approaches often inform activities in the initial stages, for instance when the salient features of argumentative essays are reviewed. Course participants rate the effectiveness of several introductions to student essays written on the same topic, creating assessment criteria within their small groups; later, they are asked to match the introductions to the conclusions from these essays and to extend their assessment criteria to conclusions. Therefore, as outlined in Dann’s concept of “assessment as learning” (2002), the students’ reflection on assessment criteria becomes part of the learning process. While seemingly focusing on the end result, this activity also fosters problem-based experiential learning when students evaluate texts as addressees rather than solely in accordance with the criteria provided by the teacher.

The importance of the target audience, a key feature of genre approaches, is emphasized in both ILSS courses: students gradually become aware of the profound implications of an academic readership, as well as of the purpose of the text, for the structural features and language of academic essays. In this context, major emphasis is placed on developing greater sensitivity to register variation, which is a departure from writing at upper-secondary level in Austrian schools.

ILSS lecturers do not promote what Racelis and Matsuda term a “staged view” (2013, p. 386) of the writing process, a linear movement from pre-writing to drafting to revising and editing stages; instead, they emphasize the “recursive and dynamic” (2013, p. 386) nature of this process, with writers continuously moving back and forth between the stages. ILSS process-oriented writing activities are often shaped as in-class writing workshops and include freewriting, mind-mapping, outlining, reverse outlining, drafting, self- and peer-editing, and conferencing.

The fact that crucial elements of the writing process are brought into face-to-face sessions, with actual drafting and composition phases taking place in the classroom, demonstrates that ILSS lecturers incorporate elements of the “flipped classroom” model as defined by Herreid and Schiller (2013, p. 62). Instruction – for instance,

on text types; on writing skills such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and developing an argument; on reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and inferencing; and on vocabulary learning strategies for noticing, selecting, and recording vocabulary items – is frequently provided before the in-class sessions, mostly via Moodle, in the form of reading and awareness-raising tasks as well as audio and video materials. This approach not only fosters learner autonomy but also creates room for practicing more advanced skills in class: with students focusing at home on what Brinks Lockwood (2014, p. xvi) terms “lower-order skills,” namely knowledge acquisition and general comprehension, ILSS class time is frequently devoted to “higher-level skills (application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation)” (2014, p. 1).

The learner-centered methods, with a focus on individualization and flexibility, are often complemented by careful scaffolding, ranging from content to metacognitive types (see, for example, Walqui, 2006), when students are provided with the guidance and support they need to achieve the learning outcomes and, when a sufficient level is reached, to venture beyond the tasks assigned. A clear structure of the ILSS courses overall and of the individual sessions, a gradual increase in the difficulty of assignments, think-alouds, critical evaluation, and self-reflection strategies – all these are key ingredients in fostering the learners’ development as language users and thinkers.

### 3.3 Feedback and Assessment

To achieve the overall goals of the course module and to ensure that the teaching and learning methods employed are actually effective, ILSS lecturers integrate various feedback and assessment types into their classes. Diagnostic assessment is often an essential component of the early sessions of ILSS 1 and ILSS 2 courses. In the get-to-know-each-other phase of ILSS 1, students may be asked to complete a survey about their language learning experiences, the brief responses to which showcase the nature of first-language (L1) interference (for example, tenses or collocations) and their exposure to English-speaking environments. In ILSS 2, the students, who come from various ILSS 1 courses taught by different lecturers, may be encouraged to evaluate their individual study-related skills and discuss their experiences with ILSS 1 in small groups, considering a set of guiding questions, after which a spokesperson from each group reports to the whole class on the group’s collective strengths and areas for improvement.

Formative assessment methods in ILSS courses may vary considerably, although some are consistent favorites. In fact, as the writing component focuses on one text type, argumentative essays, the feedback that is most productive is actually *feed-forward*, which, according to Hine and Northeast, “should either a) be given post-assignment with more specific direction on how this can be applied to future assignments or b) impact upon an upcoming assignment” (2016, p. 29). Feed-forward strategies in ILSS courses are informed by the criteria according to which students’ formal assignments are assessed.

Since process writing is a staple of the ILSS environment, peer-feedback forms, revision and editing checklists, and guided self-evaluation are employed at various stages of the writing process. Students evaluate and provide feedback on essay drafts of their peers in class and via Moodle. Whereas peer evaluation activities are relatively common in university classroom settings after the teacher has presented relevant concepts, many ILSS lecturers also rely on experiential learning techniques that enable the students to discover on their own, without initial teacher input, what can constitute good writing practices. During such pair and group activities, the lecturer acts as a facilitator and resource, and direct teacher input is mostly limited to corrective and summarizing purposes. The lecturer provides feedback on the groups' efforts, emphasizing the relevant discoveries and gently guiding the class towards recognizing other, not yet identified, evaluation criteria, which would form the basis of summative assessment.

The formal written assignments which contribute to the final ILSS 1 or ILSS 2 grade are assessed in accordance with the ILSS 1 or ILSS 2 rating scales (see Appendices 1 and 2). Both scales have seven detailed criteria (content/task fulfillment, organization, linguistic accuracy, linguistic range, punctuation, spelling, and length) and differ mainly in the nature of the first, content-oriented, criterion: the ILSS 2 rating scale has a significant focus on integrating the ideas of others. Most of the written assignments and tests in the ILSS module revolve around the various skills necessary to tackle the writing part of the CFT. Students' CFT essays are assessed according to the ILSS 2 rating scale.

When grading student essays, some ILSS lecturers attach filled-out grading checklists that are based on the descriptors from the rating scales. Students have access to these checklists, which serve both formative and summative assessment purposes, from the very start of a course. When learners clearly see which components contribute to each assessment criterion, they can reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in reference to these components and are encouraged to revise their drafts accordingly. Their self-assessment is then juxtaposed with the teacher evaluation once their essays have been graded and areas for improvement have been identified, which serves as an impetus for working on these points. The components specified in the grading checklists can also be easily transformed into questions (for example: Does my thesis statement include a preview of the main arguments?), which students ask themselves when proofreading and editing their essays. In fact, the ILSS level coordinators have recently developed a standardized self-reflection checklist including questions that all students in ILSS 2 courses have to answer at home with a *yes*, *partly*, or *no* when reflecting on and revising their in-class essay, written under conditions approximating the CFT setting. Once several essays have been graded and commented on, grading checklists have the additional benefit of clearly illustrating students' improvement throughout the course and highlight recurring mistakes, which helps learners to be more focused when producing their texts.

ILSS lecturers also use various other techniques to complement the actual points from the rating scales with qualitative feedback, the educational value of which has been clearly illustrated in, for example, Northcote et al. (2014). In addition to or in



lieu of written feedback on student essays, detailed comments are often provided orally: during individual conferences with students, via audio files where the teacher records suggestions for improvement, or as a plenary discussion of common problem areas.

The constituents of the final grade and the corresponding percentages are standardized across all ILSS 1 and ILSS 2 courses. In ILSS 1, the course grade is calculated on the basis of homework and classwork (40%), a midterm reading test (10%), a final reading test (20%), and a final writing test (30%). The course grade in ILSS 2 is based on two equal parts: three argumentative essays (40%), which are modeled after the CFT writing task, and a midterm reading test (10%) constitute the first part, whereas the CFT itself accounts for the other 50%. The in-class reading assignments in both courses prepare students for, and ultimately approximate, the CFT reading part. Passing the CFT, with a minimum score of 60%, is a prerequisite for progressing to the other courses in the ELC program; in the case of a fail, the student would have to repeat ILSS 2. In both ILSS courses, students are also required to keep a vocabulary log and give a short informal presentation.

Overall, while the nature of formative feedback varies across the ILSS courses and depends on the class dynamics and individual student needs, summative assessment is standardized. The ultimate objectives are to prepare the students to succeed in the CFT as a short-term goal and to create a solid foundation for their further academic careers in the ELC program and beyond.

### 3.4 Challenges and Future Directions

One of the major challenges for ILSS lecturers is the different entry levels of students with regard to their language competence. The introduction of the written Austrian school-leaving examination in English, which tests reading, listening, and writing skills as well as vocabulary and grammar at B2 level, has certainly helped to raise students' awareness of different text types, to hone essential receptive skills, and to develop test-taking strategies. However, our student body also includes international students, who come from various educational backgrounds, where emphasis may have been placed on other aspects of language proficiency.

While many further develop their language competence during the *StEOP* phase of their studies, especially in the areas of listening, vocabulary, and grammar, by attending lectures in an all-English environment, students pass the VELT with divergent scores, ranging from B2+ to C2 levels. This means that ILSS lecturers have to cater to a mixed audience and provide additional practice materials for various aspects of language learning. Flipped classroom approaches are immensely helpful in this respect as they grant learners considerable autonomy in refining their language skills and filling any gaps that may exist in their language competence.

While the ELC program has been designed for an EFL setting, with the majority of students aiming for a degree that qualifies them to teach English at Austrian secondary schools, L1 users of English also enroll in the BA or BEd degree programs



and thus attend ILSS classes. Many of them are willing to act as language models, especially with regard to pronunciation and fluency, and see the benefit of developing advanced writing, reading, and study skills, which have by no means been mastered by all native speakers of English. To other L1 users, however, the relevance of some teaching units and assignments is not immediately clear. It is a delicate task for the lecturer to raise these students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as language users and of the importance of certain ILSS tools and methods for their future professional careers, not least for those in the BED program.

Another major challenge is some ILSS 2 students' anxiety about passing the CFT and the natural impulse of lecturers to teach to the test. Emphasizing the transferable nature of the skills acquired in the ILSS module and their usefulness for courses beyond the language competence program often helps to alleviate stress levels and to shift the focus from just passing the test to actual learning.

All these challenges and continuously changing social dynamics require ILSS lecturers to constantly adapt their teaching practices and assessment modes. The team are currently exploring ways of syncing summative assessment methods with the strong teaching focus on formative feedback and process approaches to writing. Another possibility is to metamorphose the discrete-skills reading assignments into a more integrative format as it is more authentic in an academic context to relate students' processing of longer reading passages to written text production. The structure of ILSS as the foundational module of the ELC program is sufficiently flexible to accommodate such potential modifications and to address the needs of a variety of learners, with a view to preparing them for the other courses in their study programs as well as for further intellectual ventures they may pursue.

## Appendices

### *Appendix 1*

#### ILSS 1 Rating Scale

<b>Content, arguments, and evidence</b>	
5 points	The student has understood the task (topic / specific issue) fully; presents a reasoned argument; gives a well-founded personal opinion. Arguments are supported using evidence and examples. Both arguments and examples given are relevant and of interest to the target reader (educated reader without specialised knowledge). The student does not digress.
4 points	The student has understood the task fully and is, in most cases, able to present a reasoned argument and give a personal opinion. In most cases the student is able to support arguments by using evidence and examples. The arguments and examples given are, in most cases, relevant and of interest to the target reader (see above). The student may in some instances stray from the task by including irrelevant evidence.
3 points	The student has understood the task fully and is, to a fair degree, able to present an argument and give a personal opinion. However, the arguments and opinion are sometimes not sufficiently supported by evidence or examples. Some of the student's examples are irrelevant (e.g., not applicable to the task or too personal for the target reader, etc.).

(continued)

2 points	The student shows some understanding of the task. Arguments are presented; however, supporting evidence and examples are either missing or, if provided, of questionable relevance.
1 point	The student has misunderstood the task. The arguments presented are limited in number, range, and relevance. They are not supported by evidence or examples.
0 points	The student has completely misunderstood the task.
<b>Organisation</b>	
5 points	The text is organised into paragraphs with clear topic sentences, and the text can be seen to be structured into introduction, main body, and conclusion. There is a clear thesis statement. A variety of linking devices is used between paragraphs. Logical relations between sentences and overall method of development (e.g., result, cause & effect, comparison, etc.) are indicated by the appropriate use of lexis, pronouns, conjunctions, and discourse markers.
4 points	The text is organised into paragraphs and structured into introduction, main body, and conclusion. The topic of a paragraph is obvious to the reader by the use of a clear topic sentence and subsequent development of the main idea. An appropriate range of linking and cohesive devices is used. There are occasional problems with pronoun reference.
3 points	The text is organised into paragraphs and structured into introduction, main body, and conclusion. There is some internal organisation within these paragraphs. There is a thesis statement, but it is not entirely successful/clear. There is some use of cohesive devices. There are problems with pronoun reference.
2 points	The text is organised into paragraphs on the surface level (layout). Unsuccessful introduction (e.g., no thesis statement, main focus not addressed, random selection of details from sources, etc.) and/or conclusion (e.g., introduction of new ideas, no relation to body paragraphs, etc.). Illogical use of linking devices and pronouns.
1 point	The text is not organised into paragraphs, and there is no introduction and/or conclusion. The textual development is difficult to follow. There is little or no use of cohesive devices beyond “and/but”.
0 points	There is no apparent structure.
<b>Linguistic accuracy</b>	
5 points	The text is virtually free of errors.
4 points	The text consistently maintains a high degree of accuracy, with only occasional slips.
3 points	The text shows a relatively high degree of linguistic control. There are some mistakes, which do not cause misunderstanding.
2 points	Several linguistic choices are not satisfactory for the task. Some of these may impede understanding or strain readers, forcing them to pause.
1 point	There are frequent/repeated inaccuracies in the text which may impede understanding of certain passages.
0 points	There are basic and consistent patterns of error in the text. The student has a very poor grasp of the language required for the task.
<b>Linguistic range</b>	
5 points	The student demonstrates a very broad range of language to formulate thoughts precisely, give emphasis, and eliminate ambiguity. The student can paraphrase effectively and convey finer shades of meaning (e.g., by using a wide range of qualifying devices), and shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning. The text is consistently appropriate in style and register.

(continued)

4 points	The student has a good command of a broad range of language as required for the task. There are no signs of the student having to restrict what they want to say. The student can paraphrase effectively and qualify arguments in relation to degrees of certainty/uncertainty, belief/doubt, likelihood, etc. The text is appropriate in style and register, with only isolated minor slips.
3 points	The student uses a sufficient range of language required for the task. Little use of paraphrasing leads to some repetition. The text is generally appropriate in style and register, with a few deviations.
2 points	The student uses a limited range of language, resulting in some imprecision. Absence of paraphrasing leads to frequent repetition. Parts of the text are inappropriate in style and register.
1 point	The student has a very narrow range of language at their disposal, which makes it difficult for them to formulate clear arguments. The text relies heavily on repetition. The text is inappropriate in style and register.
0 points	The text shows clear signs of restrictions, and the student cannot use language effectively in an academic context.
<b>Punctuation</b>	
1 points	The student shows a good grasp of the most common conventions in punctuation with only some minor inaccuracies.
0 points	The student shows a poor grasp of the conventions in punctuation and little consideration for the reader.
<b>Spelling</b>	
2 points	The spelling is completely accurate (possible 2 slips).
1 points	The text shows some inaccuracies in spelling (possible 3 – 6 slips).
0 points	There are many spelling inaccuracies in the text (more than 6 errors).
<b>Length</b>	
2 points	Length appropriate (250 – 310 words)
1 point	311 – 320 words
0 points	0 – 249 or > 320 words

## Appendix 2

### ILSS 2 Rating Scale

<b>Task fulfilment</b>	
5 points	All salient points contained in the prompt are cogently elaborated. The student gives a well-founded personal opinion and presents a logically developed argument; selects relevant data from various sources, integrating them into the overall argument to support the student's points; has fully grasped the contents of the sources and compares/contrasts/evaluates/challenges information/viewpoints. All formal text type requirements are met (citation, paraphrase, etc.).
4 points	All salient points contained in the prompt are elaborated. The student gives a well-founded personal opinion and presents a logically developed argument; selects relevant data from various sources, integrating them into the overall argument to support the student's own points; may have misunderstood some minor points in the sources. Formal text type requirements are largely met (citation, paraphrase, etc.).

(continued)

3 points	All salient points in the prompt are addressed. The student is, to a fair degree, able to present an argument and give a personal opinion, but the arguments and opinion are sometimes not sufficiently supported by evidence or examples; relies heavily on sources rather than using them selectively or does not always integrate them effectively into the student's own argument; has misunderstood/misrepresented some points in the sources although the reader would still get the correct general idea. Formal text type requirements are partly met (citation, paraphrase, etc.).
2 points	Not all salient points in the prompt are addressed (e.g., reference to only one graph, central aspect of the prompt ignored). The student presents arguments, but supporting evidence and examples are either missing or of questionable relevance; OR ... does not clearly state the student's own opinion; AND/OR ... merely lists points from the sources or tries to integrate all sources without critical reflection; has misunderstood/misrepresented some points in the sources so that the reader would get a wrong impression. Formal text type requirements are not met.
1 point	The student has misunderstood the task. The student presents a limited number and range of arguments, which are not supported by evidence or examples; OR ... there are major inconsistencies in logical argumentation; does not refer to the sources provided in the prompt or has misunderstood/misrepresented key points from the sources.
0 points	The student has completely misunderstood the task.
<b>Organisation</b>	
5 points	The text is organised into paragraphs with clear topic sentences, and the text can be seen to be structured into introduction, main body, and conclusion. There is a clear thesis statement. A variety of linking devices is used between paragraphs. Logical relations between sentences and overall method of development (e.g., result, cause & effect, comparison, etc.) are indicated by the appropriate use of lexis, pronouns, conjunctions, and discourse markers.
4 points	The text is organised into paragraphs and structured into introduction, main body, and conclusion. The topic of a paragraph is obvious to the reader by the use of a clear topic sentence and subsequent development of the main idea. An appropriate range of linking and cohesive devices is used. There are occasional problems with pronoun reference.
3 points	The text is organised into paragraphs and structured into introduction, main body, and conclusion. There is some internal organisation within these paragraphs. There is a thesis statement, but it is not entirely successful/clear. There is some use of cohesive devices. There are problems with pronoun reference.
2 points	The text is organised into paragraphs on the surface level (layout). Unsuccessful introduction (e.g., no thesis statement, main focus not addressed, random selection of details from sources, etc.) and/or conclusion (e.g., introduction of new ideas, no relation to body paragraphs, etc.). Illogical use of linking devices and pronouns.
1 point	The text is not organised into paragraphs, and there is no introduction and/or conclusion. The textual development is difficult to follow. There is little or no use of cohesive devices beyond "and/but".
0 points	There is no apparent structure.
<b>Linguistic accuracy</b>	
5 points	The text is virtually free of errors.

(continued)

4 points	The text consistently maintains a high degree of accuracy, with only occasional slips.
3 points	The text shows a relatively high degree of linguistic control. There are some mistakes, which do not cause misunderstanding.
2 points	Several linguistic choices are not satisfactory for the task. Some of these may impede understanding or strain readers, forcing them to pause.
1 point	There are frequent/repeated inaccuracies in the text which may impede understanding of certain passages.
0 points	There are basic and consistent patterns of error in the text. The student has a very poor grasp of the language required for the task.

**Linguistic range**

5 points	The student demonstrates a very broad range of language to formulate thoughts precisely, give emphasis, and eliminate ambiguity. The student can paraphrase effectively and convey finer shades of meaning (e.g., by using a wide range of qualifying devices), and shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning. The text is consistently appropriate in style and register.
4 points	The student has a good command of a broad range of language as required for the task. There are no signs of the student having to restrict what they want to say. The student can paraphrase effectively and qualify arguments in relation to degrees of certainty/uncertainty, belief/doubt, likelihood, etc. The text is appropriate in style and register, with only isolated minor slips.
3 points	The student uses a sufficient range of language required for the task. Little use of paraphrasing leads to some repetition. The text is generally appropriate in style and register, with a few deviations.
2 points	The student uses a limited range of language, resulting in some imprecision. Absence of paraphrasing leads to frequent repetition. Parts of the text are inappropriate in style and register.
1 point	The student has a very narrow range of language at their disposal, which makes it difficult for them to formulate clear arguments. The text relies heavily on repetition. The text is inappropriate in style and register.
0 points	The text shows clear signs of restrictions, and the student cannot use language effectively in an academic context.

**Punctuation**

2 points	The student uses a range of punctuation marks accurately and effectively to convey finer shades of meaning.
1 point	The student has a solid grasp of the most common conventions in punctuation with minor inaccuracies.
0 points	The student has a poor grasp of the conventions in punctuation.

**Spelling**

2 points	The spelling is completely accurate (possible 2 slips).
1 point	The text shows some inaccuracies in spelling (possible 3 – 6 slips).
0 points	There are many spelling inaccuracies in the text (more than 6 errors).

**Length**

1 point	Length appropriate (300 – 400 words)
0 points	0 – 299 or > 400 words

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# Chapter 4

## Language in Use



Gillian Schwarz-Peaker

**Keywords** Text-based language teaching · Genre analysis · Text analysis · Text transformation · Mediating a text

### 4.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

After having successfully completed the Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS) module of the English Language Competence (ELC) programme (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)), students in the two undergraduate study programs offered at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English and American Studies and Bachelor of Education (BEd) in English, progress to the second module: Language in Use (LIU). LIU aims to guide students into thinking more consciously about the language used in texts, both those they read and those they produce. The module is text-based and like ILSS consists of two parts (LIU 1 and LIU 2).

One of the central tenets of lecturers when developing the LIU courses was that “one of the most important tasks of the study of language [is] to make people aware of the influence that language (as both system and discourse) has on our thoughts, thus on our behaviour, and consequently on the world” (Fill, 2007, p. 1). It was recognised that LIU students, who at the end of ILSS are generally proficient language users, often lack awareness of the choices they can/do make when producing a text. They need opportunities to explore the choices competent writers make, as

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G. Schwarz-Peaker (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [gillian.schwarz-peaker@univie.ac.at](mailto:gillian.schwarz-peaker@univie.ac.at)

well as guidance in understanding how these choices are linked to the writers' intentions. Therefore, Halliday's categorisation of language into three broad metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal, and textual – was chosen to underpin the content of the courses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). By looking at how language represents ideas and information (ideational), creates and maintains social relationships (interpersonal), and organises and structures texts (textual), students evaluate “why a text is or is not an effective text for its own purposes – in what respects it succeeds and in what respects it fails, or is less successful” (Halliday, 1994, p. xv). This way they develop valuable macro and micro skills that will be of use far beyond their immediate academic needs. By foregrounding these functions of language, working with them, and discussing them, students are encouraged to be more conscious of their own choices and intentions when producing texts in a range of contexts; in short, they “develop a sensitivity” (Flowerdew, 1993, p. 309) to how different aspects of language are intertwined to create meaning and how changing one of these parameters affects everything else.

In LIU, our understanding of text is based on Montgomery et al.'s definition of text as “a trace or record of a communicative event” (2000, p. 2) and as such includes not only written texts, but also images, TV, film and video, spoken language, both in real time and recorded, and song as examples of texts. The aim of the module is to expose students to a wide range of text types (both literary and non-literary), which they analyse to understand how these texts are used for a variety of purposes (for example, to persuade, to instruct, to move to action, to entertain) and to understand how these texts are tailored to reach their specific audience(s).

The courses have clearly defined objectives which serve to “make learners aware of how genres differ one from another and within each other, and how they can go about discovering these differences” (Flowerdew, 1993, p. 309). Skills emphasised are understanding the intended audience and purpose of a text; being equipped to comment on significant features of a text; developing an awareness of the implications and effects of specific lexical, grammatical, and stylistic choices within a text; and being able to make informed choices, taking lexical, grammatical, and (con)textual features into account when expressing themselves, both orally and in writing. The insights gained by students during their analyses have a positive impact on their own text production; becoming familiar with a range of strategies can also help them produce effective texts for a specific purpose and/or audience.

## 4.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

Students in LIU work with, mainly, authentic texts in order to experience the ways in which language is used in real-world situations. Building on the strong foundation of text production skills developed when producing argumentative essays in ILSS 1 and 2, students in LIU are introduced to writing text analyses and text transformations. Here, emphasis moves from the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the writing process to how language is used in different text types and how a writer can make use of this knowledge in order to produce effective and successful texts themselves. The



interplay between text type, purpose, subject matter, channel, and reader relationship (Badger & White, 2000; Martin, 1993) is central to the content of the course, which follows Badger and White's process-genre model of writing, in which the value of "knowledge about language," "knowledge of the context," and "skills in using language" are equally valued (Badger & White, 2000, pp. 157–160).

In LIU 1, text analysis is introduced first with the intention of going beyond the sentence (Thornbury, 2005). Students start with the text in its context and answer questions on genre, audience, and purpose (the GAP) before moving on to examine specific textual features, such as lexis (lexical cohesion, semantic fields, levels of formality), grammar (pronoun and deictic reference, tense, voice), and structural features (information structure, cohesion). This is done through small group discussions, reading guides, teacher-led class discussions, and independent work. For example, a common introductory activity is to present students with a range of different text types which have different intended audiences and different purposes. Students work in small groups to categorise them and notice similarities and differences between them. This then leads to a discussion of how students are able to identify text type, audience, and purpose and is the first step towards linking the linguistic or stylistic features of a text with how the text works.

As analysing texts is new for most students, *scaffolding* (Walqui, 2006) is used, so that in LIU 1, students are guided in their analyses with lecturers helping them to identify the most significant linguistic or textual features in a text and draw conclusions about the effect(s) created through them. Here, further support comes from a handout compiled by the course coordinators, to give students input on the kind of features they *might* consider in their analysis. Students are also provided with an analysis grid in order to collect their ideas about a text they are analysing. The grid includes fields to record which linguistic features they notice, and what the effect of each feature is (with regard to text type, audience, and purpose), and thus provides students with a means of collating and organising their ideas about a text *before* starting to write their analysis; this is appreciated by students as an effective way of helping them produce this new text type.

As the students progress through LIU 1 and into LIU 2, scaffolding is successively dismantled so that by the end of LIU 2, students are able to decide for themselves what the most significant features in a particular text are and create a hypothesis about the text based on their observations. The scaffolding approach is also reflected in the format of the final tests at each level: in LIU 1, the test question indicates which features the students should focus on in their analysis, whereas in the final test of LIU 2, the students are asked to analyse a particular text and identify the most significant features that support their hypothesis themselves.

Presenting clear and valid support for one's ideas is the main focus of the text analysis assignments, and, as such, reflects the practices of the wider academic community. LIU lecturers place great emphasis on the fact that there are hardly any *wrong* answers when analysing a text; it is acknowledged that each reader brings a different perspective to the text, such as different depths of background knowledge, different belief systems, or different experience, and this will have some impact on how they view the text and the conclusions they draw. Thus, the importance of students supporting their hypotheses about a text with reference to specific textual

features, and giving clear examples to illustrate their point(s) is repeatedly emphasised as expert opinion about a text's communicative purpose, or indeed genre, sometimes differs (Askehave & Swales, 2001, p. 198).

The second type of assignment students in LIU do is text transformation, whereby students are asked to change the genre, audience, or purpose of a text and so produce a new text. This term can be somewhat misleading in the sense that transformation (for example, taking a scene from a novel and transforming it into a screen play) is only one of the activities students might be asked to do under this umbrella term. Other activities could include responding to a text (e.g., writing a reply to a complaint letter in a newspaper), rewriting a text (e.g., rewriting a text aimed at adults for an audience of children or rewriting a text that intends to inform readers to a text that intends to persuade readers), or taking the content of one text type and reproducing it as another (e.g., producing an advert for a product reviewed in a newspaper). In each case, however, students are applying the skills they have learned in doing text analysis, only in reverse; instead of identifying why a particular author made a particular choice in a text, they are focusing on why they themselves make particular choices in producing their own texts. To further highlight this connection, a common feature in text transformation assignments (or classroom transformation activities) is to require students to produce a short justification for the transformation they have produced (e.g., students are asked to 'transform' a *Cosmopolitan* magazine cover to address a male audience and write a short text explaining which features of the cover they would choose to change and why).

Along with the wide range of activities implemented (comparing texts, dissecting texts, identifying common language features and patterns), LIU courses also make use of aspects of the flipped classroom model (Herreid & Schiller, 2013, p. 62) and the e-learning platform Moodle to support students' learning experiences.

Two important points which must be mentioned regarding content and methods are that in introducing LIU students to text analysis and text transformation, it is made clear that the approaches to writing fostered and developed in ILSS 1 and 2 (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)) are still the same but that they are now being applied to different text types. This is essential as one of the many difficulties lecturers encounter is the phenomenon of students regarding each course as an isolated event and failing to apply skills developed in one course to subsequent ones. Equally important is the fact that throughout LIU emphasis is given to developing transferable language awareness skills that will enable students to tackle the wide range of genres they will encounter in their future academic and professional lives rather than the skill of being able to write texts in any specific genre.

### 4.3 Feedback and Assessment

Formative feedback on student work within LIU is multi-faceted. It can come from the students themselves, through reflection activities, from peers, in peer feedback activities, and from lecturers, who respond to the three written assignments required; these responses take the form of written comments, audio feedback, face-to-face

tutorials, or class feedback sessions on common problems arising in assignments. The feedback may take place at any stage of the writing process to illustrate the “recursive” nature of writing (Racelis & Matsuda, 2013, p. 386) and further remind students that the new text types (analysis and transformation) that they are working with still have many parallels with the assignments written in ILSS, especially with regard to structural features.

Summative assessment in LIU courses is based on two analytic, criterion-referenced rating scales created by the course coordinators and based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020): one for text analysis (see Appendix 1) and one for text transformation (see Appendix 2). Assessment criteria encompass descriptors for task fulfilment (how competent is the analysis/transformation), text competence (structure, cohesion), linguistic range (range, connotation, register), and linguistic accuracy (lexical and grammatical control, spelling). The rating scales are identical apart from the category of task fulfilment, which reflects what is required in an analysis (in-depth analysis, cogent argument, finer subtleties of the text recognised) or transformation (genre-specific characteristics, effective use of transformation/mediation strategies and language). Additionally, on the text transformation scale there are descriptors for justifications (clarity and plausibility of explanations). The criteria are weighted to reflect the relative importance assigned to different aspects of students’ work, and so task fulfilment and text structure are weighted to have a greater impact on grades. The assessment scales are freely available to students, who are encouraged to become familiar with them so that they can see whether they have met the relevant criteria in their work; this promotion of self-assessment is seen by Rolheiser and Ross (2001) as contributing to “an upward cycle of better learning” (p. 48).

Assessment is standardised across all courses and there is a 60% pass mark. The pass mark is made up of course work (60%) and the final test (40%), and both parts must be positive. The course work includes three written assignments on which students receive feedback from their lecturer: in LIU 1 this consists of two text analyses and one text transformation, and in LIU 2 there are two text transformations and one text analysis. Course work also includes incidental activities to prepare for class, class participation, and a vocabulary log (continued from ILSS 2; see Heaney, [this volume](#)). The vocabulary log is currently being standardised across all LIU classes and is therefore work in progress. There are standardised question formats for the final test in both LIU 1 and 2, but lecturers choose the text on which their test question is based.

As with other modules in the ELC programme, to maintain horizontal coherence across the courses, lecturers’ meetings take place at the beginning of each semester and offer a forum for the exchange of material and ideas related to the courses, as well as views on recent developments in discourse analysis and language teaching. However, for many lecturers, the most significant aspect of these meetings is the opportunity to discuss the assessment of student texts. The fact that text analysis is not as clearly defined as other academic text types means that it is important to ensure that lecturers have the same understanding of what is required from the students. Thus, selected student texts are distributed to lecturers, who then assess and grade them independently and bring them to the meeting. The ensuing discussions

on why a particular grade was given highlight any discrepancies among lecturers and provide an opportunity to review and edit the assessment grids. In addition, course coordinators provide model text analyses on a Moodle meta-course to ensure new team members are familiar with the text type.

#### 4.4 Challenges and Future Directions

The challenge of getting students to recognise vertical coherence between ELC courses has already been mentioned, but a further challenge that exists in LIU is that differences in the structure of the BEd and BA programmes means that whilst students in both programmes take LIU 1, only BA students move on to LIU 2. This meant that the natural inclination to divide the course content up into text analysis (LIU 1) and text transformation (LIU 2) is not possible as both are a prerequisite for English in a Professional Context 1 (see Bruno-Lindner, “English in a Professional Context,” [this volume](#)), which is taken by all students. This is problematic in the sense that some students find it difficult to become fully confident in writing text analyses when, just as they are becoming used to the text type in LIU 1, text transformation is introduced and they are grappling with a different task. Again, the failure to see links between the different elements of their courses means that students often struggle to recognise what lecturers repeatedly stress: that text transformation and text analysis are closely related tasks, but are approached from different angles.

From the point of view of lecturers, one major problem with text transformation is the difficulty in creating and assessing the assignments. It is often felt that the tasks themselves, for example transforming the cover of a women’s magazine to be appropriate for a male audience, are artificial and that this compounds the assessment problem: how can lecturers assess how well the student has completed the task when the text type created lacks authenticity. To tackle this problem, lecturers are encouraged to focus on *interactional* rather than *situational* authenticity (Bachman, 1990), and so worry less about finding transformations that replicate real-life scenarios (situational authenticity) and focus more on students having the opportunity to employ the types of skills and language processes that they might use in a real-life situation beyond the task (interactional authenticity); in this way, students are showing that they understand *language in use*. The inclusion of justifications as part of text transformation tasks has gone some way to addressing the second part of the problem: assessment focuses on students’ explanations of how and why they would change the text they are working with, and the creative element (the text students produce) is assessed mainly in terms of linguistic criteria.

LIU courses are a new departure for students at the Department of English and American Studies and introduce students to working with texts in a way many of them have not encountered before. The creative nature of the transformation tasks is consistently welcomed by students across the LIU courses according to students’ course evaluations organised by the University’s Unit for Quality Assurance, and the courses provide an insight into the nature of analysis and transformation, which will be continued in the English in a Professional Context courses.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### LIU Rating Scale for Text Analyses

Task fulfilment	Text competence	Linguistic range	Linguistic accuracy
<p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In-depth analysis</b> of the way in which structure, language, and rhetorical devices are exploited for a particular purpose;</li> <li>• <b>Cogent argument</b> on possible reasons for and effects of author's choices;</li> <li>• <b>Finer subtleties</b> of nuanced language, rhetorical effect, and stylistic language use (e.g., metaphors, ambiguity, connotations) where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Highly reader-friendly</b> complex text which helps the reader to find <b>significant points</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Flawless paragraphs</b> with <b>highly effective</b> information structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Very broad range of complex</b> language including idiomatic expressions to convey finer shades of meaning;</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of</b> connotative levels of meaning where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Virtually free of errors</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reasoned argument</b> on possible reasons for and effects of author's choices;</li> <li>• <b>Plausible</b> evidence/examples from the text to support <b>all</b> hypotheses;</li> <li>• <b>All ideas explicitly related</b> to a larger context (e.g., possible effects on the audience, overall purpose of the text) thus explaining <b>plausibly</b> why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Smoothly flowing</b> text with a <b>logical structure</b> and logical relations between all sentences;</li> <li>• Has a <b>thesis statement</b> which takes a <b>clear position</b> on the text being analysed;</li> <li>• <b>Wide range of cohesive devices</b> used accurately;</li> <li>• <b>Conclusion</b> summarises the point of view about the text while expressing an opinion on whether it was successful or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Broad range</b> of language to formulate complex thoughts <b>precisely</b> and <b>naturally</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistently high degree</b> of accuracy, with only <b>occasional slips</b></li> </ul>

(continued)

Task fulfillment	Text competence	Linguistic range	Linguistic accuracy
<p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fair analysis</b> of the genre conventions, although <b>some points may lack elaboration/support/evidence</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Informed comments</b> on text features but <b>not all ideas</b> are <b>explicitly</b> related to a larger context thus explaining why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Well-structured, coherent</b> text, showing controlled use of organisational patterns;</li> <li>• Has a <b>descriptive thesis</b> statement showing which aspects of the text the student intends to focus on;</li> <li>• <b>Well-developed paragraphs</b>; ideas are generally linked logically;</li> <li>• <b>Conclusion attempts</b> to summarise the point of view about the text while expressing an opinion on whether it was successful or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sufficient range</b> of language used <b>appropriately</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relatively high degree</b> of linguistic control; some mistakes, which <b>do not impede understanding</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some <b>relevant content missing or not developed</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Few ideas</b> about the text related to a larger context; this may be <b>implicit</b> rather than explicit, and so it <b>may be unclear</b> why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Several inadequacies</b> in structure at the text and/or paragraph level, some of which may strain the reader;</li> <li>• Has <b>attempted a thesis statement</b> but <b>fails to address all parts</b> of this thesis throughout the text;</li> <li>• <b>Limited range of cohesive devices</b> with inaccuracies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Limited range</b> of language, resulting in some <b>imprecision, repetitiveness</b>, and/or <b>circumlocution</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Parts of the text are inappropriate</b> in style and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Several linguistic</b> choices unsatisfactory for the task; some of these <b>may impede understanding</b> or strain readers, forcing them to pause or reread</li> </ul>
<p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No evidence/examples</b> from the text to support ideas, or <b>irrelevant</b> examples/evidence;</li> <li>• Ideas about the text are <b>not explicitly related</b> to the larger context, and so it is <b>often unclear</b> why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of coherence and/or cohesion</b> at the text and/or paragraph level;</li> <li>• There is <b>no thesis statement</b> or attempt to provide one;</li> <li>• <b>Essential structural elements inadequate or missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Narrow range</b> of language with <b>clear signs of limitations</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Inappropriate</b> in style and register;</li> <li>• <b>Some non-essential lifting</b> from source text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Frequent/repeated</b> inaccuracies, which <b>may impede understanding</b> of certain passages</li> </ul>
<p><b>0</b></p>	Task misunderstood or not enough to evaluate		

## Appendix 2

## LIU Rating Scale for Text Transformations

Task fulfillment	Text competence	Linguistic range	Linguistic accuracy	Justifications
<p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transformation conveys even <b>subtle nuances</b> (e.g., clarity, memorability, action-orientation, persuasiveness, emotional appeal, tentativeness, understatement, irony, sarcasm);</li> <li>All salient content points <b>cogently elaborated/argued</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Highly reader-friendly</b> (complex) text which helps the reader to find <b>significant points</b>;</li> <li><b>Flawless paragraphs</b> with <b>highly effective</b> information structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Very broad range</b> of (complex) language including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, where appropriate, to convey finer shades of meaning;</li> <li><b>Effective use of irony</b>, allusive, figurative language, and other <b>creative elements</b> where appropriate (e.g., successfully challenging the conventions of the genre)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtually <b>free of errors</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justification with <b>highly convincing explanations</b> (incl. justifying specific language choices)</li> </ul>
<p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All genre-specific characteristics <b>effective</b> (e.g., layout, conventional text elements, moves);</li> <li>All <b>relevant features</b> of source text(s) <b>changed effectively</b>;</li> <li><b>Effective use of transformation/mediation strategies</b> (e.g., breaking down, simplifying, amplifying, streamlining)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Smoothly flowing</b> text with a <b>logical structure</b> and logical relations between all sentences;</li> <li><b>Wide range of cohesive devices</b> used accurately (where relevant)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Broad range</b> of language to formulate complex thoughts <b>precisely</b> and <b>naturally</b> and paraphrase effectively;</li> <li><b>Language adapted effectively</b> (e.g., syntax, idiomatcity, jargon, register, degree of sophistication and detail)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Consistently high degree</b> of accuracy, with only <b>occasional slips</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justification with <b>clear and logical explanations</b></li> </ul>

(continued)



Task fulfillment	Text competence	Linguistic range	Linguistic accuracy	Justifications
<p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reader has <b>no difficulty identifying the text type</b>;</li> <li>All salient content points <b>addressed</b>;</li> <li>All <b>relevant features</b> of source text(s) <b>changed appropriately</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Well-structured, coherent</b> text showing controlled use of organisational patterns;</li> <li><b>Well-developed paragraphs</b>; ideas are generally linked logically</li> <li><b>Several inadequacies</b> in structure at the text and/or paragraph level, some of which may strain the reader;</li> <li><b>Limited range of cohesive devices</b> with inaccuracies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sufficient range</b> of language used appropriately for the task (including tone);</li> <li><b>Suitable paraphrases and nontechnical language</b> where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Relatively high degree</b> of linguistic control; some mistakes, which <b>do not impede understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanations are <b>generally clear</b>, but <b>some choices explained may not be reflected</b> in the text</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reader may have <b>difficulty identifying the text type</b>;</li> <li>Some <b>relevant content missing</b>;</li> <li>Some <b>features not changed appropriately</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Lack of coherence and/or cohesion</b> at the text and/or paragraph level;</li> <li><b>Essential structural elements inadequate or missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Limited range</b> of language, resulting in some <b>imprecision, repetitiveness, and/or circumlocution</b>;</li> <li><b>Parts of the text are inappropriate</b> in style and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Several linguistic choices</b> unsatisfactory for the task; some of these <b>may impede understanding</b> or strain readers, forcing them to pause or reread</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Some explanations may not be logical</b> or reflect a <b>limited understanding</b> of the target audience/purpose/genre; choices explained are <b>often not reflected</b> in the text</li> </ul>
<p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Text type not identifiable</b>;</li> <li><b>Irrelevant features</b> of source text(s) changed;</li> <li><b>Several changes inappropriate</b>;</li> <li><b>Essential content missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Lack of coherence and/or cohesion</b> at the text and/or paragraph level;</li> <li><b>Essential structural elements inadequate or missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Narrow range</b> of language with <b>clear signs of limitations</b>;</li> <li><b>Inappropriate</b> in style and register;</li> <li><b>Some non-essential lifting</b> from source text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Frequent/repeated</b> inaccuracies, which <b>may impede understanding</b> of certain passages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanations are <b>frequently illogical/unclear</b> or do not reflect an understanding of the target audience/purpose/genre; choices explained are <b>not reflected</b> in the text</li> </ul>
<b>0</b>	Task misunderstood or not enough to evaluate			



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# Chapter 5

## English in a Professional Context



Amy Bruno-Lindner

**Keywords** English for Specific Purposes · English for General Business Purposes · Vocational English · Mediating a text · Project-based language learning

### 5.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

English in a Professional Context 1 (EPCO 1) is a course taken by undergraduate students as part of the two undergraduate study programs offered at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna: Bachelor of Arts in English and American Studies; Bachelor of Education in English. The advanced course, English in a Professional Context 2 (EPCO 2), is offered in the master's programs: Master of Arts in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures; Master of Arts in English Language and Linguistics. Together, the two courses comprise the EPCO module, which represents the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) component of the English Language Competence (ELC) program of the department.

EPCO 1 can be taken after the completion of Language in Use (LIU) and is closely linked to LIU by its text-based approach, its focus on text analysis, and its highlighting of the relationship between text and contextual parameters (see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)). Unlike LIU, however, which has a wide focus in the choice of text types, EPCO 1 focuses on text types in the domain of business. EPCO 2, on the other hand, concentrates on highly specialized texts from one specific professional domain: either law, medicine, or technology.

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A. Bruno-Lindner (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

e-mail: [amy.bruno-lindner@univie.ac.at](mailto:amy.bruno-lindner@univie.ac.at)

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61

Both EPCO 1 and EPCO 2 were designed in response to a strong need for ESP courses in the language program. A survey among graduates determined that many graduates were finding employment as teachers in specialized teaching contexts (e.g., vocational schools) as well as in professional domains such as business, civil service, or science (Pfennigbauer, 2001). The EPCO courses were developed to meet this need by equipping students with tools for coping with unfamiliar text types in professional life, that is, “the wide range of possible genres students ... will need to participate in” (Flowerdew, 1993, p. 309). In this sense, the EPCO 1 course could be characterized more specifically as what Dudley-Evans (1998) refers to as a course in English for General Business Purposes.

The courses aim to develop awareness, knowledge, and skills; while students become aware of the parameters that shape professional genres and affect linguistic encoding and text structure, they develop the skills necessary to work with new genres. These text-related skills encompass macro-level and micro-level skills. Macro-level skills include the ability to identify the main purpose of a specialized text/text type, the intended audience, and the textual organization (e.g., moves). A further macro-level skill is the ability to extract the main message of a professional text without necessarily understanding all of the technical details. Micro-level skills include the appropriate use of lexico-grammatical features (e.g., technical/semi-technical vocabulary, preferred structures), the ability to report and structure factual information in a concise and logical manner, to verbalize visual information, and to summarize the main points of a professional text. In EPCO 2, students also acquire advanced mediation strategies for transforming specialist texts into texts for non-specialist audiences, for example explaining concepts and simplifying a text (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 118–122); as a result, students are equipped to serve in the role of a “social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90), a valuable skill in the workplace. In their writing, students of both EPCO 1 and EPCO 2 are able to make appropriate use of levels of formality/register in cohesive and coherent texts which are organized and structured appropriately; they learn to transform texts to suit different target groups and purposes, and present information in a variety of formats. The unique focus on this combination of skills and awareness in connection with professional texts makes the EPCO courses valuable assets of the ELC program.

## 5.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

Both EPCO courses are process-oriented, focusing on the teaching of transferable skills applicable to different genres, and not exclusively product-oriented (i.e., focusing on the end-products of a limited number of specific genres). The transferable skills acquired (e.g., being able to identify the move structure of a text; implementing a register appropriate for the target audience) can be applied by students whenever they encounter an unfamiliar genre. Moreover, the courses follow a genre-analytical approach (Swales, 1990), emphasizing “the process of learning

about, and how to participate in, genres” (Flowerdew, 1993, p. 309). The courses highlight the close link between *language* and *context*, and between *form* and *function*. A mix of teaching methods and task types is employed to help students cope with professional texts and apply what they learn in their own writing. The development within the courses is one from teacher guidance to increased learner independence.

EPCO 1 students work with authentic texts from the domain of business, while EPCO 2 students focus on authentic texts from the law, medicine, or technology. In both courses, the content of the texts functions as carrier content for the acquisition of skills. Since students often lack familiarity with the professional domains in which the texts are embedded, questions of factual knowledge in a particular field invariably arise. This topic-related knowledge gap can be seen as an opportunity for students to learn more about the world of work, to hone their research skills, and to acquire some familiarity with the work processes, field-specific issues, and/or terminology that play a role in the texts. As technical terms are “a major concern” (Chung & Nation, 2004, p. 251) for learners working with ESP texts, particular attention is paid to identifying them reliably (see Chung & Nation, 2004, for a comparison of methods, which include applying a rating scale, using clues provided by the writer, consulting a technical dictionary, and comparing frequency of occurrence of terms in the given text with their frequency in a more general corpus). Generally speaking, the experience of acquiring a working understanding of the carrier content of a text and of the processes in which it is embedded is empowering and of value for students’ own future academic and professional writing; students observe first-hand how the practical application of research skills together with the genre-analytical approach provides them with a means of “unlocking” specialist texts, opening a window into fields outside their own areas of knowledge and expertise, thus enabling them to serve in a mediating role.

Topic-related learning phases (e.g., reading explanatory and/or authentic material, working through topic-specific vocabulary exercises) can take place outside the classroom, as lecturers strive to incorporate aspects of the flipped classroom model (Herreid & Schiller, 2013) into their teaching. Similarly, textual analysis tasks and pre- and post-writing activities can be done by students outside of class, thus freeing up more classroom time for text production. The EPCO courses follow what Badger and White (2000, pp. 157–158) call “the process-genre approach to writing,” which is characterized by the conviction that “writing involves knowledge about language (as in product and genre approaches), knowledge of the context in which writing happens and especially the purpose for the writing (as in genre approaches), and skills in using language (as in process approaches).”

The EPCO 1 course is organized within an overarching topic-related framework. Beginning with a brief overview of the economy as a whole, EPCO 1 students work with diagrams (e.g., the sectors of the economy), flow charts (e.g., the recruitment process), and explanatory texts (e.g., company types) to acquire a general understanding of key areas of business activity. These areas include forms of business organization, business transactions, product development and innovation, promotion and advertising, and human resource management. Key text types from each of

these areas (e.g., the complaint mail, the internal proposal memo, the letter of application) are analyzed and core vocabulary is acquired.

As the EPCO 1 course progresses through the topic areas, students' understanding of the concepts of genre, audience, and purpose are deepened through analytical activities that lead to writing tasks. When working with a genre, students may compare, analyze, and dissect representative samples of the target genre, exploring the moves and determining their function, asking how each move contributes to the overall purpose of the text, and identifying and categorizing the language features that help to express these functions. Extrapolating the typical move structure of the genre of the complaint mail, for example, and identifying genre-typical language structures connected to these moves yields a workable template for the text type, a result which students regard as empowering as they set about writing a complaint mail from a prompt.

Since the advanced EPCO 2 courses deal with different professional domains, each course focuses on relevant topic areas for the domain in question; in addition, each course by necessity also deals with aspects of texts or specific text types that are of particular relevance for that domain. For example, the course dealing with the domain of the law looks at unique features of specialist legal texts, such as prescriptiveness; the course focusing on the domain of medicine pays particular attention to the often hybrid purposes of non-specialist medical texts (e.g., patient brochures with the purpose of explaining and advising); while the course dealing with the domain of technology repeatedly deals with visual representations of data. Nevertheless, while the approach of the EPCO 2 courses is topic-driven and domain-specific, the focus is on transferable language skills, not on topical/subject matter knowledge.

In both EPCO 1 and EPCO 2, students carry out tasks and engage with the sample texts in pairs or small groups; the learning process unfolds as a "series of scaffolded developmental steps in which teachers and peers play a major role" (Hyland, 2007, p. 153). Students may rearrange or match moves of one or more texts; compare texts with omissions, changes, or different structures; or identify and collect examples of specific language features. Analytical tasks lead to activities that focus more explicitly on text transformation and/or text mediation, such as completing unfinished or skeletal texts; creating a parallel text following a given model; paraphrasing or abridging a text; editing a completed text; or rewriting a text by changing one of the parameters, for example purpose, audience, register, or text type.

As they work with texts, students are made aware of their interrelationships, that is, of the fact that certain genres belong together in the workplace as "connected sets of genres" (Bazerman, 1994, p. 79). Lecturers focus on "how genres are sequenced and used in real-world events" (Hyland, 2007, p. 156). For example, in the unit of EPCO 1 which deals with the job application process, students engage with sets of texts used in this context, such as the job ad, the CV, the application letter, and the job interview, noticing how textual elements of one text can be re-used and can reappear in another text. One example of a transformation task which foregrounds the interrelationship of texts is based on the text type of the press release. Tasked with writing a proposal memo to their superior to persuade them to purchase a specific product for their company, students transform a press release about the launch

of the product by selecting pertinent information and language from the original text, deciding on suitable persuasive strategies, calibrating the register so that it is appropriate for the new audience, and structuring their text in accordance with the expected move structure of the target text.

For the advanced level EPCO 2 students, text analysis is informed by a clear distinction between specialist and non-specialist texts. Students directly compare texts written for non-specialists with the authentic specialist texts upon which they are based, using the transformed texts as models of good transformation practice. As they identify salient linguistic features of the transformed texts, students add to their own repertoire of effective transformation strategies for use in their own writing.

In the final project completed for the EPCO 1 course, groups of three students analyze three texts exemplifying a chosen genre in a specific professional field (e.g., the recommendation letter in a university context; the about us page of hotels; job advertisements for lawyers). Students complete three text analysis grids (one for each text), and write an analytical essay about their findings. In a highly interactive session held near the end of the semester, each project group presents an academic poster showing the results of the analysis of their chosen genre. In the EPCO 2 course, students work in pairs and undertake the analysis of a specialist legal text type (e.g., the tenancy agreement, the cease and desist letter), of which they gather six examples. After completing six text analysis grids and writing an analytical essay on their findings, each group transforms their text type (or one example of their text type) into another text type, one which has been analyzed and practiced in class (e.g., a public service website, a legal blog). The project groups present the findings of their analyses in oral presentations at the end of the term.

### 5.3 Feedback and Assessment

EPCO lecturers employ different types of feedback and assessment to help students reach the overall learning aims and to ensure that the teaching methods employed are effective and lead to the desired learning outcomes.

Peer feedback plays a role throughout the courses. For example, several sessions of both EPCO 1 and EPCO 2 are designated as writing workshops in which students are guided in the production of a text. The writing phase of these workshops is preceded by the in-depth analysis of a sample text of the target genre, as students determine salient structural and linguistic features of the sample text. Then, working in small groups, students produce a text in response to a prompt. The texts are then uploaded to Moodle, the e-learning platform commonly used at the University of Vienna. Students are invited to provide detailed peer feedback on the uploaded texts in a discussion forum on the platform. This extensive process of collaborative writing and detailed feedback not only foregrounds the writing process, but it also establishes positive classroom dynamics, as students engage with each other in writing

and commenting on their own texts. This process also provides the lecturer with insight into the students' analytical abilities, writing and proofreading skills, as well as speaking skills. Peer feedback is also practiced through post-writing revision, editing, and ranking tasks set on the e-learning platform.

EPCO lecturers provide formative feedback in various ways. They facilitate and trouble-shoot the writing process in workshop sessions, and provide qualitative oral feedback on individual student work during these sessions, as well as in private conferences, in meetings with project groups, or via recorded comments. In class, common problem areas or language use issues are displayed on slides and discussed, and selected passages from student texts are re-worked with the class as a whole. Additionally, qualitative written feedback is provided by lecturers in the form of comments and suggestions on homework assignments and project proposals.

Criterion-referenced assessment contributes significantly to the learning process. In both EPCO courses, two rating scales – one for analytical essays (see Appendix 1) and one for text transformations (see Appendix 2) – are employed in the formative and the summative assessment of student work; they are used both to assess homework assignments and to assess the final exam and the final project report. Both rating scales have the same descriptors for text competence, linguistic range, and linguistic accuracy, but they differ with regard to the task fulfilment criterion: in the text analysis rating scale, the writer's ability to produce an in-depth analysis of a text, to argue in a cogent manner, and to address language use in the text under analysis are assessed; the task fulfilment criterion of the text transformation scale includes descriptors concerning genre-specific text characteristics, the use of transformation strategies, as well as the effective use of language in the target text. Students are encouraged to become familiar with the assessment criteria so that an informed awareness will guide their writing.

The constituents of the final grade and the corresponding percentages are the same for all EPCO courses and sections. In EPCO 1, the course grade is calculated on the basis of the following: homework assignments (two text transformations, with each accompanied by a justification grid, in which students identify and exemplify salient language features of both the original text and their own text, providing justifications for the language features they have chosen) and classwork (20%); group project (three text analysis grids, text analysis essay, project proposal) (20%); academic poster and poster presentation (10%); final test (50%). The final test consists of two parts, a text transformation of a given text (80% of the test grade), and a justification grid of the given text (20% of the test grade). For a positive EPCO 1 grade, the final test must be positive, and the average mark for the whole course must be 60% or better for the student to pass. In EPCO 2, the constituents of the final grade are the following: written assignments (two text transformations with one justification grid for each) and class participation (30%); project presentation (20%) and written project report (20%); and the final test (30%). In EPCO 2, the



final test consists of an analytical essay writing task in response to a question about the text type the students have chosen to analyze for the course project. All of these parts must be completed and three out of the four parts must be positive (including the final test). The pass grade for the course is 60%.

## 5.4 Challenges and Future Directions

EPCO lecturers face many of the challenges encountered by teachers of ESP courses generally. These can include a lack of teacher knowledge of the specialist area, the need to adopt a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach in genre-based teaching, the issue of text authenticity, or the challenge of dealing with variation within genres, to name but a few. One considerable challenge faced by ESP teachers and lecturers of EPCO 1 and 2 is keeping abreast of the continual evolution of what Skulstad (2002) refers to as *emerging* and *established* professional genres. Since developments in technology, workplace processes, company culture, and social mores clearly affect professional genres, lecturers are encouraged to pay attention to emerging text types, such as the Facebook complaint, the about us page, the marketing tweet, the video tutorial, as well as to the changes occurring in established text types (e.g., the application letter/email, the CV, terms and conditions). This challenge can best be met with a mindset that prioritizes the continual adaptation and relevance of teaching materials and methods.

A further challenge faced specifically by lecturers of the advanced level course is the fact that EPCO 2 builds on a foundation gained in EPCO 1 in the BA/BEEd programs. However, as some EPCO 2 students enter the MA program from outside the department and have not completed EPCO 1, they are often unfamiliar with the genre-analytical approach. To remedy this situation, lecturers need to identify these students and steer them to remedial materials at the outset of the course. Scheduling an in-depth review of key concepts and a “toolkit check” at the beginning of EPCO 2 benefits the class as a whole.

In order to maintain the relevance of the skills and genre awareness EPCO students acquire, lecturers must be willing to meet the challenges posed by a world of constantly changing and newly-emerging discourse practices and their textual products.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### EPCO Rating Scale for Text Analyses

Task fulfilment	Text competence	Linguistic range	Linguistic accuracy
<p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In-depth analysis</b> of the way in which structure, language, and rhetorical devices are exploited for a particular purpose;</li> <li>• <b>Cogent argument</b> on possible reasons for and effects of author's choices;</li> <li>• Addresses <b>finer subtleties</b> of nuanced language, rhetorical effect, and stylistic language use (e.g., metaphors, ambiguity, connotations) where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Highly reader-friendly</b> complex text which helps the reader to find <b>significant points</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Flawless paragraphs</b> with <b>highly effective</b> information structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Very broad range</b> of <b>complex</b> language including idiomatic expressions to convey finer shades of meaning;</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of</b> connotative levels of meaning where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Virtually free of errors</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reasoned argument</b> on possible reasons for and effects of author's choices;</li> <li>• <b>Plausible</b> evidence/examples from the text to support <b>all</b> hypotheses;</li> <li>• <b>All ideas explicitly related</b> to a larger context (e.g., possible effects on the audience, overall purpose of the text) thus explaining <b>plausibly</b> why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Smoothly flowing</b> text with a <b>logical structure</b> and logical relations between all sentences;</li> <li>• <b>Wide range of cohesive devices</b> used accurately;</li> <li>• <b>Conclusion</b> summarises the point of view about the text while expressing an opinion on whether it was successful or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Broad range</b> of language to formulate complex thoughts <b>precisely</b> and <b>naturally</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistently high degree</b> of accuracy, with only <b>occasional slips</b></li> </ul>

<p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fair analysis</b> of the genre conventions, although <b>some points may lack elaboration/support/evidence</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Informed comments</b> on text features but <b>not all ideas</b> are <b>explicitly</b> related to a larger context thus explaining why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Well-structured, coherent</b> text, showing controlled use of organisational patterns;</li> <li>• <b>Well-developed paragraphs</b>: ideas are generally linked logically;</li> <li>• <b>Conclusion attempts</b> to summarise the point of view about the text while expressing an opinion on whether it was successful or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sufficient range</b> of language used <b>appropriately</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relatively high degree</b> of linguistic control; some mistakes, which <b>do not impede understanding</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Some relevant content missing</b> or <b>not developed</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Few ideas</b> about the text related to a larger context; this may be <b>implicit</b> rather than explicit, and so it <b>may be unclear</b> why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Several inadequacies</b> in structure at the text and/or paragraph level, some of which may strain the reader;</li> <li>• <b>Limited range of cohesive devices</b> with inaccuracies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Limited range</b> of language, resulting in some <b>imprecision, repetitiveness, and/or circumlocution</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Parts of the text are inappropriate</b> in style and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Several linguistic choices</b> unsatisfactory for the task; some of these <b>may impede understanding</b> or strain readers, forcing them to pause or reread</li> </ul>
<p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No evidence/examples</b> from the text to support ideas, or <b>irrelevant</b> examples/evidence;</li> <li>• Ideas about the text are <b>not explicitly related</b> to the larger context, and so it is <b>often unclear</b> why the author(s) made their choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of coherence and/or cohesion</b> at the text and/or paragraph level;</li> <li>• <b>Essential structural elements inadequate</b> or <b>missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Narrow range</b> of language with <b>clear signs of limitations</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Inappropriate</b> in style and register;</li> <li>• <b>Some non-essential lifting</b> from source text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Frequent/repeated</b> inaccuracies, which <b>may impede understanding</b> of certain passages</li> </ul>
<p><b>0</b></p>	<p>Task misunderstood or not enough to evaluate</p>		

## Appendix 2

### EPCO Rating Scale for Text Transformations

Task fulfilment	Text competence	Linguistic range	Linguistic accuracy	Justifications
<p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transformation conveys even <b>subtle nuances</b> (e.g., clarity, memorability, action-orientation, persuasiveness, emotional appeal, tentativeness);</li> <li>All salient content points <b>cogently elaborated/argued</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Text competence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Highly reader-friendly</b> (complex) text which helps the reader to find <b>significant points</b>;</li> <li><b>Flawless paragraphs</b> with <b>highly effective</b> information structure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Linguistic range</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Very broad range</b> of (complex) language including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, where appropriate, to convey finer shades of meaning;</li> <li><b>Effective use of irony, allusive, figurative language, and other creative elements</b> where appropriate (e.g., successfully challenging the conventions of the genre)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Linguistic accuracy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Virtually free of errors</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Justifications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justification with <b>highly insightful observations</b> and <b>convincing interpretations</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All genre-specific characteristics <b>effective</b> (e.g., layout, conventional text elements, moves);</li> <li>All <b>relevant features</b> of source text(s) <b>changed effectively</b>;</li> <li><b>Effective use of transformation/mediation strategies</b> (e.g., breaking down, simplifying, amplifying, streamlining)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Text competence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Smoothly flowing</b> text with a <b>logical structure</b> and logical relations between all sentences;</li> <li><b>Wide range of cohesive devices</b> used accurately (where relevant)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Linguistic range</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Broad range</b> of language to formulate complex thoughts <b>precisely</b> and <b>naturally</b> and paraphrase effectively;</li> <li><b>Language adapted effectively</b> (e.g., syntax, idiomaticity, jargon, register, degree of sophistication and detail)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Linguistic accuracy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Consistently high degree</b> of accuracy, with only <b>occasional slips</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Justifications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justification with <b>clear and logical explanations</b>;</li> <li>The <b>most relevant features</b> of source text <b>identified</b> (with <b>examples</b>), and <b>changes/additions</b> (with <b>examples</b>) are <b>explained in relation to their intended effect</b> in the target text</li> </ul>

<p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reader has <b>no difficulty identifying the text type</b>;</li> <li>All salient content points <b>addressed</b>;</li> <li>All <b>relevant features</b> of source text(s) <b>changed appropriately</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Well-structured, coherent</b> text, showing controlled use of organisational patterns;</li> <li><b>Well-developed paragraphs</b>; ideas are generally linked logically</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sufficient range</b> of language used appropriately for the task (including tone);</li> <li><b>Suitable paraphrases and nontechnical language</b> where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Relatively high degree</b> of linguistic control; some mistakes, which <b>do not impede understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanations are <b>generally clear</b>, but <b>some choices explained may not be reflected</b> in the target text</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reader may have <b>difficulty identifying the text type</b>;</li> <li>Some <b>relevant content missing</b>;</li> <li>Some <b>features not changed appropriately</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Several inadequacies</b> in structure at the text and/or paragraph level, some of which may strain the reader;</li> <li><b>Limited range of cohesive devices</b> with inaccuracies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Limited range</b> of language, resulting in some <b>imprecision, repetitiveness</b>, and/or <b>circumlocution</b>;</li> <li><b>Parts of the text are inappropriate</b> in style and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Several linguistic choices</b> unsatisfactory for the task; some of these may <b>impede understanding</b> or strain readers, forcing them to pause or reread</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Some explanations may not be logical</b> or reflect a <b>limited understanding</b> of the target audience/purpose/genre; choices explained are <b>often not reflected</b> in the target text</li> </ul>
<p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Text type not identifiable</b>;</li> <li><b>Irrelevant features</b> of source text(s) changed;</li> <li><b>Several changes inappropriate</b>;</li> <li><b>Essential content missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Lack of coherence and/or cohesion</b> at the text and/or paragraph level;</li> <li><b>Essential structural elements inadequate</b> or <b>missing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Narrow range</b> of language with <b>clear signs of limitations</b>;</li> <li><b>Inappropriate</b> in style and register;</li> <li><b>Some non-essential lifting</b> from source text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Frequent/repeated inaccuracies</b>, which <b>may impede understanding</b> of certain passages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanations are <b>frequently illogical/unclear</b> or do not reflect an understanding of the target audience/purpose/genre; choices explained are <b>not reflected</b> in the target text;</li> <li><b>Examples missing</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>0</b></p>	<p>Task misunderstood or not enough to evaluate</p>			

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# Chapter 6

## English for Academic Purposes



Angelika Rieder-Bünemann

**Keywords** English for Specific Purposes · Teaching academic writing · Academic identity · Academic genre conventions · Academic discourse community

### 6.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course is one of two language courses in the MA programmes at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna: English Language and Linguistics, and Anglophone Literatures and Cultures. There is no prerequisite for attendance other than admission to the MA programme. The general level of language proficiency expected from students enrolling for the MA programme is between C1 and C2 according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001).

As part of the MA programmes, students have to plan and undertake research leading to an MA thesis. The EAP course is designed to support students in this process, building on knowledge they have gained from language classes in their BA programme, their experience of writing BA seminar papers, and more generally their high language proficiency in English. Generally, this course should increase students' understanding of academic discourse practices and the applicability of these to postgraduate study and research. More specifically, the course aims at developing student competences in three core areas: students' identity as producers and recipients of academic texts, their ability to comply with established genre conventions, and textual competence.

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A. Rieder-Bünemann (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

e-mail: [angelika.rieder@univie.ac.at](mailto:angelika.rieder@univie.ac.at)

The centrality of identity for academic practices represents the main foundation of the perspective on EAP taken in the course: writer identity is conceptualised as intrinsically linked to academic writing and speaking practices (see Ivanič, 1998), which is in line with an interpretation of academic discourse as social practice (Fairclough, 1992). This central role of identity clearly shapes both students' conceptions of academic writing and their positions as academic readers (see Ohata & Fukao, 2014), and is equally relevant for oral scenarios, such as academic presentations. Special emphasis is placed on building students' awareness of their own developing identities as participants in academic discourse communities, and of their paths towards finding their voices as academic writers and speakers (see Ivanič, 1998). This involves familiarising students with the processes and practices of academic discourse, with the aim of making them more confident as academic writers and speakers. Special emphasis is also given to raising their awareness of the role of ethics in academic writing and the development of their critical (self-)awareness as writers and researchers (see Wallace & Wray, 2006). Furthermore, the course aims at enhancing their competences in evaluating arguments of other researchers, and in expressing personal stance in their own academic productions.

Another course focus revolves around academic genre conventions: genres that are relevant in an MA context (e.g., abstracts, literature reviews) are critically discussed and compared, addressing both parallels and differences between academic fields (see Swales & Feak, 2012). The social-constructivist view of academic writing adopted sees the development of academic literacy as a socialisation process, rather than as a set of skills to be learned (Paltridge, 2004), and is essentially discourse-oriented and sensitive to discipline-specific variations (Hyland, 2000). Consequently, the course does not aim at presenting universal models of genres, but at raising students' awareness of the common communicative purposes of each genre, as well as of the particular conventions agreed on in a particular study area (Swales, 1990). This should enable students to produce relevant written and oral genres in accordance with the specific conventions of their research field. In line with the focus on students' identities, the course embraces a view of student genres as legitimate and independent entities with their own purpose and audience (Charles & Pecorari, 2016). Course discussions here also touch upon the socio-cultural context, including critical reflections on the potential influence of reader/writer power relations on students' academic writing (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). The genre-related course objectives reflect these principles: After the EAP course, students should be aware of the conventions of different academic discourse communities and of the role of purpose in shaping academic texts, which should enable them to produce text types required for their MA degree in an acceptable format. At the same time, they should also be aware of the role of ideology and power in shaping text production.

The third course content area deals with textual competence, which specifically takes into account the fact that academic writing is taught in a second language (L2) (see Cumming, 2006). Here, the focus lies on generic aspects of academic writing and speaking like style or logic (see Swales & Feak, 2012). With stylistic elements of academic registers, including formal lexico-grammar, or the use of the first person, the course stresses that what is considered appropriate can vary from discipline

to discipline, or between written and spoken genres. Features of text organisation, logic, and authorial stance discussed comprise, for example, signalling textual or argument structure, synthesising sources and positioning oneself in relation to them, or qualifying statements. Through this input, then, students should be able to write and speak in an academic style, which includes using appropriate levels of formality, classifying and synthesising information, as well as making evaluative comments on others' works and using them to support their own arguments. Furthermore, the course should enable them to use appropriate signposting to make texts more reader- and listener-friendly, and to produce cohesive and coherent academic texts which present clear, logical, and convincing arguments.

## 6.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

In line with the content areas sketched in Sect. 6.1, the approach to EAP-teaching is essentially genre-based (see Johns, 2001), reflecting a situated view of academic writing and speaking which acknowledges both the role of students as members of the academic community and the place of student writing in academia (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). At the same time, the teaching approach takes into account the extra challenge faced by L2 learners.

As regards the realisation of these elements in the course syllabus, the notions of identity and genre conventions are integrated by moving from more general points related to writer identity and writing processes to the question of what makes a good academic text. Then, each of the academic genres focused on (abstract, book review, literature review, academic presentation, research proposal) is discussed in turn, with a view to discipline-specific variations, in order to enable students to produce these genres in accordance with the academic conventions of their chosen discipline (which is part of their home assignments). In the final session, the course focus returns to the concepts of the (self-)critical writer and identity, and touches on the role of ideology and power in academia. In order to cater for language and textual competence, individual focus units are integrated in each session in line with the specific session topic. Academic lexico-grammar, for example, is dealt with when discussing features of 'good' academic texts, or hedging and comparing/contrasting arguments are focused on in the sessions on literature reviews. The component of referring to others' works, including summarising, paraphrasing, and quoting sources, as well as referencing and citation rules, is treated in a separate session to ensure a thorough revision, especially for students from other university backgrounds who may have divergent experience or expectation levels (see also Sect. 6.4). Course syllabus, lesson plans, activities, materials, and assessment are standardised across all EAP courses to ensure comparability, and all related course documents are updated and made available to lecturers via file-sharing by the course level coordinators. Furthermore, the e-learning platform Moodle is employed in all courses for assignment hand-in, course material provision, and supplying students with complementary activities, materials, or links.



In in-class as well as out-of-class tasks, the course applies a mix of methods with a special focus on inductive and awareness-raising activities, interactive tasks, pair and group work, and independent student work. Genre-related activities are typically characterised by a top-down approach (Swales, 2002), starting by analysing example texts regarding their purpose, audience, and social context, rather than using deductive procedures. Procedures here combine different topics, activity types, and modes. In the session on book reviews, for example, students first explore and discuss purposes and effects of hedging devices to signal authorial position in a teacher-led activity, which is followed by individual and pair practice. Then they receive four different book reviews in a jigsaw reading activity (see Esnawy, 2016), with one quarter of the class reading one of the reviews each and analysing purpose, structure, and content elements. The analysis results are first discussed in groups sharing the same review, and then compared in groups of four students with different reviews, followed by a whole class discussion, to raise awareness of parallels and differences. Finally, the focus is directed towards analysing the language elements of their reviews signalling the reviewer's position and evaluation of the book. Only then do they receive guidelines for writing their own book reviews (see Swales & Feak, 2012), which are based on a genre analysis of published reviews.

In order to provide a theoretical embedding of the contents discussed, the course is accompanied by a reader containing relevant background literature, which is integrated either as preparatory or follow-up reading for each unit. As a link to discourse practices, example texts are provided for each genre discussed to illustrate variations across disciplines, and students are encouraged to reflect and comment on specifics of their MA thesis field, which may or may not conform to these examples.

In order to strengthen the link between the coursework and students' MA studies, course participants are strongly encouraged to choose MA-related source texts for their written assignments. The academic book review, for example, should focus on a book or an article relevant for their thesis, and for their literature review, they should review literature relating to their MA thesis topic. The academic presentation assignment, in turn, ensures MA relevance by focusing on the variation between written and spoken academic discourse, and asking students to apply their competences of analysing relevant genres. Here, students fulfil a twofold task: On the one hand, they carry out a systematic analysis of a text illustrating a relevant genre of their choice (e.g., abstract, journal article, student paper) in an academic format (i.e., based on a focused research question, employing a systematic methodology, and using credible sources); on the other hand, they show that they can present the results of their text analysis in an academic format.

### **6.3 Feedback and Assessment**

Typically, students entering the MA programme come from a range of university backgrounds. In order to ensure that the EAP class is tailored to students' actual needs, the course initially includes diagnostic assessment. Students are asked to

hand in a guided written reflection on text types produced so far, perceived past and potential future challenges, and course expectations. This gives lecturers a basic idea of the experience, needs, and expectations of each student, enabling them to adapt and differentiate their teaching accordingly.

Throughout the course, formative assessment plays a central role at various stages. Systematic formative assessment is integrated both on the level of peer feedback and on the level of lecturer feedback for two of the four written assignments (book review, literature review). For their book review assignment, the students give feedback to, and receive feedback from, two randomly assigned colleagues on a draft version (assignment upload and allocation is organised automatically via the Moodle tool *workshop*), which they integrate before handing in their final version. For the literature review, the major assignment for this course, the loops of drafting and formative feedback continue throughout the second half of the semester to ensure that students go through several writing phases before handing in their final version. While the first and second cycle involve peer feedback (students first exchange an outline and then a draft version), the third stage comprises formative feedback from the lecturer on a revised outline and a 500-word section of the literature review, with a focus on argument structure and logic.

In addition to these predetermined feedback loops, the lecturer is available to students for individual formative feedback on assignment drafts or related questions as needed. The final versions of the written assignments are assessed summatively based on a standardised assessment grid containing detailed criteria for the categories *task fulfilment*, *textual competence*, and *lexicogrammar*. The points awarded for each assignment are complemented by qualitative teacher feedback. Procedures vary, but typically, individual written feedback comments are provided for each assignment in addition to the point results, and overall qualitative feedback for the whole group is given orally in class when handing back graded assignments, with exemplary discussions of strengths and weaknesses of student texts.

The criteria for the summative assessment of academic presentations are also standardised and specified in a separate grid with detailed descriptors integrating both content-related and genre-related aspects. As the presentations are given in pairs, the assessment contains a group component (content of text analysis, presentation structure, visual aids) as well as an individual component (language use, voice, body language), so that feedback on each student's presentation style can be factored into the assessment result. Again, complementary to the point result, students receive (oral or written) qualitative feedback from the lecturer.

The final course grade is based on continuous assessment of students' home assignments and course participation only, since a final test involving text production in a limited time frame would not represent a realistic writing scenario in academic settings, where manuscripts are typically written and revised in various cycles. The constituents and percentages of the final grade are standardised across all courses as follows: abstract (15%), book review (15%), literature review (30%), research proposal (20%), academic presentation (15%). Course participation, which includes the completion of smaller, ungraded assignments, features with 5%. Since

the literature review is a crucial element in students' MA theses, the completion of this assignment is also a minimum requirement for passing the course.

## 6.4 Challenges and Future Directions

The EAP course faces two main challenges: catering for a diverse student population with varying prior knowledge and experience, and conveying the variation of genre conventions in different subject areas. The first challenge revolves around the diverse entry levels of students regarding their language competence and previous academic experiences. While students who have attended the BA programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna generally exhibit relatively uniform levels, international students entering the MA programme come from a range of university backgrounds, with language proficiency levels and academic writing experience typically varying widely. This implies that EAP lecturers have to cater for a markedly heterogeneous audience. To ensure that all students meet the standards expected of BA graduates at the Department of English and American Studies, a certain amount of in-class revision is already integrated in the course. However, with the rising proportion of international students in the MA programme, this discrepancy in entry levels can be expected to increase further, so that more systematic procedures for individualised honing and revising of language and academic competences might have to be integrated.

The second challenge relates to the conventions varying between academic disciplines. MA students will write their thesis in a range of different fields (cultural studies, linguistics, literary studies, language teaching methodology), with practices varying between them, and sometimes also within the same discipline. This is challenging for lecturers both from the perspective of picking example texts to raise awareness of differing conventions, as well as for giving targeted feedback on student productions, since the teachers might not be fully familiar with the precise conventions of the respective discipline. Furthermore, since these conventions are discourse community-specific, international students might have diverging expectations based on the practices at their home institutions. Clearly, this diversity cannot be catered for by the lecturers aiming at familiarising themselves with all possible scenarios, but only by a focus on more generic features of academic genres, style, and argumentation in the feedback, and by encouraging students to explore the specific conventions of their own academic field themselves by investigating related publications or speaking to their supervisors, in order to ensure that they comply with these practices.

Accordingly, future directions for the EAP course would need to involve integrating adaptations to cater for the challenges mentioned above. Student variations in language competence and academic writing experience could, for example, be met by setting up systematic supplementary self-study packs and useful links for autonomous remedial study as standard resources on the e-learning platform Moodle. Students' diverging needs regarding discipline conventions, in turn, could

be addressed by inviting groups of departmental researchers working in students' respective MA fields and organising targeted group discussions, for example in one of the final sessions. With these elements, the EAP course would be in an even better position to ensure that all students are equally well equipped to meet the requirements of their MA thesis as well as those of a potential academic journey beyond the master's level.

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# Chapter 7

## Mediation and Genre Analysis for English Teachers



Gabrielle Smith-Dluha

**Keywords** Genre analysis · Mediation · Writing skills · Digital communication · Professional communication

### 7.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

Mediation and Genre Analysis for English Teachers (MAGNET) is one of two required English language competence courses designed for pre-service English teachers in the Master of Education (MEd) program of the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. While its companion course, Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (ASSET), is focused on developing advanced spoken English for educational contexts (see Richter, “Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers,” [this volume](#)), MAGNET emphasizes advanced genre analysis, writing, and mediation skills. There is no prerequisite for attendance other than admission into the MEd program. The language proficiency of students is expected to be at the upper range of C1 according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020).

MAGNET develops the skills and knowledge necessary for coping with a wide range of texts relevant in the educational domain. The course takes a hands-on, project-oriented approach in which students analyze, critically question, write/read about, produce, and mediate genres relevant to teachers, students, and professionals. Emphasis is placed on independent genre analysis and adapting texts to suit different audiences and purposes.

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G. Smith-Dluha (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [gabrielle.smith-dluha@univie.ac.at](mailto:gabrielle.smith-dluha@univie.ac.at)

The MAGNET curriculum focuses on three categories of genres: academic genres, school-leaving exam text types, and professional genres with a focus on how these genres are evolving in digital spheres together with new digital genres. This selection of text types is shaped by our students' personal and professional goals and based on the principle that "students learn best when the learning is relevant to their immediate needs" (Blok et al., 2020, p. 26). We are keenly aware that our MED students require "career-ready communication skills and proficiency in English" (Blok et al., 2020, p. 16). Thus, MAGNET is carefully designed to enable pre-service teachers to explore the structural, linguistic, and social dimensions of text types prominent in their future careers.

The primary purpose of the course is for students to develop generic skills in analyzing the typical discourse patterns of any selected genre. Students investigate how reoccurring patterns in register, organization, and layout are used in a text to reach certain audiences and fulfill specific purposes. They explore how "genres differ in that each has a different goal and they are structured differently to achieve these goals" (Hyland, 1992, p. 15, as cited in Lakic et al., 2015, p. 43). The pre-service teachers learn to identify patterns of similarity, or unique instances of difference, found across each genre and to examine why, for which communicative purpose(s) and audience(s), the genre tends to follow these patterns, so they can teach their future students to competently produce and mediate a range of genres, such as emails and reports.

Central to MAGNET is the understanding that genres are socially-situated, meaning that audience, purpose, medium (written, spoken, electronic), cultural norms, and the way the text is consumed (where and how it is read, seen, or listened to) all impact the structural and linguistic realizations of the text. Students reflect on how language, visual, and/or paralinguistic elements are used to organize and sustain social communities, construct meanings and identities, promote values and assumptions, influence behavior, establish power, and create knowledge (see Swales, 1990).

Additionally, the MAGNET course curriculum draws upon computer-mediated discourse analysis theory to examine digital genres together with the metamessage conveyed by the medium itself (see Tannen, 2013; Vandergriff, 2016). For example, the decision to send a message via email rather than via phone text carries a tacit message beyond the simple denotative level of the written content. Drawing upon Herring's (2007) classification scheme for analyzing communication in technologically-mediated spaces, students in the MAGNET course examine both the *situational factors* (the social context, such as author-audience relationship) and the *medium factors* (the dimensions of the digital tool, such as ability to communicate through an anonymous online identity), and how these two factors intertwine to shape digital communication.

Further analysis includes the network of texts in which a genre functions or its *genre ecology*. Swales (2004) described constellations of genres, which include hierarchies, chains, sets, and networks. For instance, a single blog entry does not exist on its own, but is part of a connected ecology of other blog entries by the same

author, the author's profile, hyperlinks to other online texts, an interactive comments section, and other genres.

MAGNET also addresses intercultural and plurilingual competence together with lexico-grammatical competence. In many instances, writers and readers bring culture-specific assumptions to genres. For example, norms regarding register and move structure in emails to professors may vary from culture to culture (see Baugh, 2011). This means that, at times, genre production must be adapted to specific cultural contexts. To navigate the social context of request emails, for example, writers must draw upon socio-pragmatic skills to achieve their purpose and be acutely aware of culturally specific dimensions of power distance, degree of familiarity, and degree of imposition (see Brown & Levinson, 1987). By bringing cultural awareness into the analysis, the MAGNET course aims to support the recent paradigm shift in Austrian education policy, which strives to foster teachers' and students' multilingual repertoire (see Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019).

Hand in hand with the genre analysis component of the course is mediation, a skill highly relevant for teachers. Mediation can be defined as the act of adapting and reformulating content from one context to another in order to make the content comprehensible to different audiences. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* describes mediation as occurring when "the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90). Mediation can involve reprocessing an existing text, adapting language, breaking down complicated information, amplifying a dense text, or streamlining a text (see Council of Europe, 2020). In other words, mediation enables communication between people or groups who are unable to share content directly and thus facilitates collaboration in society. By engaging in mediation tasks in MAGNET, the pre-service teachers are called upon to make choices as to which information to relay, making a judgement call as to what might be relevant to the other participants (see Dendrinos, 2006). Such practice is important for the role of educators who mediate knowledge daily for their students. Furthermore, because of the increasingly diverse student populations in Austria (see Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019), teachers are also called upon to develop competence in multimodal mediation (visual and acoustic texts) to aid L2/L3 student comprehension of content alongside competence in relaying information that is more digestible between cultures.

## 7.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

One of the starting points for the MAGNET curriculum was the nationwide implementation of a new, standardized school-leaving exam in 2015/16, the *Standardisierte Reife- und Diplomprüfung*, which has had far-reaching implications in Austria's upper secondary school system and also a carry-over effect into tertiary teacher education programs in Austria (see Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019). In response,



MAGNET focuses on the text types required for the national Austrian school-leaving exam, such as emails, blogs, leaflets, and reports. In addition, various academic genres relevant for graduate studies, such as abstracts and research proposals, are also examined and produced in the course. Furthermore, emerging non-linear, multi-modal digital genres, such as Instagram captions, online reviews, and digital profiles, are also explored as a means for the pre-service teachers to keep abreast with genres currently used by society at large. The aim is for the students to develop a strong understanding of genre analysis in general, which then can be applied to any genre they may need to teach or produce professionally.

In terms of the MAGNET course assignments, a Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach is applied. PBL can be defined as a teaching method in which students develop knowledge and specific competences through engaging in extended authentic tasks in which they must grapple with complex, meaningful questions or challenges and then communicate their findings or solutions (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Well-designed project work requires critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. In the MAGNET approach to language competence, students engage in a variety of extended group and individual projects questioning, discussing, researching, and making and justifying decisions in order to analyze and produce selected text types.

The MAGNET curriculum is built around a series of weekly learning tasks in which students engage in small group analysis and production of various text types. Preparation starts with individual reading assignments of academic research papers from the field of linguistics alongside more popular online professional guides or how-to articles for comparison and discussion. Collaboratively, the groups engage in analyses of a variety of texts and informal practice producing the genre. Practice producing the genres is important as “experiencing their own performances is surely the most powerful way for students to learn to write better” (Dewitt, 2015, p. 48).

In addition, MAGNET students engage in an individual research assignment. Students write a formal 1000-1500-word genre-analysis report on a self-selected genre. Following from their own genre analysis research question, students write a short literature review along with a close analysis of two example texts, highlighting salient rhetorical, linguistic, or multimodal choices.

As for an extended collaborative project, the pre-service teachers complete a creative group mediation project which is then presented to the class in the form of an academic presentation at the end of the semester. Student groups select two genres of interest which are relevant to the educational domain and write a project proposal. After consultation with the lecturer, the groups embark on analysis and comparison of each genre, providing a foundation for the subsequent creative mediation task. The groups then mediate the content from one of the genres to the second, producing a new text adapted for a different audience or purpose. For example, students examine school textbook instructions for writing cover letters and mediate the content into the more student-appealing multimodal genre of a how-to blog. Or, for another example, students mediate content from a literary work into a short scene to be performed by students in a language class. The aim is for the pre-service teachers to develop and practice the challenging mediation skills of adapting tone,



style, and register, as well as the level of linguistic and conceptual complexity, for a new audience while aiming to achieve equivalent meaning. Finally, the groups present their analysis of both genres to the class, showcasing their mediated text and explaining/justifying the relevance of their project and their rhetorical-linguistic choices in crafting the mediated text.

Overall, the MAGNET course aims to develop students' competence and confidence in approaching and producing a wide range of genres, thus qualifying them to lead the next generation of students with specialized skills in professional and social communication in English.

### 7.3 Feedback and Assessment

Students in MAGNET are organized into smaller learning communities of four to five students. These small learning communities, which are maintained for the duration of the semester, provide an ideal context for ongoing formative assessment. Small learning communities enhance student voice in the course, allowing for increased personal responsibility in the instructional process and creating a context in which the values and perspectives of the students help shape the discourse and thus set the context for meaningful, formative peer to peer feedback.

As much of their work is collaborative within their small learning community, ongoing formative assessment occurs naturally through peer interaction and self-assessment. For instance, before each course session students each read different articles on the same topic, and then, in the class session, peer-teach to the others in their learning community. Collaboratively, the groups use their reading as a guide for genre analysis and genre production tasks. Through such peer-teaching activities, students are motivated to gauge whether they have understood the reading material enough to teach it, and they self-assess their comprehension based on questions and interaction with their peers. While this self- and peer-assessment is occurring, the lecturer supports with a further layer of formative assessment by posing questions to groups and conducting in-process evaluation of student comprehension and progress.

Furthermore, students receive formative feedback in the form of individual comments on written assignments from the lecturer, as well as a small group consultation session during the mediation project in order to ensure the academic quality of the project design.

In addition to formative assessment, summative assessment is integral to the MAGNET course in order to determine the final grade. Students' final written assignments and final exam are assessed summatively with an assessment grid based on the categories of *task fulfillment*, *textual competence*, and *lexico-grammar* based upon the assessment grid used in the department's English for Academic Purposes course (see Rieder-Bünemann, [this volume](#)).

The criteria for the summative assessment of the group project are standardized and specified in a separate assessment sheet with descriptors integrating both

content-related and genre-related dimensions, with emphasis on the overall academic quality of the project.

A culmination of all course content and competence building occurs in the final exam. In a 90-minute in-class essay exam, students are called upon to demonstrate their mastery of genre analysis through effective written argumentation, accuracy, and fluency. The final course grade is based on continuous assessment of students' course participation (10%), summative assessment of the written assignment (30%), group project (30%), and final written exam (30%).

## 7.4 Challenges and Future Directions

There are three core challenges in executing the MAGNET course: (1) the diverse foci of the course, (2) the choice of text types, and (3) the discrepancy between the text types for testing purposes and authentic texts.

The first challenge is the multiple foci of the course. On the one hand, MAGNET is conceived as an English for Specific Purposes course, specifically addressing the professional needs of pre-service teachers by focusing on genres related to the educational domain, particularly school-leaving exam text types. On the other hand, some content of the course reflects more of an English for Academic Purposes focus, serving the students' needs not as teachers, but as graduate students who require competence with academic text types. Finally, as the MAGNET student population consists of pre-service teachers, class discussions at times veer away from language competence towards didactics, as the students want to explore methods for teaching the genres to their own students. It is challenging to maintain a coherent language competence course with these overlapping and competing foci.

The second challenge is the choice of genres to examine in the course. It is clear that the MEd students want to be competent with the school-leaving exam text types; however, as MAGNET is their only required language competence course focused on writing, they also need competence with text types related to their own academic work. MAGNET aims to address the tension of these competing needs by including a range of text types from both domains. Furthermore, changes in professional and non-professional genres are occurring in digital communication at a faster rate than can be seen in text types found on school-leaving exams. Communication practices are dynamic in our digital age, particularly for the younger generations, so the text types selected for the school-leaving exam do not fully represent the genres currently relevant for student populations or society at large. For example, school textbooks may emphasize letters of complaint, which younger students argue are becoming irrelevant or inauthentic as most product and service reviews today are written online or shared in product review videos. As a result, the MAGNET pre-service teachers want to engage with more current digital text types to meet the growing demand for teacher competence in digital media (see Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019). So, it is difficult to decide which text types to focus on in the course in order to meet the students' professional and academic needs.

The final challenge for MAGNET is the discrepancy between the idealized, prescriptive, and, at times, inauthentic description of the text types in the official school-leaving exam guidelines and textbooks in contrast to the real performances of the text types in communities of use. While emails and blogs are described in simple broad strokes for reasons of testing reliability, in reality each communicative context gives rise to unique realizations of genres. MAGNET students struggle with mastering the stiff genre conventions for testing purposes in contrast to the fluid, responsive skills needed to actually write a text for a real audience.

In terms of possible future directions for MAGNET, ideally there should be greater collaboration with our departmental Centre for English Language Teacher Education and Research (CELTER) to enable a dialogue with other stakeholders such as novice teachers, in-service teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, researchers, and policy makers to help shape the curriculum, particularly with a greater emphasis on plurilingualism and digital media.

In conclusion, despite its challenges, the MAGNET curriculum overall cultivates strong English skills in the areas of communicative, social, intercultural and media competences. Through its genre analysis focus in small learning communities, the course establishes a strong foundation for future teachers of English to teach English language competence skills at secondary and tertiary level.

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# Chapter 8

## Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills



Karin Richter

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### 8.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

With the obligatory Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills (PPOCS) 1 and 2 courses, the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna has a distinct oral communication strand. In addition to a solid grounding in practical phonetics, the PPOCS module aims to ensure that graduates of the bachelor's programmes are expert users of spoken English in its productive and interactive forms. This involves not only highly proficient language use but also a good working knowledge of the main principles of spoken language and familiarity with spoken English in its various stylistic, contextual, social, and regional forms.

The prerequisite for attending PPOCS 1 is the successful completion of the introductory phase (*Studieneingangs- und Orientierungsphase*) and the Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS) module (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). PPOCS 1 is therefore usually taken by students in their fourth semester, parallel to Language in Use 1 (LIU 1, see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)). Attendance at PPOCS 2 requires successful completion of PPOCS 1. (For the corresponding equivalent of PPOCS 2 in the Master of Education programme, see Richter, "Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers," [this volume](#)).

Both PPOCS courses are closely linked to the phonetics components of the Introduction to the Study of Language and the Language in a Social Context

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K. Richter (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [karin.richter@univie.ac.at](mailto:karin.richter@univie.ac.at)

lectures, which provide a theoretical basis by introducing students to the main concepts of phonetics/phonology and phonemic transcription. The PPOCS module builds on this knowledge by focusing on the practical application of these concepts. In addition, there are close links to other courses of the ELC programme, especially ILSS, LIU, and English in a Professional Context (EPCO), in particular as far as register, style, and audience awareness are concerned.

PPOCS 1 and 2 have three main aims in relation to the development of second language (L2) competence. Firstly, students should learn to speak fluently and effectively with a consistent, clear, and precise (regional) pronunciation in various forms of interaction and production at C1 or C2 level according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020). Secondly, students should acquire expert knowledge of the characteristics of spoken language. Lastly, they should develop practical analytical skills, for example for monitoring one's own speech and for error analysis of the speech of others. PPOCS 1 focuses on practical phonetics, with particular attention being paid to segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English (commonly referred to as 'British English' or 'American English'), while PPOCS 2 sees the continuation, elaboration, and practical application of what has been learned in PPOCS 1 as its centre of interest.

In its design, PPOCS 1 is a pronunciation class which seeks to help learners to approximate a certain first language (L1) accent of English. Explicit pronunciation instruction has long been ignored in second language learning and teaching (e.g., Chun, 2012). Gilbert (2010) even calls pronunciation "the EFL/ESL orphan" (p. 1). However, with the advent of the communicative approach to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching, this particular aspect of language learning has attracted renewed interest, with proponents arguing that it should be given its rightful place in communicative language teaching (Grant, 1995), which it clearly occupies in the ELC programme. The decision to offer 'British English' (BE) and 'American English' (AE) has a long-standing tradition at the Department of English and American Studies and is aligned with research on pronunciation models taught in many EFL classes worldwide (e.g., Young & Walsh, 2010) as well as pronunciation models requested by many EFL learners (e.g., Moyer, 2013, p. 92).

Building on the skills and knowledge acquired in PPOCS 1, PPOCS 2 focuses on formal presentation and interactive speaking skills. It discusses characteristic features of spoken language and provides plenty of opportunity for practice. Now more than ever, EFL teachers strive to make their classes more communicative by encouraging students to take the initiative, think beyond the mandated textbook, and use language creatively, purposefully, and interactively (e.g., Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010, p. 227). In the ELC programme, this is a major goal of the PPOCS 2 course, which explicitly addresses two main speaking formats, namely formal presentations and outcome-based group discussions.

Teaching presentation skills in higher education has many benefits. Perhaps the main advantage of incorporating oral presentations with ensuing question-and-answer sessions in the classroom is the opportunity for learners to engage in natural, authentic, and meaningful interaction with their peers by negotiating meaning.

Girard, Pinar, and Trapp (2011) demonstrated that employing oral presentations in their L2 classrooms triggered greater class interaction and participation as well as more lively interest in the subject matter. In addition, oral presentations are realistic language tasks, which in turn can have a positive effect on learner motivation (Brooks & Wilson, 2015).

Apart from giving presentations, PPOCS 2 students also learn to engage in discussions with their peers. They are encouraged to use the target language when their attention is focused elsewhere, namely on conveying and receiving task-based messages. Interaction is a collaborative activity, which includes “the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver and the context of the situation” (Wells, 1981, p. 54). Hence, interaction not only incorporates expressing one’s own ideas and opinions but also entails comprehending the ideas and opinions of others. In other words, the students listen, talk, and thereby negotiate meaning in a shared context (e.g., Guo, 2015).

## 8.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

PPOCS 1 aims to elaborate the main aspects of English pronunciation on the segmental and suprasegmental levels. Apart from the weekly 90-minute session with the lecturer, the course also comprises a compulsory two-hour language lab session each week with a student tutor who gives regular pronunciation feedback (see Schwarz, Milchram, & Wankmüller, [this volume](#)).

According to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994, p. 71), effective pronunciation teaching involves three distinct interrelated procedures, namely *exposure* to the target language, active *practice*, and *explanation*. These three components feature prominently in PPOCS 1, where the focus of the learners’ attention is on segmental and suprasegmental features of the chosen variety (i.e., ‘British English’ or ‘American English’). During the *exposure* procedure, the students encounter spoken language in the context of a number of tasks and activities designed to motivate them to use the language without paying explicit attention to pronunciation but with a communicative purpose. In contrast, *practice* is related to traditional engagement with pronunciation, such as sound identification or specific training of sound perception and production with a focus on form rather than meaning. These two procedures are accompanied by *explanation*, which refers to the theoretical knowledge of phonetics and phonology.

Empirical research into the question of how pronunciation is actually learned and taught (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2015; Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2017; Jones, 2005) has revealed that a great number of course books do not sufficiently cover pronunciation, often reducing it to listen-and-repeat drills. Researchers have also found a clear preponderance of activities based on the production of specific sounds and a general neglect of suprasegmentals, which are in fact equally or even more important for effective communication (e.g., Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). For this reason, the PPOCS 1 lecturers have developed their own teaching materials

which take into account the fact that both individual sounds and suprasegmentals need to be addressed from the very start of the pronunciation class (Richter, 2019), ideally embedded in a communicative activity, which is a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to pronunciation teaching (e.g., Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 69). Accordingly, each session (90 minutes) comprises a small number of specific segmental and suprasegmental features of the target language. In addition to the weekly language lab and 90-minute class with the lecturer, the students also work autonomously on a portfolio (the so-called “PPOCSfolio”) during the semester. This portfolio consists of two parts: a reference section and a collection of worksheets. The first part mainly includes general information about and research findings on various accents of English (with a focus on the model chosen for the respective class) as well as detailed discussions of a selected number of pronunciation features, on both the segmental and suprasegmental levels, of the chosen variety. The second part features tasks and questions which are largely based on the reading material in part one. In addition, a weekly progress diary in part two helps the learners to keep track of their own development over the semester.

Taking the skills and knowledge acquired in PPOCS 1 as its foundation, PPOCS 2 elaborates on communicative language practice on the basis of a thorough discussion of relevant theoretical concepts and ideas related to formal presentations and interactive speaking skills. As far as presentation skills are concerned, PPOCS 2 students learn how to structure and deliver a formal/academic presentation effectively. They focus on creating an appropriate and engaging introduction and conclusion as well as on employing transitional expressions to link the various sections of the presentation (i.e., signposting). Apart from verbal skills, the students practice utilising non-verbal aspects of a presentation: they work on their vocal impact (e.g., pitch, pacing, volume, and intonation) and their body language (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, stance, and posture) to create an impactful and memorable talk. Further aspects which are discussed in PPOCS 2 include creating rapport with the audience and capturing the listeners’ attention with various means such as persuasive rhetorical devices (e.g., emphasis, repetition, tripling, and rhetorical questions) and impactful visuals. For formal discussions, the main topics which are covered are making appropriate use of turn-taking devices and applying effective floor-management skills (e.g., agreeing/disagreeing, making and evaluating proposals, and asking for clarification).

Overall, the PPOCS 2 course structure has three main parts: principles of presentations, principles of interaction, and actual student presentations and outcome-based group discussions. Whereas parts 1 and 2 are predominantly teacher-led activities and discussions of relevant features of presentations (part 1) and interactions (part 2), part 3 is mainly student-led. In this final part, students deliver their academic presentations, which they prepare at home taking into account all the aspects discussed in class and the feedback received on their mini-presentations in part 1. Students create their individual presentations around a probing research



question which they formulate themselves addressing a topic from a list of topic clusters: accents and attitudes, memorable speeches, teaching speaking skills, culture and social interaction, spoken language and the media, new developments in pronunciation, and features of spoken language. During each session, four or five students give their presentations; each presenter receives oral and written feedback from their peers and the lecturer. Then the whole class is divided into groups of four students who engage in an unrehearsed role play, where role cards, which are distributed to the students 3 minutes before the discussion starts, provide the context and detail the opinions of the participants. This simulation of a formal meeting lasts 15 minutes, within which a decision should be reached (for a detailed description, see Savukova & Richter, [this volume](#)).

PPOCS 2 students are also required to submit a number of short written reflection tasks, which foster autonomous learning. For instance, they are encouraged to critically reflect upon their progress over the course of the semester in the two main discourse formats. Similar to the “PPOCSfolio” in PPOCS 1, PPOCS 2 students also hand in a portfolio (“PPOCSfolio 2”) at the end of the semester. This includes further reading material on presentation and interaction skills as well as corresponding questions and tasks.

### 8.3 Feedback and Assessment

To achieve the overall goals of the course module and to ensure that the teaching and learning methods employed are effective, PPOCS lecturers integrate various types of feedback and assessment into their classes. These often include peer feedback in class (e.g., on the in-class presentation in PPOCS 1 and 2), electronic feedback at home (e.g., on self-assessment/self-reflection tasks in PPOCS 2), formative assessment to monitor the students’ progress (e.g., the midterm check-up in PPOCS 1), and summative assessment (final oral examinations in PPOCS 1 and PPOCS 2). The constituents of the final grade and the corresponding percentages are standardised both in PPOCS 1 and PPOCS 2.

In both courses, formative feedback plays an important role. In PPOCS 1, for instance, the students regularly give each other feedback in class, and they also receive feedback from the teacher (either in person or digitally) to help them monitor and track their own development. In PPOCS 2, feed-forward strategies (e.g., Hine & Northeast, 2016) are implemented to help the students reflect on their in-class presentation and to make specific suggestions for improvement regarding their final presentation. Here, great care is taken to ensure that the presenters are clear about the next steps in the revision process. This means that the lecturer and the students engage in a timely and constructive discussion which aims at providing careful guidance and practical advice for the final summative assessment.

In PPOCS 1, the course grade is based on the following two categories: a theory component (25%) and a final oral examination (75%) consisting of three parts, namely the reading aloud of a prepared text, a prepared talk about one aspect of the chosen text, and an unprepared conversation. Two PPOCS 1 examiners rate the performance individually by awarding points according to a standardised rating scale (see Appendix 1) and then calculate the grade of the final exam. This rating scale consists of three criteria: control of segmentals, control of suprasegmentals, and appropriateness in the three tasks. The last aspect, appropriateness, is particularly important since it captures how engagingly the students can read a text, how effectively they can speak freely, and how appropriately they can respond to the examiners' questions.

In PPOCS 2, each student has to give a 5-minute in-class presentation, which is mandatory but not assessed. The course grade is based on in-class and home assignments (providing peer feedback on presentations and role play performance, written assignments, and the "PPOCSfolio 2"), which account for 20%, and the final oral examination. The examination comprises two parts: a 5-minute presentation, which is an improved version of the in-class presentation (40%), and a 15-minute discussion in groups of four (40%), which corresponds to the format practiced in class. Two examiners rate the performances independently. The standardised rating scales for PPOCS 2 (see Appendices 2 and 3) consist of four main criteria each: lexicogrammatical resources and fluency (presentations and interactions), pronunciation and vocal impact (presentations and interactions), structure and content (presentations), genre-specific presentation skills (presentations), content and relevance (interactions), and interactions skills (interactions).

## 8.4 Challenges and Future Directions

Since one of the main aims of the PPOCS module is to speak fluently and effectively with a consistent, clear, and precise (regional) pronunciation, it is evident that pronunciation plays a pivotal role in PPOCS 1 and is also important in PPOCS 2. In this respect, a significant challenge with which PPOCS teachers have been confronted in the recent past relates to a paradigm shift in pronunciation teaching regarding the question of whether the target accent is viewed as a norm or a model (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994, pp. 6–7). In many EFL classrooms today, the aim of improving pronunciation is not to achieve a close imitation of a particular native accent, but to help the learners to pronounce precisely enough to be intelligible and comprehensible. This means that pronunciation models are often given preference over the notion of the norm, and these models are then presented as more realistic targets for the respective groups of learners (Brown, 1989). As research (e.g., Levis, 2005) has shown, the approximation of a certain target accent is difficult, if not impossible, for most learners to achieve in a foreign language, and in some cases it may not even be desirable. In fact, some students may, consciously or not, wish to keep a certain

degree of their L1 accent as an expression of their individual socio-cultural identity (see Richter, “Foreign Accent and the Role of Identity in the Adult English as a Foreign Language Pronunciation Classroom,” [this volume](#)).

In this context, a further question arises as to which model should be taught. While some theorists and teachers believe that the goal of a pronunciation class should be achieving one of the “standard” forms of English (e.g., Received Pronunciation or General American), others challenge this view, in particular in the context of the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Consequently, ELF advocates have suggested that the ideal model should be that of the fluent non-native speaker of English (e.g., Thir, 2014; Walker, 2010). No matter from which perspective this issue is viewed, it has also been asserted that it has hardly ever been the goal of a pronunciation course to promote a given model (native or non-native) as the perfect ideal, but that a model is still necessary for effective teaching (Fang, 2019).

Against the backdrop of these admittedly controversial views surrounding the questions of norms, models, and goals of L2 pronunciation teaching, a number of empirical investigations (e.g., Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Müller, 2012; Pöcksteiner, 2019) conducted at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna show that students highly appreciate the PPOCS module as an extremely useful component of the ELC programme. In their study on PPOCS 1 students’ attitudes towards different accents, Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) found that the learners exhibited predominantly negative attitudes towards their own foreign accent in English. The authors conclude that these findings generally support the standards set by English teachers in Austria since “native accents are firmly in place as models for EFL learning and teaching” (p. 126) despite the fact that the majority of the learners fail to attain the L2 standard pronunciation they seem to evaluate so positively. These empirical investigations also corroborate the conclusions of other researchers (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Walker, 2010) that many learners themselves wish to approximate L1 users’ pronunciation. Müller (2012), exploring the role of the language lab in PPOCS 1, revealed that the overwhelming majority of the students feel highly motivated by PPOCS 1, which they see as an opportunity to minimise their L1 influences. Some students even described the pronunciation classes as “the most important classes they had had during their language education so far” (p. 74). Similar results were obtained very recently in the course of Pöcksteiner’s (2019) research project into the role of motivation in PPOCS 1. The author concludes that both successful and less successful students, as measured by the grade they received at the end of the course, appreciate an accent close to that of an L1 speaker as a sign of professionalism (p. 81). In addition, she has also found that PPOCS 1 does not seem to pose a threat to the learners’ linguistic heritage or cultural identity.

While these empirical investigations into pronunciation learning in PPOCS 1 clearly confirm that the course has its rightful place in the ELC programme and that it is also highly appreciated by the students, it is also important to note that the course has undergone a number of significant changes since its introduction. Perhaps one of the major developments in this respect concerns the fact that PPOCS 1 now

explicitly addresses the increasing importance of English as a global language. In response to a growing awareness of ELF in the current sociolinguistic landscape of the English-speaking world, critical reading material on the topic (e.g., Walker & Zoghbor, 2015) has been added to the “PPOCSfolio”. This is now accompanied by an in-class exploration and discussion of the role of ELF and the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000) not only in international communication but also in the teaching context. However, not only ELF plays a more prominent role in PPOCS 1 these days: there is also an increasing recognition of other L1 and L2 accents of English owing to the fact that the students in PPOCS 1 are not exclusively (Austrian) German speakers of English. With the promotion of university student mobility programmes and convenient access to a wide range of accents through the internet, our learners today bring a wider array of experiences with the English language into the classroom. In PPOCS, this is recognised as a valuable source of comparison between language varieties both teachers and students can draw on. Clearly, mere accent reduction is not the focal point of the module. Instead, there is a much stronger emphasis on effectiveness and vocal aspects such as voice quality, pacing, pitch, and volume. This shows that a number of adaptations have already been made to existing teaching practices, yet more will have to follow to acknowledge ongoing pedagogical and linguistic developments resulting from an increasingly plurilingual classroom.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### PPOCS 1 Rating Scale

Band	Control of segmentals: consistency and precision	Control of suprasegmentals: consistency and precision	Appropriateness
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistently clear, precise, and effortless</b> production of the segmental features of a particular variety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistently clear, precise, and effortless</b> production of the suprasegmental features of a particular variety, especially <b>assimilation, elision,</b> and <b>intonation patterns</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistently natural and appropriate</b> pronunciation in all three tasks, even while attention is otherwise engaged; shows ability to read the chosen text <b>engagingly</b>, to present ideas about the text <b>effectively</b>, and respond to the examiner <b>effortlessly</b>; exploits pronunciation to convey <i>finer shades of meaning</i></li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Most</b> segmental features of a particular variety <b>clear and precise</b>, with <i>only occasional lapses</i> in control; can <i>usually self-correct</i> if he/she noticeably mispronounces a sound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Smooth production</b> of suprasegmental features of a particular variety, with <i>only occasional lapses</i> in control, which <i>do not affect effectiveness</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally natural and appropriate</b> pronunciation in all three tasks; shows ability to read the chosen text <b>meaningfully</b>, to present ideas about the text <b>freely and clearly</b>, and to respond to the examiner <b>adequately</b></li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally clear and precise</b> production of the <b>salient</b> segmental features of a particular variety (such as <b>fortis/lenis</b> distinction and <b>vowel length</b>); <b>no strain</b> on the listener, although the production of a <b>small number of sounds is noticeably unstable</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally clear and precise</b> production of the <b>salient</b> suprasegmental features of a particular variety (such as <b>tonic stress, chunking, basic linking, weak forms, and word stress</b>); <b>no strain</b> on the listener, although the production of a <b>small number of features is noticeably unstable</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally natural and appropriate</b> pronunciation in most tasks; shows ability to read the chosen text <b>meaningfully</b>, to present ideas about the text <b>clearly</b>, and to respond to the examiner <b>adequately</b></li> </ul>
0			

*Appendix 2*

PPOCS 2 Rating Scale for Presentations

		Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Content and structure	Genre-specific presentation skills
<b>Full Academic</b>	<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Excellent</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language</li> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> formulating ideas to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent control</b> of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English</li> <li>• Ability to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b> (e.g. deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Great breadth and depth of content</b></li> <li>• <b>Full and appropriate</b> use of a <b>wide range of cohesive devices</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and effective</b> use of <b>all</b> of the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>opening hook</b></li> <li>• <b>rhetorical features</b> (e.g. metaphor, tripling, repetition, inclusive language, rhetorical questions, analogy)</li> <li>• <b>paralinguistic features</b> (gesture, posture/poise, facial expression, eye contact, use of space)</li> <li>• <b>audience rapport</b></li> <li>• <b>visuals</b></li> <li>• <b>take-home message</b></li> <li>• <b>time-keeping</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Advanced Academic</b>	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language</li> <li>• <b>Consistent</b> lexical and grammatical <b>control</b> of [complex] language as appropriate for the genre, even while attention is otherwise engaged</li> <li>• Expresses him/herself <b>at length with a natural flow</b>, almost effortlessly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberate</b> use of <b>intonation and stress</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Student's own contribution of ideas</b></li> <li>• <b>Critical engagement with sources</b> (e.g. evaluation, comparison, contextualisation, implications, limitations)</li> <li>• <b>Effective signposting</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective audience rapport</b></li> <li>• <b>Confident performance</b></li> </ul>

General Academic	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reformulations occur mainly for reasons of <b>expressing ideas fully</b></li> <li>• Free speech <b>without rote memorization</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate use of intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of relevant evidence-based ideas</b></li> <li>• <b>Awareness of audience and task constraints</b></li> <li>• <b>Clear and logically developed 3-part structure</b></li> <li>• <b>Controlled use of cohesive devices</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate use of rhetorical features</b> (e.g. metaphor, tripling, repetition, inclusive language, rhetorical questions, analogy)</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of visuals:</b> visual appeal, formal features, references to sources</li> </ul>
Full Operational	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>broad</b> range of language</li> <li>• <b>Errors</b> are rare and mostly insignificant</li> <li>• <b>Rare pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally maintains control</b> of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate use of volume</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Presentation of relevant ideas</b></li> <li>• <b>Adequately structured</b> speech</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate signposting</b></li> <li>• <b>Appropriate research question</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use of most of the following:</b> opening hook, rhetorical features, paralinguistic features, audience rapport, visuals, take-home message</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate use of paralinguistic features</b> (gesture, posture/poise, facial expression, eye contact, use of space)</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate audience rapport</b></li> <li>• <b>Precise time-keeping</b></li> </ul>
Effective Operational	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and appropriate</b> expression with possible <b>limitations</b> when communicating <b>complex ideas</b></li> <li>• <b>Occasional pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> <li>• Reformulations <b>do not strain</b> the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear pronunciation</b> although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may <b>occasionally put strain</b> on the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May include <b>some ideas of doubtful relevance</b></li> <li>• 3-part structure <b>just discernible</b></li> <li>• <b>Only occasional use of signposting</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate use of visuals:</b> relevance</li> <li>• <b>Insufficient use of the following:</b> rhetorical features, paralinguistic features, audience rapport, take-home message, time-keeping</li> </ul>

### Appendix 3

PPOCS 2 Rating Scale for Interactions

		Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Content and relevance	Interaction skills
<b>Full Academic</b>	<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Excellent</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language</li> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> formulating ideas to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent control</b> of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English</li> <li>• Ability to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b> (e.g. deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> in responding to others</li> <li>• <b>Easily contributes at length</b> to complex interactions even on abstract, complex, unfamiliar topics</li> <li>• <b>Spontaneous answers</b> to complex lines of counter-argument</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relates own contribution skilfully</b> to those of other speakers</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of floor management skills non-verbal cues posture/poise</b></li> </ul>
<b>Advanced Academic</b>	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language</li> <li>• <b>Consistent</b> lexical and grammatical <b>control</b> of [complex] language as appropriate for the genre, even while attention is otherwise engaged</li> <li>• Expresses him/herself <b>at length with a natural flow</b>, almost effortlessly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberate use of intonation and stress</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Flexibility</b> in responding to others</li> <li>• Ability to <b>hold his/her own</b> in formal discussion of complex issues</li> <li>• <b>Articulate, convincing, and persuasive</b> argument</li> <li>• <b>Original proposals</b> that advance the discussion</li> <li>• Ability to <b>frame the issue</b></li> <li>• <b>Complete task awareness</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective use</b> of the following collaboration strategies: <b>taking the initiative getting/keeping/giving the floor back-channelling gesture eye contact facial expression</b></li> </ul>



<p><b>General Academic</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reformulations</b> occur mainly for reasons of <b>expressing ideas fully</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Easily keeps up</b> with the discussion and <b>argues a formal position</b></li> <li>• <b>Contributes ideas</b> of relevance to the joint discourse and <b>adapts his/her contributions</b> to those of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adjusts</b> his/her way of expressing him/herself to the interlocutor</li> <li>• Ability to <b>clarify/recap</b></li> <li>• <b>Appropriate posture/poise</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Full Operational</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>broad</b> range of language</li> <li>• <b>Errors</b> are rare and mostly insignificant</li> <li>• <b>Rare pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally maintains control</b> of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>volume</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Satisfactory task awareness</b></li> <li>• <b>Basic proposals</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relates own contribution</b> to those of other speakers</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of the following collaboration strategies: <b>getting/keeping/giving the floor</b> <b>back-channelling</b> <b>paralinguistic features</b> <b>facial expression</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Effective Operational</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and appropriate</b> expression with possible <b>limitations</b> when communicating <b>complex ideas</b></li> <li>• <b>Occasional pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> <li>• Reformulations <b>do not strain</b> the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear</b> pronunciation although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may <b>occasionally put strain</b> on the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Limited responses</b> to complex questions and comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to <b>give emphasis</b></li> <li>• <b>Limited eye contact</b> and <b>gesture</b></li> <li>• <b>Insufficient interaction</b></li> </ul>

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# Chapter 9

## The Language Lab



Magdalena Schwarz, Maria Milchram, and Olivia Wankmüller

**Keywords** Teaching English pronunciation · Pronunciation learning · Accent training · Phonological control · Pronunciation model

### 9.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

The language lab accompanies the course Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 1 (PPOCS 1) taught in the English Language Competence programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna (see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)). Building upon knowledge in phonetics and phonology acquired in introductory linguistics lectures, it should be taken in the third or fourth semester as recommended by the curricula of the Bachelor of Education or the Bachelor of Arts in English and American Studies (University of Vienna, 2013; University of Vienna, 2016). Both programmes require students to have completed the Integrated Language and Study Skills module (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)).

As a complement to the more theory-oriented PPOCS 1 course, the language lab is concerned with practical pronunciation training. It uses a set of interactive, practical, and hands-on methods to encourage students to actively engage with their theoretical knowledge of English phonetics and phonology. The language lab assumes a communicative and constructivist approach: this method is learner-centred, advocating that students autonomously construct and develop knowledge and skills through interactions with peers and teachers (Nikitina, 2010, p. 90; see also Sarıçoban, 2014, p. 2770).

When registering for PPOCS 1 and the language lab, students choose between what is commonly referred to as ‘British English’ or ‘American English.’ Students

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M. Schwarz (✉) · M. Milchram · O. Wankmüller  
Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [magdalena\\_schwarz@univie.ac.at](mailto:magdalena_schwarz@univie.ac.at)

are asked to select the accent which matches their current pronunciation best and/or which they identify with most. Some students may have already acquired a different regional accent during a stay abroad, for instance in Scotland or Australia. In this case, lecturers and tutors attempt to accommodate their wishes to either continue working on this accent or to switch to a British or American accent.

The main aims of the language lab are to offer groups of up to 18 students the opportunity for practical pronunciation training and individual feedback. The weekly 90-minute sessions are held by a tutor in a designated classroom equipped with computers and headsets. Tutors are qualified students of a higher semester who are chosen based on their PPOCS 1 grades and through interviews. Attendance is mandatory, but the tutor does not mark the students' performance. PPOCS 1 lecturers and tutors cooperate, for example by meeting at least once per semester to discuss each student's progress and learning needs.

The shared goals of PPOCS 1 and the lab are manifold. Students are required to become familiar with the intricacies of the American or British standards, model their pronunciation on the chosen accent, and increase their fluency while simultaneously overcoming their insecurities related to reading and speaking in a second language. The systematic and consistent training needed to accomplish these aims relies on the main assets of the language lab: weekly, guided practice, both individual and in peer groups, combined with personal and personalised feedback from the tutor.

To explore students' self-reported study routines, as well as their attitudes towards and experiences with the language lab, we conducted an anonymous online survey ( $N = 38$ ) among participants of three 'British English' language labs (Wankmüller et al., 2017). We will refer to findings from this survey at several points throughout this chapter.

## 9.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

This section describes the syllabus of the language lab and the pedagogical approaches adopted to implement the course components. The main objectives of the language lab are to improve students' pronunciation, general communication skills, and study strategies.

The language lab uses a specially designed lab booklet, which includes 12 lessons, each consisting of a core, a review, and an extra part. The core focuses on a set of vowels and/or consonants from the British or American sound inventory plus suprasegmental aspects, while the review section includes exercises on topics covered in the previous session. The extra part offers additional practice material such as pair and group exercises. In general, the lab booklet comprises an array of exercises: recordings of minimal pairs, dialogues, and text passages to be recorded by students; transcription tasks; theory exercises; prompts for pairs and groups to practise free speech; and tasks asking students to reflect on different aspects of pronunciation, on their own progress, and on their attitudes towards the chosen model accent. The syllabus emphasises phonetic segmentals known to be especially

challenging for Austrian German speakers. For instance, the long central vowel /ɜ:/ and the voiceless plosives /p, t, k/ appear earlier in the syllabus and receive relatively more training time. Wherever possible, exercises combine segmental and suprasegmental features in a meaningful way, inviting students to examine the interaction between these levels.

The sequence in which aspects of pronunciation are practised in the lab generally follows that of PPOCS 1, allowing students to implement what they have previously learned. During the most recent revision of the lab booklet and due to the relevance of suprasegmental features for intelligibility (Setter & Jenkins, 2005, p. 5), more exercises on weak forms, stress, linking, and intonation were added. Additionally, more tasks introducing various study strategies were included. Table 9.1 shows the main contents of the British lab booklet.

The language lab combines two pedagogical approaches: supporting students in developing autonomous practice routines and offering direct feedback and instruction. It has been shown that motivational and affective variables are crucial for the success of pronunciation training (Bernaus et al., 2004; Marinova-Todd et al., 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Richter, 2019). In line with these insights and because of the PPOCS 1 final exam, which is one of only a few oral exams in both programmes and perceived as a challenge by many students, the language lab aims at creating a supportive atmosphere for learners to work both individually and collaboratively on their strengths and needs.

Throughout the course, students are required to practise their English pronunciation skills in a self-reliant manner. During each lab session, participants complete computer-assisted, audio-supported exercises from the lab booklet independently and at their own pace. Wherever possible, the exercises are topical and relevant to the target group of learners. Students are advised to listen to their own recordings and compare their performance to that of the model speakers, thus practising their self-monitoring and self-correction skills. Examples of model speech include recordings from English pronunciation practice books but also interviews with

**Table 9.1** Topics included in the lab booklet and covered in the language lab sessions (British)

Unit	Topics
1	Introduction, awareness raising
2	/v/, /ɔ:/, /əv/
3	/ɜ:/, weak forms and weak syllables
4	/i:/, /ɪ/, /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, sentence stress
5	/æ/, /e/, /ʌ/, intonation
6	/əv/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əv/, /eɪ/, /e/, word linking
7	/v/, /w/, /f/, /θ/, /ð/, sentence stress, chunking, linking
8	/θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /t/, /d/, sentence stress, chunking
9	/eə/, /ɪə/, assimilation, intonation
10	/tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʒ/, /n/, /ŋ/, word stress
11	/u:/, /v/, /ʌ/, /t/
12	Round-up

well-known actors and actresses, podcasts (see Fouz-González, 2019), and audio books. It has been shown that training in critical listening, which prompts learners to detect divergences between different examples of speech, improves speech perception (Couper, 2011). Besides increasing phonological control, the language lab trains students in flexibly applying their pronunciation skills in various communicative contexts, from small talk to professional presentations.

Any remaining time in the sessions is devoted to pair or group exercises, which enable students to analyse and comment on their peers' performances and further foster their phonetic awareness. Thanks to the variety of available exercises, students also develop multimodal study strategies. These include the visualisation of articulatory organs and their functions, the application of phonetic and phonological concepts through the transcription of texts, and the close analysis and imitation of segmental and suprasegmental features of recorded model speech.

In addition, tutors continuously encourage students to practise outside the lab. In our survey, students reported practising on average two additional hours per week at home (Wankmüller et al., 2017). To support such autonomous study, exercise material is available on the e-learning platform Moodle. These resources comprise advice on identifying individual target sounds, a list of effective study strategies, multimedia exercises on segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features, and an extensive list of authentic English-language resources, such as YouTube channels, TV shows, movies, podcasts, and websites. The Moodle tasks also include exercises for exam practice and tips for overcoming anxiety and demotivation. In addition, students are invited to submit audio recordings to the tutor in order to be reviewed, commented on, and later discussed in person. Students can also attend voluntary practice classes held by student tutors and financed by the student representatives. These extra sessions focus on improving fluency and conversational skills through spontaneous conversations, role plays, and games. Sometimes they include mock exams to prepare students for the PPOCS 1 final exam.

By autonomously completing the aforementioned tasks in and beyond the lab, students receive indirect feedback of two different types: listening to model speech provides input on the target level of performance while analysing their own recordings provides feedback on their current level of performance (Dlaska & Krekeler, 2013, p. 26). Still, as individual practice presupposes a relatively high level of discipline and self-monitoring (Dlaska & Krekeler, 2013, pp. 26–29), the language lab supplements autonomous study with continuous and explicit feedback from tutors. The next section outlines how the language lab incorporates this feedback.

### 9.3 Feedback and Assessment

Conceptualised as a supportive environment in which students explore and practise the features of their chosen model accent, the language lab does not include any formal performance assessments. However, students receive regular and personal formative feedback from their tutor. This feedback includes three aspects: an

evaluation of the student's present performance highlighting both improvements and learning needs, a model of the desired level of competence, and practical tips for achieving the latter (Dlaska & Krekeler, 2013, p. 26).

The most regular type of feedback is offered during the lab sessions when one or a pair of students read brief texts or talk freely to their tutor while the others are working on the computers. These weekly interactions have two main advantages: firstly, they ensure that students receive encouragement for any progress they make. Secondly, the tutor can track each student's individual development and instantly address problems by suggesting study strategies tailored to their needs. A majority of students reported that they greatly benefited from this personal feedback, which they said represented a valuable source of support and motivation (Wankmüller et al., 2017).

In addition, students are invited to send audio recordings to their tutor to receive a detailed, written analysis with practical advice in return. A much-appreciated advantage of this type of feedback is that it is typically more comprehensive than what is possible during in-class interactions. Recordings can be particularly valuable for students who find it stressful to read or talk to their tutor face to face as they can freely choose the time and place to produce the recording and read and revisit the written feedback.

Another important form of feedback occurs during peer interactions. Students complete group tasks during which they listen to others, take notes, and share their observations. At first, some students are reluctant to open up to their colleagues, but over time, their confidence increases. Through this reversal of roles from learners to teachers, students improve their phonetic awareness, develop analytical skills, and learn to give precise and constructive feedback. Overall, the diverse types of feedback employed in the language lab support students by offering immediate responses, an opportunity to reflect on their study strategies, and motivation to take control of their learning progress.

## 9.4 Challenges and Future Directions

Although the language lab has been evaluated as highly useful by students (Wankmüller et al., 2017), there is room for further improvements. For students, who typically start the course with limited previous experience in practical phonetics, the greatest challenge is to unlearn acquired articulatory habits within only one semester. Computer-assisted learning requires students to detect minute differences between their own articulation and the model accent and to develop fine-motor skills, which many learners find difficult (Wankmüller et al., 2017). In the future, achieving these goals might become easier thanks to innovations in computer-assisted pronunciation teaching (Thomson, 2011), such as automated speech analysis systems and training software based on artificial intelligence (Hincks, 2015).

In addition, students tend to struggle considerably longer with approximating a model accent in free and spontaneous speech than when reading texts aloud. This



discrepancy likely stems from the additional conceptual planning work involved in free speech production (Ganushchak & Chen, 2016). To address this problem, tutors frequently encourage students to speak freely, both in their one-to-one interactions and through group exercises, but an even greater focus on spontaneous speech would be desirable.

Another challenge for students is staying motivated throughout the semester despite phases of slow progress. Generally, students are keen on learning the accent, but some perceive the continuous ‘evaluation’ of their pronunciation as potentially face-threatening. While non-linear or inconsistent learning curves (Sturm, 2019) and hypercorrections (Eckman et al., 2013) are to be expected in pronunciation training, they can cause considerable frustration. For tutors, it is therefore essential to create a motivating and cooperative learning environment, to transparently communicate the expected learning outcomes, and to highlight the available toolkit of exercises and methods. The fact that the tutors are peers likely helps to reduce social or performance pressure, but they also need to make students aware that pronunciation learning is likely to include phases of falling back into old habits.

From the perspective of tutors, the greatest challenge is tailoring their support to students’ individual needs and keeping track of their progress, especially in a course with 18 participants. Each learner comes with a unique combination of prior knowledge, study skills, and attitudes. Students with first languages other than Austrian German usually require particular attention because the lab material is primarily aimed at native Austrian German speakers. Future revisions of the lab materials could incorporate exercises targeted at students with other first languages. Additionally, both students and tutors would profit from a reduction in the number of participants per tutorial, which would mean more comprehensive and regular feedback for each student. Further, an extension of the course to two semesters would likely increase the proficiency levels ultimately reached.

To date, the unique design of the language lab has been invaluable in helping students acquire phonological control in English, which represents a challenging but rewarding task for most learners. Certainly, as approaches to pronunciation teaching change and more innovative teaching tools become available, the language lab will remain subject to ongoing revisions and adaptations.

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# Chapter 10

## Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers



**Karin Richter**

**Keywords** English-for-teaching · Mediating concepts · Mediating communication · Presentation skills · Interaction management

### 10.1 Curricular and Theoretical Context

With the two obligatory language competence courses Mediation and Genre Analysis for English Teachers (MAGNET, see Smith-Dluha, [this volume](#)) and Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (ASSET), the Master of Education (MEd) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna has a distinct focus on language competence and proficiency, which can be seen as a continuation and elaboration of the language competence classes offered in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme. These two courses, which are specially designed for future teachers of English, ensure that MEd students continue to work on their advanced spoken (i.e., ASSET) and written (i.e., MAGNET) English both in its productive and interactive form.

ASSET, as the name indicates, seeks to equip future teachers of English with the oral language skills needed to cope with the growing demands of today's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This involves not only highly proficient language use but also a solid working knowledge of the main principles of spoken language in its various stylistic, contextual, social, and regional forms. Special emphasis is placed on the language competence required to teach English in and

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K. Richter (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [karin.richter@univie.ac.at](mailto:karin.richter@univie.ac.at)

through English (for a discussion, see Berger, “Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English,” [this volume](#)). This involves knowledge and skills needed to facilitate understanding and communication among interlocutors, including processes like managing interaction, facilitating collaboration, and encouraging conceptual talk (see Council of Europe, 2020). In addition, this class provides the students with essential linguistic tools to monitor and develop both their own speaking skills and the oral language competence of their pupils in a teaching context. In its structure and design, ASSET is similar to Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 2 (PPOCS 2) in the Bachelor of Arts in English and American Studies programme (see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)); however, ASSET is explicitly tailored towards students in the teacher education programme.

On the whole, the course aspires to meet the target group’s specific needs, expectations, and professional profiles in order to ensure high productivity, effectiveness, and transferability into practice. As Richards (2017) notes, the proficiency required to teach English through English generally draws on three domains, namely content expertise, pedagogical knowledge, and discourse skills (p. 11). In this respect, ASSET’s main focus lies predominantly on the last category, discourse skills, which typically include aspects of functional language use, such as explaining concepts, giving instructions, checking understanding, or leading discussion activities (Richards, 2017, pp. 17–18).

## 10.2 Main Contents and Teaching Methods

In terms of content, ASSET explicitly addresses two main types of speaking skills, namely giving formal presentations and leading as well as participating in discussions, two skills which are highly pertinent for future teachers. Regarding presentations, the students are taught verbal and non-verbal skills essential for giving a successful talk. For instance, they learn how to structure a presentation effectively, how to increase vocal impact, how to make effective use of body language, or how to build rapport with the audience in order to give a memorable, persuasive, and impactful presentation. All these aspects, of course, also play a decisive role in the classroom. Being able to get their learners’ attention, captivate their interest, and spark their enthusiasm is of paramount importance for any teacher (e.g., White & Gardner, 2012). In addition, there is little doubt that apart from knowledge of the subject matter, effective voice and body language play a crucial role in establishing oneself as a well-respected and stimulating teacher who manages to create a pleasant and inspiring learning environment (Duarte, 2013; White & Gardner, 2012).

Apart from public speaking skills, the students in this class also learn to lead discussions with their peers. They are introduced to basic concepts of spoken interaction (e.g., turn-taking) but also to the principles of professional meetings.

This involves an introduction to the structure of a meeting, the language of meetings, and the role of the chairperson or moderator. In contrast to PPOCS 2, which features formal discussions without a designated chair, ASSET centres on the role of the moderator. This is largely based on the premise that both teaching a class and moderating a meeting have many features in common (e.g., setting the agenda, introducing the topic, ensuring full participation, managing time, making sure that all relevant matters are discussed). Evidently, by exploring the topic of professional meetings, ASSET students are not only prepared to take part in and moderate teacher meetings, but at the same time they are also provided with essential classroom management skills and classroom management language (e.g., Scrivener, 2012). This includes language functions and activities such as explaining complex ideas, encouraging others to participate, giving instructions, using different questioning techniques, giving feedback, to name but a few. The functions addressed in ASSET are largely based on a student survey conducted by Berger (“Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English,” [this volume](#)).

Another essential component of ASSET is related to the concept of mediation. Although the term as such has been around for much longer (e.g., Mason, 2000), it has gained renewed interest with the launch of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020). In an attempt to replace the traditional model of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) introduced a range of communicative language activities and strategies, including reception, interaction, production, and mediation. In the *Companion Volume*, the concept of mediation has been redefined and attributed a key position in the action-oriented approach to teaching and learning (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 35; Piccardo & North, 2019). According to this extended definition, teachers are essentially mediators of concepts (e.g., grammar) and mediators of communication (e.g., interaction skills), which highlights that mediation is in fact one of the most common activities that language teachers engage in. Hence, a thorough discussion of this concept deserves due attention in a class aiming to enhance pre-service teachers’ spoken language competence.

In terms of teaching methods, this course pays particular attention to communicative language practice on the basis of in-depth discussions of relevant theoretical concepts and ideas in the context of spoken interactions and formal presentations. According to the principles of communicative language teaching (e.g., Richards, 2006), which emphasise meaningful communication in a real-life context in the second language, ASSET tries to provide a choice of interesting and relevant topics, uses authentic texts and tasks, and – as particularly relevant for future teachers – consistently stresses the immediate importance of the topics for the learners’ future professional careers. As a consequence, the chosen classroom activities aim to provide ample opportunity for purposeful interaction, in which the students are encouraged to bring their own interests and experiences from teaching engagements into the classroom. By embracing collaborative learning (e.g., Harmer, 2001), which

fosters mutual learning and cooperation among participants, the teaching methods employed in ASSET involve individual practice, group and peer activities, learning-by-doing, and best-practice exchanges.

Overall, the course is structured into three main parts. Part 1 includes a thorough discussion of the most important principles of formal presentations. Part 2 then goes on to elaborate on parameters that shape spoken interaction, with a focus on chaired meetings, discussions, and classroom discourse. Part 3 comprises student presentations and role play activities, practising what has been discussed in parts 1 and 2 as well as preparing for the final exam. In addition to giving their in-class presentations, in this final part ASSET students lead and guide through the 90-minute sessions. This means, for instance, that the students welcome the audience, introduce the speakers, explain the set-up for the meeting, and close the session. Depending on group sizes, each session comprises up to four student presentations (of 5–6 minutes each). The talks are all based on a research question which addresses a topic chosen from a list of suggested topic clusters. These topics are closely related to speaking skills relevant for future teachers. The top ten topics students found interesting according to the survey conducted by Berger (“Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English,” [this volume](#)) which have found their way into the ASSET class include oral fluency, oral feedback, classroom interaction, speaking activities, classroom management, acquisition of pronunciation, teaching of pronunciation, elicitation techniques, assessing speaking, and motivation through body language (in order of priority). After the talks, the class is divided into small groups. The groups are then given a copy of the agenda for a teachers’ meeting (set in a simulated school context), which has been prepared jointly by the presenters. As mentioned above, the four presenters are in charge of running the whole session, which also entails a brief introduction as well as a smooth transition from one speaker to the next and from one activity to the next. Finally, the students wrap up the session by giving a brief summary. This is intended to reflect the real-life classroom situation, where the teacher’s responsibilities certainly involve more than merely presenting a topic. Empowering the students in such a way gives them an opportunity to actively apply the strategies for running effective meetings and the linguistic tools for moderating discussions in a classroom context.

### 10.3 Feedback and Assessment

To achieve the overall goals of the course and to ensure that the teaching and learning methods employed are effective, ASSET lecturers integrate various types of feedback and assessment into their classes. They may include oral teacher feedback in class (e.g., after the in-class presentations), in-class written peer feedback (e.g., in groups after the in-class presentations), electronic peer feedback (e.g., on students’ research questions for the presentations), diagnostic self-assessment (e.g., a presentation skills questionnaire at the beginning of the course), written

self-reflection (e.g., on students' own pronunciation skills), and summative assessment (e.g., final oral exam).

The various constituents of the final grade and the corresponding percentages are standardised in ASSET. The final course grade consists of peer feedback and written assignments (30%) and a final oral exam (70%) consisting of two distinct parts, namely a 5-minute presentation, which is an improved version of the in-class presentation (35%), and a 20-minute role play (35%). The interaction component of the oral exam takes the form of a teacher meeting with four participants who are given an agenda consisting of four items (prepared by the examiner). Each student is expected to moderate the discussion of one of these items for about 5 minutes. Since this scenario is supposed to simulate a teachers' meeting, every item on the agenda is related to the school context. An example of such an item could be the following:

Many teachers have complained about pupils using their mobile phones in class, especially the 16- to 18-year-olds. This clearly has a negative impact on the quality of your teaching. With your colleagues, develop guidelines concerning the use of mobile phones in the classroom and decide on the next step that should be taken in this matter.

This discussion of controversial topics in the exam requires the student teachers to both moderate a meeting and participate in it. Without doubt, these are highly valuable skills for teachers.

For the final oral exam, carefully designed and constantly updated analytic rating scales are used (see Appendices 1 and 2). These scales are largely based on the descriptors given in the CEFR but also take into account the specific requirements of the course. The four main criteria for the presentation are the same as in PPOCS 2. These include lexico-grammatical resources and fluency, pronunciation and vocal impact, structure and content, and genre-specific presentation skills. As far as the meeting is concerned, the assessment criteria have been adapted to reflect the parameters of a chaired meeting. This means that in contrast to PPOCS 2, the categories 'content and relevance' and 'interaction skills' have been replaced by 'interaction management' and 'interaction' respectively. Whereas the former addresses speaking skills related to moderating the discussion (e.g., the ability to intervene diplomatically in order to guide the direction of the talk or ensuring each participant's involvement), the latter is concerned with participating in the discussion (e.g., being able to argue a formal position or articulating a persuasive argument).

## 10.4 Challenges and Future Directions

In the planning phase of ASSET, perhaps one of the most significant challenges for the programme designers was to decide which aspects of speaking are in fact relevant for EFL teachers in the twenty-first century: in other words, which specialised oral language skills, contexts, and implications need to be addressed to help future teachers develop the necessary speaking competence to succeed in today's EFL



classroom. In this respect, Berger's needs analysis survey (Berger, "Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English," [this volume](#)) facilitated the active involvement of student views in the planning. Of course, the enhancement of their language awareness and language development together with fundamental didactic skills constitute essential cornerstones of any EFL teacher's expertise and confidence (e.g., Wright, 2002). However, today this is often not enough.

In addition to knowledge about language learning and teaching, EFL teachers nowadays are also expected to have a basic understanding of intercultural competence. Perhaps one of the most significant changes over the past few decades has been the recognition of the intercultural dimension as a key aspect in language teaching (e.g., Byram et al., 2002). Owing to increasing internationalisation and globalisation, the profile of the language teacher today is changing. This brings to the fore educational challenges relating to the pupils' cultural diversity, range of first-language backgrounds, and also different learning expectations. As a consequence, EFL teachers are increasingly expected to teach intercultural understanding, bearing in mind that it is essential to "contextualise the code against the socio-cultural background" (Castro & Gonzalez-Cascos, 2018, p. 175). Thus, EFL language teachers are in dire need of additional knowledge, competencies, and skills stemming from the ramification of this intercultural dimension (Willems, 2002). This is perhaps an aspect which is currently relegated to the sides but could feature more prominently in the ASSET curriculum. To date, the wider implications of intercultural communication have been merely touched upon in one of the topic clusters (i.e., intercultural communication in the EFL classroom) – provided that one or more learners actually decide on this particular topic for their presentation. In addition, occasionally questions regarding cultural norms and values when discussing body language (e.g., eye contact) or impact strategies used in formal presentations (e.g., humour) arise. This shows that perhaps a more in-depth treatment of the significance of a multicultural classroom could be embedded in ASSET.

Clearly, designing and implementing a new course which focuses on the advanced speaking skills of future teachers is no easy task. Apart from the implications arising from an increasingly diverse classroom, there might also be certain needs English teachers have regarding the development of their speaking competence that are presently not addressed in the course. For instance, the current trend towards content and language integrated learning poses not only pedagogical but also linguistic challenges for many of our graduates. In addition, the growing importance of the English language as a global means of communication with its pedagogical ramifications cannot be underestimated, and therefore our students should also be prepared to teach in *lingua franca* settings. In order to ensure the development of ASSET in the right direction both in terms of discourse formats and language functions covered in the course, other stakeholders, such as novice teachers, experienced teachers, or teacher educators from the departmental Centre for English Language Teacher Education and Research, should be involved in deciding on how to equip future teachers for the reality of the EFL classroom in the twenty-first century.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1

ASSET Rating Scale for Presentations

	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Structure and content	Genre-specific presentation skills
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Excellent</b> command of a very <b>broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> formulating ideas to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent control</b> of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• Ability to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b> (e.g., deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Great breadth and depth of content</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Full and appropriate use of a wide range of cohesive devices</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and effective</b> use of <b>all</b> of the following: <b>opening hook</b>, <b>rhetorical features</b> (e.g., metaphor, tripling, repetition, inclusive language, rhetorical questions, analogy), <b>paralinguistic features</b> (gesture, posture/poise, facial expression, eye contact, use of space), <b>audience rapport</b>, <b>visuals</b>, <b>take-home message</b>, <b>time-keeping</b></li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Consistent</b> lexical and grammatical <b>control</b> of [complex] language as appropriate for the genre, even while attention is otherwise engaged;</li> <li>• Expresses him/herself <b>at length with a natural flow</b>, almost effortlessly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberate</b> use of <b>intonation and stress</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student's <b>own contribution of ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Critical engagement with topic</b> (e.g., evaluation, comparison, contextualisation, implications, limitations);</li> <li>• <b>Effective signposting</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective audience rapport</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Confident performance</b></li> </ul>

(continued)

	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Structure and content	Genre-specific presentation skills
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reformulations</b> occur mainly for reasons of <b>expressing ideas fully</b>;</li> <li>• Free speech <b>without rote memorization</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of relevant evidence-based ideas</b>;</li> <li>• Awareness of audience and <b>task constraints</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Clear and logically developed 3-part</b> structure;</li> <li>• <b>Controlled use of cohesive devices</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>rhetorical features</b> (e.g., metaphor, tripling, repetition, inclusive language, rhetorical questions, analogy);</li> <li>• <b>Effective</b> use of <b>visuals</b>: visual appeal, formal features, references to sources</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Errors</b> are rare and mostly insignificant;</li> <li>• <b>Rare pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally maintains control</b> of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>volume</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Presentation of relevant ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Adequately structured</b> speech;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate signposting</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate research question</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of <b>most of the following</b>: opening hook, rhetorical features, paralinguistic features, audience rapport, visuals, take-home message;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>paralinguistic features</b> (gesture, posture/poise, facial expression, eye contact, use of space);</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate audience rapport</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Precise time-keeping</b></li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and appropriate</b> expression with possible <b>limitations</b> when communicating <b>complex ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Occasional pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice;</li> <li>• Reformulations <b>do not strain</b> the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear</b> pronunciation although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may <b>occasionally put strain</b> on the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May include <b>some ideas of doubtful relevance</b>;</li> <li>• 3-part structure <b>just discernible</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Only occasional</b> use of <b>signposting</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>visuals</b>: relevance;</li> <li>• <b>Insufficient</b> use of the following: rhetorical features, paralinguistic features, audience rapport, take-home message, time-keeping</li> </ul>

*Appendix 2*

ASSET Rating Scale for Interactions

	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Interaction management	Interaction
<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Excellent</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> formulating ideas to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent control</b> of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• Ability to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b> (e.g., deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective and flexible leading</b> of the development of ideas in a discussion of complex/unfamiliar topics, <b>guiding the direction</b> of the talk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> in responding to others;</li> <li>• <b>Ease of contribution</b> to complex interactions on complex/unfamiliar topics;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>relate own contribution skilfully</b> to those of other speakers;</li> <li>• <b>Spontaneous answers</b> to complex lines of counterargument;</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of non-verbal cues, posture/poise</b></li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Consistent</b> lexical and grammatical <b>control</b> of [complex] language as appropriate for the genre, even while attention is otherwise engaged;</li> <li>• Expresses him/herself <b>at length with a natural flow</b>, almost effortlessly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberate</b> use of <b>intonation and stress</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to <b>frame the issue</b>;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>intervene diplomatically</b> in order to redirect talk if necessary;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>stimulate logical reasoning</b> (e.g., hypothesising, inferring, analysing, justifying, and predicting)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective</b> use of the following collaboration strategies: <b>taking the initiative, getting/keeping/giving the floor, back-channelling devices, gesture, eye contact, facial expression</b>;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>frame the issue</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Articulate and persuasive</b> argumentation;</li> <li>• <b>Proposals</b> that advance the discussion</li> </ul>

(continued)

	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Interaction management	Interaction
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reformulations</b> occur mainly for reasons of <b>expressing ideas fully</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally efficient</b> management of discussion (incl. time-keeping, summarizing, passing on to the next moderator);</li> <li>• Ability to <b>prevent one person dominating or to confront insufficient collaboration</b>;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>clarify and recap</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to <b>contribute ideas</b> of relevance to the joint discourse and <b>adapt his/her contributions</b> to those of others;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>easily keep up</b> with the discussion and <b>argue a formal position</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Ability to clarify</b></li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Errors</b> are rare and mostly insignificant;</li> <li>• <b>Rare pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally maintains control</b> of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>volume</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sufficient task awareness</b> (rephrasing the issue at hand, identifying the language function);</li> <li>• <b>Ensuring each participant's involvement</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to <b>relate own contribution</b> to those of other speakers;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of the following collaboration strategies: <b>getting/keeping/giving the floor, back-channelling, paralinguistic features, facial expression</b></li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and appropriate</b> expression with possible <b>limitations</b> when communicating <b>complex ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Occasional pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice;</li> <li>• Reformulations <b>do not strain</b> the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear</b> pronunciation although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may <b>occasionally put strain</b> on the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate intervention</b> to set a group back on task, but <b>insufficient interaction management</b> overall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Limited eye contact and gesture</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Insufficient interaction</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Limited responses</b> to complex questions and comments</li> </ul>

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# Chapter 11

## The Vienna English Language Test



Susanne Sweeney-Novak

**Keywords** Testing grammar and vocabulary · Entrance test · Proficiency test · Multiple-choice test · Test development and validation

### 11.1 Contextualisation and Test Purpose

The Vienna English Language Test (VELT) was developed at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna and first implemented in 2011. It is a multiple-choice test used to determine undergraduate students' language knowledge in the areas of vocabulary and grammar with a view to ensuring level B2+ according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001). The VELT is not an entrance requirement for the undergraduate programme: failing the test does not exclude a student from attending lectures. However, students have to pass the VELT to be able to register for the courses in the department's English Language Competence (ELC) programme. There is no limit to the times this test can be taken.

Since the inception of a new curriculum in 2002 at the department, a commercially available standardised test, referred to below as the "old test," had been administered to first-semester students at the beginning of their first ELC course to establish their proficiency level in accordance with the CEFR. Monitoring the results over time made it clear that about 20% of students did not meet B2 level, which is supposed to be the school-exit level in the Austrian context. It made sense that these students should first improve their language competence before being offered a place in the ELC courses at the department.

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S. Sweeney-Novak (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [susanne.sweeney-novak@univie.ac.at](mailto:susanne.sweeney-novak@univie.ac.at)

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125

Test security and the wish to create a specific departmental test led to the development of the VELT. Unlike the old test, which targeted all the proficiency levels from A1 to C2 of the CEFR, the purpose of the VELT is to establish whether a test taker is proficient in grammar and vocabulary at level B2+ and above. Therefore, the VELT only marginally includes items at B1 level and below.

## 11.2 Test Construct

The theoretical framework adopted for the design of the VELT was taken from Purpura's theoretical definition of grammar, which covers phonological/graphological, lexical, morphosyntactic, cohesive, information management, and interactional forms and meanings at the subsentential, sentential, and suprasentential/discourse levels (2004, p. 78). The VELT has a strong focus on lexical, morphosyntactic, cohesive, and information management forms and meanings at the sentential and suprasentential levels. In his description of corpus linguistics, Purpura (2004, p. 15) shows that there are features of language use which could be "taken as both lexical and grammatical": for example, the word *since* has both a "lexical dimension," its meaning, and a "grammatical dimension" as a clause marker or a preposition.

Indeed, when analysing and labelling individual items first in the old test and then in the VELT, it was not always clear whether an item was testing vocabulary knowledge or grammatical knowledge, which confirmed Purpura's position that grammar and vocabulary are not separate traits but are interrelated in language use. One example may illustrate the point: the teaching of vocabulary should also focus on colligations, which are the syntactic environment of a specific word and are an important aspect of knowing a word. Most English as foreign language learners taking the VELT would probably be familiar with the word *upset* when used as a verb with an animate object with the meaning of making a person sad or anxious. However, in our data only a very small number of test takers were able to recognise the use of *upset* with an inanimate object in the sentence "The airline's insolvency upset our holiday plans."

In the VELT, there are no separate grammar and vocabulary sections, and vocabulary and grammar are tested context-dependently. In the example above, the use of the word *upset* is embedded in a sentence whose syntactic features should elicit the correct response over incorrect distractors. A context-independent response would be, for example, word-definition matching, as in Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (see Read, 2000, pp. 9–13 on the dichotomy of context-dependent and context-independent and pp. 118–120 on Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test).

The test construct of the VELT includes English morphology, lexis, and syntax. In contrast to many vocabulary tests, which ask for definitions of words or elimination of non-words, the VELT focuses on the meanings of words, semantic fields, and collocations in context. In the more current versions of the test, items were added related to word order (e.g., inversion) to express emphasis.

## 11.3 Test Method and Administration

In format and length, the VELT mirrors the old test. Each version consists of 60 items; time given for completion is 30 minutes. For test administration and security purposes, candidates are randomly divided into two groups, necessitating the development of two equivalent versions of the VELT. Due to the large number of students tested, this paper-based test must be administered speedily and results produced quickly. Since the answer sheets can be machine read, it is possible to have the results within a matter of hours. Success or failure is reported to students as percentage points away (positively or negatively) from the cut score.

The consistent format of the VELT is four-options multiple choice (MC) with one correct answer. The decision to adopt a MC format only, rather than develop a test using a variety of formats, was governed by the assumption that this is a format most likely known to all test takers. Furthermore, according to Purpura (2004), despite the criticism they receive, MC items are well suited for testing discrete features of grammatical knowledge. This claim would also apply to knowledge of vocabulary. In addition, MC items can be scored objectively, thus avoiding any subjective interpretation of student answers.

The VELT consists of individual sentences and five short text passages of 70–90 words with 7–9 gaps each. The passages include a range of text types with selected gapped items which require the test taker to supply a missing word or phrase chosen from four options. The purpose of the reading passages is to test beyond the sentence and to focus on text-specific features, for example past tense, participle clauses, or logical connectors. All short reading passages are authentic texts taken from different sources. Sometimes it is necessary to make minor adaptations to the text, for example to ensure that the content is not biased, that world knowledge is not required to understand the content, or to be in keeping with the required length of these short passages.

## 11.4 Test Development and Piloting

### 11.4.1 *Collecting Response Data*

Initially, selected items from various published test papers were given to students at the beginning of their first semester. These items were also administered to final-year pupils in schools to compare the results with first-semester students at the department. The purpose of using papers from published tests was to gain an understanding of the level of proficiency that pupils and university students of English were at and which items denoting lexical or grammatical features were typical of a specific level of proficiency. At the same time, independently constructed items were piloted to see whether these correlated with standardised items at specific levels of proficiency. Lexical items were included which were taken specifically from the Academic Word List developed by Coxhead (2000). A considerable part of the



discrete sentences was taken from corpora, such as the British National Corpus, or dictionaries whose examples are based on a corpus, such as the COBUILD dictionary, which is based on the UK's Birmingham University Language Database and is a pioneering work in dictionary compilation of modern English usage. Once we had accumulated a bank of at least 200 items, we investigated item difficulty, item discrimination, and distractor quality. Those items which proved statistically unsatisfactory as regards their level of difficulty and/or their ability to discriminate between high and low scorers were discarded. For the major trial, all items were classified regarding their level and purpose, and two versions of a trial test were developed. Up to the present time, the trialling and piloting procedures of two versions described above remain the same.

### ***11.4.2 Including and Excluding Items***

Items which look appropriate from the point of view of item difficulty and discrimination are piloted. Distractor analyses are conducted, and adjustments of weak distractors are made. Analytical software is used for analysis, namely SPSS and Winsteps (Linacre, 2019). The Rasch dichotomous model (Winsteps) can compare *person ability* and *item difficulty*, informing test developers of the probability of test takers answering specific items correctly. In addition, the Rasch model calculates *fit data* (person and item fit or misfit). This means that items or persons that produce surprising answers are indicated as not fitting the model. Items that the model specifies as misfitting are discarded.

In addition to omitting items which are found statistically wanting, some items are discarded or amended because of the feedback received from students and colleagues. These could include biased items or items which do not take into consideration language change. For example, on one occasion a student pointed out that they could only complete an item by elimination, because the “correct” answer was given in ‘British English’ rather than ‘American English,’ with which they were familiar. Besides, with an increasing number of students whose first language is not German or who come from a non-Austrian background, cultural bias in test development should be borne in mind. For test security reasons, student feedback is limited to some points they would like to make after the trial tests have been collected. By contrast, feedback from colleagues, especially those who revise the first drafts, is extensive.

### ***11.4.3 Trialling***

Originally, two versions, referred to as Version 1 and Version 2 below, of the future test were trialled and correlation studies with the old test were conducted. Today we trial the test with students at the beginning of their ELC programme. The trial

population has, in fact, passed a VELT and should at least be at level B2+. All items and more for two versions are trialled, and correlation studies are conducted between each student's test and trial result.

#### **11.4.4 Standard Setting**

Another step in the development of the VELT was the setting of cut scores between CEFR levels and, most specifically, between a pass and a fail. Various parameters were taken into account to tackle the question. First of all, the difficulty (facility value) of an item gave some indication as to whether an item was easy or difficult. The results of the old test enabled us to match test takers' CEFR level based on the old test with their scores on the trial versions. We also used the Rasch-based person/item map, together with the facility values, to determine the cut-off points between levels.

A second parameter was the judgement of experienced colleagues who had extensive teaching experience at the school-exit level. They were asked to scrutinise the items and decide whether a student at this level, which is supposed to be B2, would be able to answer an item correctly, whether they would regard an item as below the school-exit level, or whether only more advanced students would be able to answer an item correctly.

Thirdly, classifications according to CEFR levels were taken into account. To this end, the English Vocabulary Profile and the English Grammar Profile (English Profile, 2015), as well as Lextutor (Cobb, n.d.), an online platform for the analysis of texts and words, were consulted.

Finally, we drew on the results from the previous 16 semesters about the distribution of proficiency levels of beginning students. This gave us a good idea as to which percentage of test takers would be below B2 and which would be in the B2, C1, and C2 ranges.

### **11.5 Test Validation**

Having used the old test for a number of years and having found the results of the test to be consistent and sound in determining which students are at the required ability level, it was clear that this test should be used to establish the new test's concurrent validity by way of correlation studies. For a detailed study of the research parameters, see Sweeney-Novak (2012).

Originally, there were three sets of data to work with. The 189 students in the trial had taken the old test before the start of the semester and had subsequently taken both versions of the new test in class. It was therefore possible to correlate the two new test versions with an external measurement instrument, namely the old test. Scatterplots showed a positive relationship between the three variables.

As a further step to see to which extent the two sets of data correlated, *Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient* ( $r$ ) was calculated. Data with significant discrepancies were taken out of the data set: for example, isolated cases with a considerable difference between the trial and old test and cases with high numbers of items missing. In these instances, it was not clear whether students had arrived late to do the trial test, whether they had not taken the trialling process seriously enough, or whether test security of the old test had been compromised. The correlation indices showed a strong positive correlation between the old test and trial Versions 1 and 2 (.794 and .761 respectively), as well as between trial Version 1 and trial Version 2 (.809). A correlation index of .809 shows a clear relationship between the two trial versions, although an  $r$  in the high .80s or .90s, according to Hatch and Lazaraton (1991, pp. 440–444), would be desirable.

Initially, statistical information was acquired by means of Classical Test Theory. Subsequently, data was analysed using Item Response Theory (IRT) for additional information about test items (difficulty) and test takers (ability), which can be placed on one common linear scale, in order to establish the item difficulty hierarchy for each version and to ensure equivalence of the two versions. IRT is a powerful statistical tool which is used to make informed claims about a test's overall quality, about item and person characteristics, and about their relationship. IRT models are based on formalised expectations about person and item behaviour which is not directly observable; hence, IRT models are also referred to as “latent trait” models. The IRT model used in all VELT analyses is the one-parameter Rasch model based on Winsteps (Linacre, 2019).

At the present time, there are a considerable number of test versions, which begs the question whether the results of these versions are comparable and whether the VELT has continuously been a stable measurement instrument. In fact, data for all versions compares well, and the degree of reliability is very high. By way of example, Table 11.1 presents the reliability results of five versions. The data shows the results of the two original versions (Version 1 and Version 2), of one version given to one group in the winter semester 2017 (Version 5), and of the two versions from the winter semester 2018 (Version 7 and Version 8). The data is taken from the

**Table 11.1** Rasch reliability and separation

Semester	Version	Number of candidates	Person reliability	Person separation	Item reliability	Item separation
WS 2011	1	333	.89	2.86	.99	8.43
WS 2011	2	288	.89	2.79	.98	7.90
WS 2017	5	189	.90	3.03	.97	5.81
WS 2018	7	239	.90	2.97	.97	5.68
WS 2018	8	210	.89	2.85	.97	6.01

Winsteps analysis, which reports two types of reliability: person and item reliability. Person reliability is the equivalent of Cronbach's alpha. Item reliability is a specific Rasch entity indicating the "reproducibility" of item difficulties. Person separation classifies candidates: low person separation (below 2 and reliability below .8) could mean that the test does not distinguish well enough between high and low achievers. Item separation verifies item hierarchy: item separation indices should be above 3 and item reliability above .9 to confirm item hierarchy (or construct validity) of a test.

The data shows invariance between the test dates and two versions given at one test date. This kind of stability is consistent through all test administrations to date.

## 11.6 Conclusion

In describing the development of the VELT and the validation processes, this chapter explains the work that has produced an effective instrument to measure vocabulary and grammar knowledge of students wanting to major in English at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. It is hoped that the work so far has provided some validity evidence to support the claim that the VELT measures grammatical and lexical knowledge at a proficiency level which would form a sound basis for foreign-language students in an academic context in which English is the medium of instruction.

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# Chapter 12

## The Common Final Test



Thomas Martinek and Armin Berger

**Keywords** Testing academic writing · Testing academic reading · Proficiency test · Achievement test · Test development and validation

### 12.1 Contextualisation and Test Purpose

The Common Final Test (CFT) is a standardised reading and writing test developed at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna and taken by all students at the end of the second semester of Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS, see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). A first version of the CFT was introduced in tandem with the implementation of new curricula and course designs in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme in the winter semester 2002/03.

Prior to the introduction of the CFT, ILSS lecturers had had diverse approaches to assessing students. It is thus unsurprising that from the outset, the test was heralded as an “agent of change” (Sweeney-Novak, 2006, p. 60) as it constituted a paradigm shift: for the first time, students at the end of their first year in ELC courses would sit the same test on the same day so as to ensure “transparency of assessment and comparability of results” (Sweeney-Novak, 2006, p. 60). For this purpose, analytic rating scales were introduced and continuously revised, regular rater training sessions were established, and test results were statistically analysed.

The first version of the CFT was closely modelled on the test formats of the International English Language Testing System (British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, & Cambridge Assessment English, 2019). It consisted of a reading and a writing part, each accounting for 50% of the test grade. The 60-min reading part contained approximately 40 items based on three reading passages. The writing part

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T. Martinek (✉) · A. Berger

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [thomas.martinek@univie.ac.at](mailto:thomas.martinek@univie.ac.at); [armin.berger@univie.ac.at](mailto:armin.berger@univie.ac.at)

featured two separate text types, a graph-description task, in which students had to transform visual information into a verbal text of 150–180 words in 20 min, and an argumentative essay of 250–300 words, which students had to produce in 40 min.

As Sweeney-Novak (2006, p. 67) explains, the first writing task met with resistance from the start. Many students did not see the immediate relevance of describing graphs. For lecturers, it may have seemed difficult to teach the necessary writing, conceptual, and processing skills in appropriate detail while maintaining student motivation. There were good reasons for including this graph-description task: it aimed to test students' "cognitive ability to interpret, compare and contrast non-verbal information and evaluate its relevance" and their "language competence to report findings clearly, precisely and economically" (Sweeney-Novak, 2006, p. 67). However, as the lack of acceptance by students negatively affected the face validity of the CFT (Sweeney-Novak, 2006, p. 67) and students continuously complained about the time pressure during the writing part, where they had to complete two different tasks in 60 min, the project of developing a new writing test format was undertaken by members of the ELC team in the early 2010s.

While most lecturers felt the need to modify the format and time frame of the writing part, they still wanted to address the skills and competencies relevant to the graph-description task. Thus, the new CFT features only one writing task, an argumentative essay, which students have to complete in 75 min; unlike in the old version, the task sheet also provides visual and verbal sources, such as graphs and quotations from mostly academic publications relating to the topic. Students have to process the information and include references to several of these sources in their essays. This new writing task integrates a range of skills formerly tested separately and is much more authentic in an academic setting, where scholars report on the findings of others and integrate these into their own line of argument. After an intense process of fusing the two previous test formats into a single task, the creation of test specifications, the development of new rating scale criteria, piloting, and rater training, the new CFT was administered for the first time in January 2013. An example of the new writing task is given in the Appendix at the end of this chapter. Whereas the writing part had changed considerably, the specifications for the reading part remained the same.

The main purpose of the CFT, which is a standardised hybrid achievement test with features of proficiency testing, is to assess whether students have sufficient reading and writing ability in English to communicate effectively in academic contexts. This includes text comprehension (of descriptive, expository, narrative, and argumentative texts), the production of argumentative texts, the application of academically relevant skills (e.g., processing text content and complying with formal guidelines), and language proficiency at B2+/C1 according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001, 2020). The test construct, outlined in the next section, reflects the reading and writing sub-skills necessary to facilitate this type of communication.

## 12.2 Test Construct

The CFT reading tasks test the candidates' ability to skim and scan a text to locate specific information, to understand main ideas and supporting details, to understand linking sentences and ideas, to infer meaning from context, to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar lexical items, to distinguish between fact and opinion, and to adapt reading speed to task.

The CFT writing task tests the candidates' ability to present a reasoned and well-structured argument, to provide relevant support and examples, and to use varied, appropriate, and accurate language. Candidates are assessed on their ability to present and justify an opinion; to support an argument based on their own knowledge and experience, as well as by selecting relevant data from various sources (including information presented in visual form) and comparing, contrasting, evaluating, and challenging ideas, evidence, and implications; to summarise, paraphrase, and cite various sources; to develop ideas logically and use organisational patterns (e.g., paragraphing, information structure, signposting) effectively to produce a cohesive and coherent text; and to use a range of lexico-grammatical resources appropriately and accurately.

## 12.3 Test Method and Administration

The reading part consists of three reading passages of fairly equal length (approximately 900 words each). The texts are used in their original form and shortened only if necessary. Test takers have 60 min to answer 40–43 items. The reading section contains a number of closed-ended and limited-response formats, such as multiple choice, short-answer questions, sentence completion, gapped summaries, table/flow chart or diagram completion, choosing paragraph headings, choosing text titles, identifying the writers' views, matching a numbered list of items to a set of options, or identifying the best summary. The texts are taken from newspapers, textbooks, magazines, and journals and are semi-academic in nature, written for a non-specialist audience.

For the writing section, candidates are required to produce an argumentative essay of 300–400 words in 75 min. They present a reasoned argument, supporting it by referring to two types of visual information (e.g., graphs, tables, diagrams, or charts) and any of the verbal input texts (four to six quotations with a maximum of 250 words in total) provided on the task sheet.

The reading and writing sections of the CFT are graded separately so as to avoid a possible halo effect. The scoring of the reading test is objective, with one point awarded for each correct item. The reading paper accounts for 50% of the overall test score. The writing performances are rated analytically according to the following criteria: task fulfilment, organisation, linguistic accuracy, linguistic range, punctuation, spelling, and length. The writing paper accounts for 50% of the overall test

score. The pass mark is 60% of the overall score. A score below 48% on one of the two parts (reading or writing) results in a fail grade.

While the candidates' reading answers are marked by their own lecturers, using an extended scoring key devised during pilot testing, the writing papers are distributed randomly among ILSS lecturers. In other words, no lecturer marks the papers of their own group or of students they may know from previous semesters. Writing performances below the cut score are second marked by another rater, and the ratings are averaged. In cases of a considerable discrepancy between the two ratings, the performances are rated a third time to ensure inter-rater reliability.

## 12.4 Test Development and Piloting

Developing the CFT reading and writing tasks is a cyclical and iterative process, which involves a design phase, a trial phase, and a monitoring phase (e.g., Milanovic, 2002). The design of the reading task begins with the selection of appropriate reading passages according to the test specifications. After some initial vetting, promising texts are analysed in more detail. In addition to text type, topic, purpose, audience, style, register, and level, other parameters for selecting a text include lexical density and lexical frequency, as well as structural complexity. Analytical tools such as Compleat Web VP (Cobb, 2019) or English Profile (2015) are used in this process. Furthermore, there are a number of technical considerations that must be taken into account, for example whether the text lends itself to several response formats, whether it is dense enough to generate a number of independent items, and whether the items can be spread evenly through the text. Once a final decision about text choice has been made, test items are designed. The number of items produced at this stage far exceeds the number of items included in the final test booklet as it can be expected that some will have to be discarded in the wake of quality control. A number of ILSS lecturers are involved in this phase, especially in the feedback and editing stages. As suggested by Davidson and Lynch (2001), also asking colleagues who are only vaguely familiar with the specific course requirements and target group to give feedback on a newly developed task is a valuable exercise in this process. All this feedback helps to identify items which may have more than one correct answer, wholly implausible distractors, or items which are unclear even to very proficient language users.

In the trial phase, the test materials are pretested on a representative sample of the test takers. The reading tasks are administered to several ILSS 2 groups in order to conduct a number of statistical analyses on the scores obtained, involving both Classical Test Theory and Rasch analysis. In particular, item facility, item discrimination, distractor tallies, and fit statistics are routinely inspected. The purpose of this phase is to analyse the performance of individual items and check whether they are effective enough to be included in the live test, as well as to produce an extended answer key for scorers with an exhaustive list of acceptable answers for limited-response formats such as short-answer questions or gapped summaries.



Once the CFT reading test is fully operational, the results of the live administration are carefully monitored. The reading test scores are analysed shortly after the administration in order to correct possible errors in scoring, to evaluate how the items performed in the live test, and to assess any need for revision before the items are banked.

The development of the writing task, by nature, follows a different process. The design phase starts with choosing a general topic and a specific issue to be discussed in an argumentative essay. The topics are restricted to areas that can safely be assumed to be of general interest and familiar to the candidates. One challenge in the design phase is to select suitable quotations and quantitative data from a range of academic sources which candidates can use to support their arguments. Great care is taken to ensure that the supporting materials balance each other and are suitable for various lines of argumentation.

After several loops of feedback and revision, the next step is to trial the prompt, again by administering it to ILSS 2 students as part of a practice test. Two types of data are collected and analysed in this phase: Firstly, the candidates' performances are marked on the basis of the same rating scale that is used in the live administrations. The performance data provides valuable information about whether the topic matches the students' experience, whether the task elicits the intended construct, whether the prompt is understood by the candidates, and whether it gives them the opportunity to show a range of structures and vocabulary expected at the target level. In relation to the sources, raters indicate which quotations were selected by the candidates, how the sources were used (e.g., as a direct quotation, a paraphrase, or a summary), whether they were incorporated into the text effectively, and whether the content was presented accurately.

Secondly, questionnaire data is collected. After completing the trial test, students answer a number of Likert-type items about their test-taking experience and their opinion on the prompt, including, for example, whether the topic is interesting, whether the visual information is clear, whether the quotations helped them to support their argument, and whether the language used in the quotations is not too difficult. In addition, there are some open-ended questions as to what candidates like and what they dislike about the writing task, as well as any suggestions they may have regarding the prompt. All this information helps the test developers to improve the prompt before it is used in a live test.

## 12.5 Test Validation

In addition to rigorous and principled test development, in line with the guidelines for good practice in language testing and assessment suggested by the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (2006), the ELC team routinely takes a number of measures to ensure a consistently high quality of the test, particularly in relation to scoring validity. One such measure intended to increase rater reliability is the random distribution of the test papers among the lecturers who

function as raters. This is to ensure that the ratings are not influenced by the expectations that lecturers invariably have of their own students. Anonymising test papers can help to minimise such rater effects (Hughes, 2010). Another measure is multiple independent ratings of negative performances. As mentioned above, essays rated below the cut score are assessed a second or, if need be, even a third time, with all independent ratings being averaged.

The team of ILSS level coordinators also organise regular rater training sessions, which are held once per semester. For these meetings, the level coordinators select test performances from previous semesters and ask raters to assess them several days prior to the meeting. Scores for the different criteria of the rating scale are sent to the level coordinators in advance and anonymised; discrepancies are singled out for discussion at the meeting. Raters are then given the opportunity to revise their ratings in the light of this discussion: the revised scores usually display a considerably greater degree of uniformity, which seems to confirm that rater training sessions indeed increase inter- and intra-rater reliability (e.g., Van Moere, 2014; Weigle, 1998). The scores and salient points from the discussion are recorded in the minutes and made available to all lecturers via Moodle, the university's online learning platform, for future reference. An important outcome of the discussions is that raters agree on assigning certain content, structural, or linguistic features unambiguously to one of the rating scale criteria. Examples and explanations from the texts are collected in a file made available on Moodle, which raters are encouraged to review prior to any CFT administration.

In addition, during these meetings, benchmark performances for various criteria of the rating scale are defined. Benchmarks are candidate responses that have been selected as exemplars of performances epitomising a particular point on the rating scale. A performance is considered to be a benchmark if a consensus of  $N - 1$  is reached among the raters present at the benchmarking meeting. Such exemplars are particularly useful around the cut score, illustrating responses which are nearly but not quite good enough for a positive score, or vice versa (Schedl & Malloy, 2014). Raters are instructed to consult these materials before every test administration and throughout operational scoring as needed.

Furthermore, the rating scales themselves are under scrutiny at these meetings. Not only have a number of vague terms – mostly qualifiers such as *little*, *some*, *frequent*, or *very* – been eliminated over the years; a major overhaul of the rating scale criteria was achieved in the winter semester 2017/18, when the two separate criteria of *vocabulary* and *grammar* were replaced with *linguistic accuracy* and *linguistic range*. This change had become necessary as the former version of the scale seemed to prioritise correct usage and avoidance of errors and mistakes at the cost of linguistic experimentation and risk-taking. The switch to the new categories has made it possible to give students credit for the ambitious use of low-frequency vocabulary items and advanced grammatical structures. A similar move had already been made by the designers of the standardised school-leaving exam for foreign languages in Austrian upper-secondary schools (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2019). It was thus felt that students as well as lecturers teaching at both secondary and tertiary levels would be familiar with the system and thus encouraged to view linguistic experimentation positively. Most

importantly, this major revision of the rating scale provided the opportunity to link the CFT rating scale more explicitly to the levels and descriptors defined in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020).

In addition to the regular measures outlined above, the ELC team conducted a comprehensive quantitative rating study in 2018, which involved the complete rating data from the CFT administration in the summer semester with 184 candidates and 8 raters. The purpose of this study was twofold: Firstly, it aimed to validate the CFT rating scale after the changes described above had been made, with a focus on candidate separation (i.e., whether the rating scale is discriminating), criterion difficulty (i.e., how difficult the scale criteria are in relation to one another), and scale step functionality (i.e., how the analytic scale categories operate). Secondly, the aim was to provide individual feedback to raters about their level of severity and consistency. To this end, a many-facet Rasch analysis with three facets, namely candidates, raters, and rating scale criteria, was conducted. The results of this study show that all relevant statistics have satisfactory values, confirming that the new scale functions effectively in an operational setting. As regards rating behaviour, the results indicate that there were different degrees of severity, which is to be expected in situations where raters function as independent experts. All raters were consistent in their ratings, with one minor exception, who behaved slightly more unpredictably than the statistical model expected. However, all rater fit statistics were within acceptable ranges. The information obtained from this study was fed back to individual raters and addressed in rater training.

## 12.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the rationale behind the CFT, a standardised test developed in-house to measure students' reading and writing ability after their first year in the ELC programme. As the CFT serves an important gate-keeping function, the team is making every effort to maintain and further improve the quality of the test. Quality assurance includes rigorous test development, rater training, rater feedback, benchmarking, and empirical validation, as well as regular meetings with lecturers in which the test instruments and procedures are constantly adapted to respond to issues which arose during the operational phase. These meetings also serve to promote positive washback effects on teaching and learning in ILSS courses, while reducing the potential risk of teaching to the test, which, in the worst case, could mean that central instructional goals would be abandoned in favour of test preparation. Possible future directions for CFT development and validation include, *inter alia*, reconsidering the discrete skills approach in favour of integrative skills testing, formally linking the CFT to the CEFR according to standard procedures (Council of Europe, 2009), and constructing a validity argument based on a theoretical framework for justifying the uses for which the CFT is intended (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 2010). This chapter has demonstrated that, despite the limited resources available for test development and validation, the team strive to fulfil their professional, social, and ethical responsibilities as language testers.

## Appendix

### CFT Writing Task

Present a written argument to an educated reader on the following topic:

*"One of the liveliest current debates [...] revolves around the accelerating global spread of English and the urgent socio-economic, ideological, and ecological issues raised as a consequence of this spread" (Seidhofer 2003: 7).*

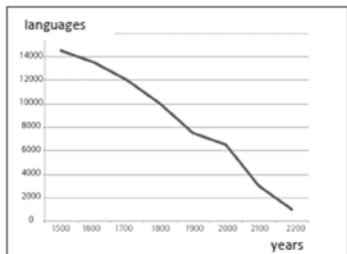
*Do the potential benefits of having English as a global language for international communication outweigh possible disadvantages?*

You have **75 minutes** to complete this task.  
Write between **300 and 400 words**.

Support your arguments by referring to **both** sources of visual information and **at least one** of the other quotations below.

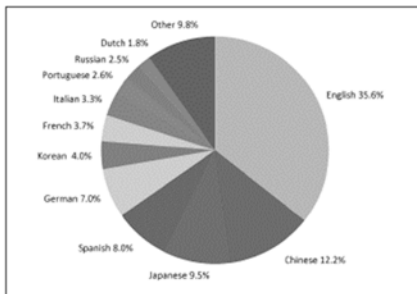
You will receive points for task achievement, good organisation, range of vocabulary and sentence structure, and linguistic accuracy.

Number of languages worldwide



Graddol (2006: 60)

First languages of Internet users  
Total: 680 million



Thurlow et al. (2004: 121)

[...] around two-thirds of the world's top 100 universities are in English-speaking countries.

This is one reason why English is used increasingly as the medium of education in universities across the world.

[...] English-speaking countries have the most entrepreneurial universities, who seek income by marketing their courses to overseas students; and English itself is seen as a key educational investment.

Graddol (2006: 74-76)

[Crystal] warns us of the resentment, envy, anger of the non-English mother-tongue speakers who feel disadvantaged. Or who, worse still, feel their mother tongue or identity threatened.

Hanson (1997: 22)

A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people - especially their political and military power.

Crystal (2003: 9)

Arguments about the need for national or cultural identity are often seen as being opposed to those about the need for mutual intelligibility. But this is misleading. It is perfectly possible to develop a situation in which intelligibility and identity happily co-exist. [...] The two functions can be seen as complementary, responding to different needs. And it is because the functions are so different that a world of linguistic diversity can in principle continue to exist in a world united by a common language.

Crystal (2003: 22)

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**Part II**  
**Teaching English to Advanced Learners**

# Chapter 13

## Reading Below the Surface: Guiding Students to Getting More out of Texts



Lisa Nazarenko

**Keywords** Teaching reading skills · Reading process · Top-down processing · Reading guides · Text analysis

### 13.1 Contextualization

The courses Language in Use (LIU) 1 and 2 at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna aim to enhance students' understanding of text types and how they work (see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)). The objectives indicate that students be aware of how texts are used and be able to identify characteristic features of different text types and explain their effects. Specific focus is on awareness of audience, purpose, style, appropriateness, and the importance of lexical, grammatical, and stylistic choices in text.

To achieve these goals, the courses require students to learn how to analyze texts and how to write a text analysis. This involves identifying (with support) the text type, audience, and purposes of the text and identifying language features that are used to focus on the audience and achieve the purpose(s).

Students in LIU 1 and 2 generally do not have a problem with vocabulary or with complex sentence structure in the texts they read, so their bottom-up processing in reading comprehension is extremely good. However, they often have difficulty with top-down processing (Andrews & Bond, 2009, pp. 687–688), which relies on background information to make predictions about what they will read. This includes noticing intertextuality, the tone or attitude of the text, intended audience, and aspects of purpose; in other words, they struggle with aspects of the text that are more subtle. I refer to this as *reading below the surface*. These difficulties interfere with their comprehension of the text on a deeper level, so that they do not always

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L. Nazarenko (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [lisa.nazarenko@univie.ac.at](mailto:lisa.nazarenko@univie.ac.at)

realize the purpose(s) of the text or who the intended audience is. This, obviously, keeps them from analyzing the text efficiently.

To focus specifically on my students' difficulties, I developed feedback questionnaires for them to identify some of the problems they have with fully comprehending the particular texts used in the course. Using the students' feedback as well as input from a colleague who was having similar problems in the LIU courses, we identified the following factors (see Nazarenko & Schwarz-Peaker, 2014):

- (a) level of interest in overall topic of text
- (b) complexity of ideas discussed in text
- (c) discrete vocabulary items
- (d) word length, number of syllables
- (e) sentence structure, length, semantic complexity
- (f) overall length of text
- (g) vocabulary items that have more than one meaning
- (h) use of idioms, expressions
- (i) use of tone, attitude in text
- (j) lack of relevant cultural background
- (k) student's own prejudices or assumptions about topic

In addition to factor j), which relates to top-down processing, Stott (2001) mentions that the students' cultural backgrounds could result in their reacting differently to a text than what was intended by the author. For example, students might not realize that an author's example is intended to be funny if it is not a type of humor in their culture.

## 13.2 Objectives

I try to avoid factors a) and b) in the list above by my choice of texts or by input from students. Factors c) – f) are usually not a problem, since students' grammar knowledge and bottom-up reading ability at this level are rather advanced. Factors g) – k), however, often cause problems because students do not always realize that they do not know these features in a text. This is identified as a critical point by Nuttall (2005, p. 64), who writes that “it takes a competent reader to be aware that he is not understanding and it sometimes takes a very skilled one to be aware *why* he is not.”

Therefore, I realized that I should focus on these particular areas of difficulty to make students aware of the features they were missing when reading the texts. This would not only improve their reading comprehension but would help them analyze texts more efficiently.

To achieve this, I developed *Reading Guides* (in collaboration with my colleague) for students to refer to after reading a text but before writing their text analysis. A Reading Guide is a one-page handout with various questions for students to answer in preparation for the lesson in which we will discuss the text. It includes background information or cultural knowledge they might not have but would need in order to fully comprehend the text. Each Reading Guide has different questions



depending on the text and the difficulties I assume students will have in reading it below the surface, but in general, each Guide includes questions that focus on identification of text type, audience, and purpose(s); significance of title or visuals; uses of intertextuality; cultural references; features that help students identify author's tone or attitude; relevant language features; and specific word choices (i.e., why a particular word was chosen instead of a synonym).

The focus on the author's specific word choices is particularly relevant for the LIU courses since this helps students see how language is used to achieve particular purposes in writing. Even words that are synonyms are not used in the same way; there are differences in connotation and appropriateness that are relevant to understanding the author's intention in the text. Having students find out about these differences when reading a text prepares them for a more motivating and in-depth discussion about the text in the following lesson.

### 13.3 Procedure

To illustrate how I prepare and use Reading Guides, I will use the example of *The Challenger Speech*, which was delivered by then-President Ronald Reagan after the space shuttle Challenger broke apart after takeoff on January 28, 1986, killing all seven crew members.

This speech is generally recognized as an excellent text that achieved the combined purposes of responding to the tragedy, eulogizing the dead astronauts, expressing mourning, and supporting continued space flight despite the disaster. I use this text in LIU I because of how well the text's language achieves all these purposes. The students are assigned to read the speech and the accompanying Reading Guide for homework in preparation for the discussion in the following lesson.

#### **Pres. Ronald Reagan: Speech on the Challenger Disaster January 28, 1986**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd planned to speak to you tonight to report on the state of the Union, but the events of earlier today have led me to change those plans. Today is a day for mourning and remembering. Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle Challenger. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country. This is truly a national loss.

Nineteen years ago, almost to the day, we lost three astronauts in a terrible accident on the ground. But we've never lost an astronaut in flight. We've never had a tragedy like this.

And perhaps we've forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle. But they, the Challenger Seven, were aware of the dangers, but overcame them and did their jobs brilliantly. We mourn seven heroes: Michael Smith,

(continued)

Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe.

We mourn their loss as a nation together.

For the families of the seven, we cannot bear, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy. But we feel the loss, and we're thinking about you so very much. Your loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that special spirit that says, "Give me a challenge, and I'll meet it with joy." They had a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths. They wished to serve, and they did. They served all of us.

We've grown used to wonders in this century. It's hard to dazzle us. But for twenty-five years the United States space program has been doing just that. We've grown used to the idea of space, and, perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They, the members of the Challenger crew, were pioneers.

And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's take-off. I know it's hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them.

I've always had great faith in and respect for our space program. And what happened today does nothing to diminish it. We don't hide our space program. We don't keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front and in public. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute.

We'll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue.

I want to add that I wish I could talk to every man and woman who works for NASA, or who worked on this mission and tell them: "Your dedication and professionalism have moved and impressed us for decades. And we know of your anguish. We share it."

There's a coincidence today. On this day three hundred and ninety years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian later said, "He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it." Well, today, we can say of the Challenger crew: Their dedication was, like Drake's, complete.

The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."

Thank you.

When I first used this text in the LIU 1 course – before developing Reading Guides – I realized that the students did not know much about this event or the significance it had at the time, and they did not recognize all of the references made in the speech. Among the references many students did not know were: what ‘the state of the Union’ is; who ‘Nancy’ was; who ‘Francis Drake’ was or why he was referred to; who all the multiple audiences were (many students just said the audience is Americans); what the situation was at the time regarding the space race between the USA and the USSR; and which text was quoted at the end of the speech (or that it was a quote and not an expression). Therefore, I included a focus on these aspects in my Reading Guide.

Read the text, *The Challenger Speech*, and imagine how you would approach writing a text analysis of this text. After you’ve made notes, then focus on the questions below to see if there are any changes you would make to your ideas. Be prepared to share your notes in class.

1. What was the space shuttle Challenger disaster? If necessary, read some background information about the intended flight and its destruction.
2. Who are the different audiences of this text? In which order are they structured?
3. What purpose(s) are there to this speech? Support your assumptions with references to the text.
4. This event happened on the same day that the ‘state of the Union’ speech was supposed to be delivered. What is this speech, and what is the significance of having to cancel it?
  5. Who is Nancy, and what is the effect of referring to her by her first name?
6. What is the significance of the president naming each of the astronauts?
7. Why do you think the president specifically says, “We don’t hide our space program. We don’t keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front and in public. That’s the way freedom is, and we wouldn’t change it for a minute.”?
8. Who was Sir Francis Drake and why do you think he is referred to?
9. Look up the quotes used at the end of the speech. Which text does it come from, and why do you think this text in particular is quoted?
10. Find all the adjectives used to refer to or describe the astronauts – make a list. What semantic fields are they in? Why are these words chosen? How does this relate to one of the purposes of the text?
11. Make note of any other features of the text that you feel are relevant in your text analysis.

In the following lesson, students form small groups to discuss their analysis of the text, focusing on their answers to the Reading Guide questions. These questions not only help them to concentrate on aspects of the text they might not have noticed, but they also serve as a starting point to their peer discussion. Small group discussions are effective because each student gets a chance to contribute ideas.

Over the course of the semester, there are fewer questions and guidelines on the Reading Guide. For the final texts, there are no Guides. This form of scaffolding (Kayi-Aydar, 2013) encourages students to look for relevant language features on their own, (hopefully) inspired by the features that had been pointed out throughout the semester. In this way, students can learn to read more critically on their own.

This type of Guide can be developed for any text, and the questions can be focused specifically on aspects of the text that the teacher thinks the students might not notice. Questions can also focus on aspects of language that are being studied in the particular course. I have also developed Reading Guides for engineering students at a technical university. Those Guides focus on the aspects of the texts that students should reproduce in their own writing, in particular, process descriptions, technical reports, and discursive essays (see also Nazarenko, 2017; Nazarenko & Schwarz-Peaker, 2014).

## 13.4 Evaluation

In comparing student analyses of the same texts before and after using Reading Guides, I have seen that there is certainly a significant improvement in the quality of their analyses and understanding of the text after using the Guides. In course feedback students fill in at the end of the semester, they have indicated that they were very much helped by the Guides. They started to notice aspects of the text they would not have noticed otherwise – particularly connotation, intertextuality, and aspects of specific word choice. Some of the typical comments from students include: The Reading Guides are useful because I look at things in the text I hadn't noticed; Now I realize what's important to look at; Now I look up words for a different reason – not only to find out what they mean; The Guides give me a better idea of what I should be looking for when I write a text analysis.

I believe that through the Reading Guide, students also develop the ability to read below the surface of the text and realize when they are having difficulty understanding aspects of the text beyond the vocabulary and grammar. As Nuttall (2005) asserts, “readers who are aware of the potential problem are halfway to solving it; they can scrutinize the text for unstated assumptions and try to identify the mismatch that has produced their difficulty” (p. 8). Students become aware of the difference between their own viewpoint and that of the author, any differences between the title or illustration and the topic of the text, and discrepancies between the author's stated intention and what the text actually is about.

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# Chapter 14

## Writing an Argumentative Essay Like Sherlock Holmes: Teaching Essay Structure with the Detective Analogy



Horst Prillinger

**Keywords** Teaching academic writing · Logical argumentation · Coherence and cohesion · Thesis statement · Communicative purpose of essays

### 14.1 Contextualisation

One of the foundational language classes in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna is Integrated Language and Study Skills 2 (ILSS 2), where, throughout the semester, students are to produce at least five argumentative essays of 300 to 400 words (of which two are written in a test situation); each of these is to provide a reasoned argument supported by evidence drawn from quantitative data and quotations from academic sources that are provided in the prompt (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). Many students struggle with these writing tasks, which require focusing on the topic, having a clear opinion on the subject, and being able to critically evaluate the sources provided before developing a coherent, cohesive, and convincing argument with a sound thesis. Conversations with students have made it clear that many of them are to varying degrees overwhelmed by what they feel is a multitude of formal requirements: they struggle with the concepts of thesis statements, topic sentences, main and supporting ideas, introductions, and conclusions. Their main problem is not that these concepts would be alien per se: they struggle with what they perceive as so many variants and unknowns in the equation to the extent that they are afraid of writing a “wrong” essay if they are unable to fulfil all of the criteria to the lecturer’s expectations. Typically, they will therefore

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H. Prillinger (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [horst.prillinger@univie.ac.at](mailto:horst.prillinger@univie.ac.at)

ask for the “correct” way to write, demand clear-cut instructions, and adhere rather strictly to what they have been told by their lecturer.

As a result, a significant number of student essays not only show a certain lack of flexibility when it comes to approaching different topics, but they also display signs of the students’ internal struggles: there is a disparity between what they want to say and the limitations imposed by their attempts to follow the lecturer’s instructions and fulfil as many formal criteria as possible. This struggle between form and content characterises many student essays, and it is not helped by the fact that in case of doubt, form is typically prioritised over content, even to the extent where students will argue a position that is not their personal opinion, simply because they feel that it is easier to follow the instructions that way.

The primary role of the lecturer at this stage in the ELC programme is thus to assist the students to focus on the communicative purpose of the text and explain how the textual elements in the essay help to fulfil this purpose. In this vein, the teaching material presented in this chapter is an example of a practical application of these elements that can enable students to understand how the formal components that are often seen as obstacles can actually be valuable aids in bringing their message across.

The lecturer’s task is to clarify how the abstract elements of an argumentative essay are in fact means of facilitating communication between the writer and the reader; analogies, which help to explain complex concepts through tangible comparisons, thus lend themselves well to this purpose. Hulshof and Verloop have pointed out that an essential part of the teacher’s role is to convert subject content knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge, and that analogies are a vital tool to accomplish this transformation (Hulshof & Verloop, 2002, p. 77). Wilson, Shulman, and Richert (1987) and Cochran, DeRuiter, and King (1993) noted the necessity for teachers to have a repertoire of analogies and metaphors at their disposal in order to translate content knowledge into terms that the students can relate to. This repertoire needs to be extensive, for in order to be effective, an analogy needs to make an abstract idea “as concrete and personally affecting as possible” (Wormeli, 2009, p. 24) so that the students can relate to and benefit from it.

## 14.2 Objectives

The teaching unit described in this chapter uses analogy to teach the principles of basic essay structure in an attempt to make it as concrete and affecting as possible by temporarily regarding the argumentative essay as a detective story of sorts and first putting the focus on what the text is trying to communicate before paying attention to the elements it uses to achieve this. At the end of this process, after seeing how various techniques used by detectives also apply to the argumentative essay, the students should have a more concrete idea of what purpose the structural elements of an essay serve, and they should have been supplied with examples of communicative devices that they can adapt for and apply to their own writing. In this unit, the analogy thus serves four purposes:

- understanding the mechanisms of the text through a concrete, relatable example (rather than abstract instructions),
- helping the student identify with a communicator who wants to convey a message (rather than with a student who needs to pass a test),
- giving a tangible example of a communicative purpose that needs to be accomplished, and
- providing an easily identifiable indicator if that purpose has been accomplished or not.

The unit had its origin in the students' recurring questions about the differences between the essay introduction and the conclusion. Many were confused by the fact that both introduction and conclusion are supposed to contain the thesis and that both are supposed to summarise the main ideas, so they were unsure about how to make the text reflect the difference given all these similarities.

The difference, however, lies in the communicative purpose, not in the factual content. Thus, the answer that seemed to resonate most was explaining the function of the conclusion not as the section that concludes the text, but rather as the section that *draws a conclusion from the arguments* – much like detectives draw their conclusions about the identity of a murderer from all the clues that they have collected. It turned out that the students could easily relate to this analogy. The next logical step was then to illustrate not only the essay conclusion, but the entire argumentative essay by using a detective analogy as a model for arguing a position. This was then further expanded and developed into a teaching unit by adding two classroom activities to what was initially a mere explanatory handout. I started referring to the unit as “The Sherlock Holmes Principle” to further drive home the point that the main task at hand is to argue and prove a position. It has to be noted, however, that the teaching module is not modelled after the entire whodunit (in which the murderer is only revealed at the very end), but rather after the last chapter of the whodunit, in which the detective reveals to all the suspects who he believes is the murderer and why. Key excerpts from the teaching handout are included in this chapter; the entire handout can be downloaded from Prillinger (2018).

### 14.3 Procedure

The teaching unit should be used once the basic elements of essay structure (introduction, body paragraphs, argument structure, conclusion) have been taught, or when it has been established that the students are familiar with these concepts. The unit should not be used as an introduction to these concepts as the focus is on recognising elements that they should be familiar with rather than showing them these elements for the first time. It consists of three phases:

1. a classroom activity in which students discuss a task
2. a rough analysis of a text
3. a detailed explanation of the text mechanisms



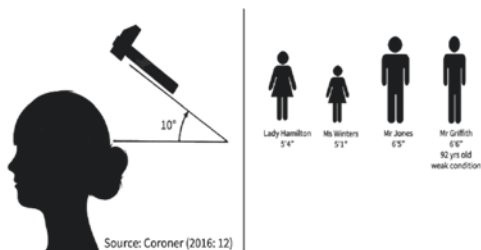
In the **activity phase**, the students are given a task sheet (Fig. 14.1) which is reminiscent of their other writing tasks in that it contains a question along with two graphs and quotations that should be used for their argumentation, but it is simplified and easily recognisable as not entirely serious. The semi-playful tone is used to make sure that the task is approached with less distance and tension than a more “serious” worksheet, thus allowing for an emotional link to the teaching content.

The students form groups of four and discuss the murder case. They have to reach a decision as to who their group believe to be the murderer and give at least two reasons for their decision. The results are then compared in a whole class discussion, and the names of the suspected murderers and the arguments for the cases are written on the board. Usually, there will be some agreement that the evidence strongly suggests Mr. Jones as the murderer; if a group suspects a different person, name and reasons can be written down in a second column on the board. The important point is that the groups put forward an opinion and provide evidence for it.

Subsequently, the lecturer points out that each group has just given what is essentially a thesis, an argument, and an overall conclusion: Their thesis was their answer to the prompt question, or the name of the murderer; their arguments were their reasons for their answer, or how they identified the murderer; and their conclusion is the connection between the thesis and the arguments, or how the thesis follows logically from the arguments.

In the **analysis phase**, the students receive a printed version of a text (Fig. 14.2) in which Sherlock Holmes argues why he thinks Mr. Jones is the murderer, and a set of control questions (Fig. 14.3) that they are to check in the text. These questions aim to establish the key elements that need to be present in the introduction, body

*Lady Hamilton was killed yesterday at 9pm with a heavy sledge hammer. Who is the murderer?*



*"Mr Griffith hates Lady Hamilton with a vengeance. The Lady always forced that poor weak man to carry her heavy shopping bags."*  
— Borrowby-Smythe (2016: 2).

*"Jones is a member of the weightlifting club, and he trains regularly."* — Miller (2016: 7).

*"Ms Winters will inherit a part of Lady Hamilton's fortune because of her devotion and loyalty to the Lady."* — Udell (2016: 4).

*"Yes, we were in the pub all evening, and Jones was there too, between 7pm and until the pub closed at 11pm."*  
— Smith and Cooper (2016: 3)

*"Jones was at the pub alright, but around quarter to nine he went to the toilet and didn't come back until half past nine. Must have had some serious stomach trouble."* — Fuller and Hume (2016:1)

**Fig. 14.1** Task sheet for activity phase (Prillinger, 2018)

Yesterday evening at 9pm, Lady Hamilton was killed with a massive sledge hammer. Considering how the murder was committed and the whereabouts of the suspects, it can be proved that the murderer is none other than Mr Jones, the gardener.

Of all the suspects at hand, only Mr Jones and Mr Griffith, the butler, are tall enough to kill Lady Hamilton. The coroner (2016: 12) has established that the lethal wound was inflicted from such a position that the hammer hit Lady Hamilton at an angle of only 10 degrees. This necessitates that the murderer be at least one foot taller than the victim. The third suspect, Ms Winters, is significantly smaller than Lady Hamilton and was thus unable to inflict the lethal wound.

As for the murder weapon, the sledge hammer is so heavy that only Mr Jones can easily lift it. Even though he is known to hate Lady Hamilton, Mr Griffith is now 92 years old and weak, and very much unable to lift, let alone swing the hammer. Mr Jones, on the other hand, is a member of the local weightlifting club (Miller 2016: 7) and should have no difficulty at all using the hammer as a murder weapon.

While Mr Jones has brought forward witnesses (Smith and Cooper 2016: 3) who saw him in the local pub between 7pm and 11pm yesterday, his alibi does not hold. Further interviews with the customers at the pub have revealed that Fuller and Hume (2016: 1) saw Mr Jones go to the toilet around 8:45pm and did not see him re-emerge from it until about 9:30pm. As Lady Hamilton's house is just a five minutes' walk from the pub, he has no alibi for the time of the murder.

To sum up, the impact angle, the weight of the murder weapon, and the absence of an alibi strongly suggest that Mr Jones is indeed the murderer.

**Fig. 14.2** Written argument for text analysis (Prillinger, 2018)

- *Does the introduction describe what the problem is (why Holmes is telling you this)?*
- *Does the introduction contain Holmes's thesis about who the murderer is?*
- *Does Holmes tell you in the introduction how he will prove his thesis?*
- *Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence which contains one main idea which states why Holmes believes that he has identified the right person as the murderer?*
- *Is the main idea backed up with supporting ideas or is it just a claim?*
- *Is every supporting idea based on evidence?*
- *At the very end, does Holmes state his conclusion who he thinks is the murderer by briefly referring to the main ideas?*

**Fig. 14.3** Control questions for text analysis (Prillinger, 2018)

paragraphs, and conclusion. In the same groups, the students try to answer the questions and mark the respective sections in the text.

In the **explanation phase**, the students receive a colour-coded handout of the text which explains various textual functions and moves (Fig. 14.4). (As the colour-coded handout cannot be reproduced in this publication, please download the colour

To **introduce** his argument, Holmes states the *problem*, points out how he will discuss it, and presents his **thesis** (= the answer to the question)

Each subsequent paragraph will present one piece of evidence for the thesis.

The **main idea** of the first paragraph is the first reason why Holmes arrived at his thesis.

The supporting ideas support the main idea. Holmes also provides *evidence* why the supporting ideas are true.

Yesterday evening at 9pm, *Lady Hamilton was killed* with a massive sledge hammer. Considering how the murder was committed and the whereabouts of the suspects, it can be proved that **the murderer is none other than Mr Jones, the gardener.**

Of all the suspects at hand, **only Mr Jones and Mr Griffith, the butler, are tall enough** to kill Lady Hamilton. *The coroner (2016: 12) has established* that the lethal wound was inflicted from such a position that the hammer hit Lady Hamilton at an angle of only 10 degrees. This necessitates that the murderer be at least one foot taller than the victim. The third suspect, Ms Winters, is *significantly smaller than Lady Hamilton* and was thus unable to inflict the lethal wound.

**Fig. 14.4** Partial reproduction of colour-coded handout in black and white. (Adapted from Prillinger, 2018)

copy from Prillinger [2018].) In particular, the thesis statement, main ideas, supporting ideas, and evidence are highlighted in different colours so that they and their role in the text can be easily identified. The handout should be explained in detail by the lecturer; in this context, it is also possible to identify some of the argumentation techniques (e.g., juxtaposition, rebuttal) used in the text.

Subsequently, it is pointed out that a structured argument like this cannot easily be improvised on the spot; it requires that the evidence at hand be ordered and the overall structure be planned. This is achieved through an outline, in which main ideas, supporting ideas, and sources are thematically grouped. The explanation handout also contains an example of what could have been Holmes's outline (Fig. 14.5).

There is an optional fourth phase that can be added in a later session, in which the students are shown a series of PowerPoint slides in which Sherlock Holmes's confused cousin fails to argue a case. This phase is designed to illustrate a selection of communication problems that occur with severely flawed argumentation in a somewhat exaggerated and funny way. It covers cases of paragraphs that contain pure evidence without ever formulating a point, evidence that is irrelevant to the point that is being made, and a failed rebuttal that does not go beyond mere contradiction, as well as the effect of an essay conclusion which contains a new idea that was not discussed in the text.

**A. Introduction:**

why we are discussing this: Lady Hamilton dead, killed with heavy sledge hammer at 9pm  
thesis: murderer = Mr Jones the gardener  
organisation of essay: how the murder was committed; where the suspects were

**B. Main body = Arguments:**

1. main idea: only Mr Jones and Mr Griffith are tall enough
  - supporting idea: murderer must be 1 ft taller than Lady H
    - evidence: coroner (2016: 12) calculated impact angle
  - supporting idea: Ms Winters cannot be murderer
    - evidence: she is smaller than Lady Hamilton
  
2. main idea: only Mr Jones is strong enough to lift heavy hammer
  - supporting idea: Mr Griffith unable to lift hammer
    - evidence: 92 years old & weak condition
  - supporting idea: lifting the hammer is no problem for Mr Jones
    - evidence: membership in weightlifting club (Miller 2016: 7)
  
3. main idea: alibi does not hold (rebuttal of counter-argument)
  - ~~counter-argument: Mr Jones was at pub from 7pm to 11pm~~
  - ~~counter-evidence: Smith and Cooper (2016: 3)~~
  - supporting idea: Mr Jones away from pub from 8:45pm to 9:30pm
    - evidence: Fuller and Hume (2016: 1)

**C. Conclusion:**

thesis: Mr Jones is the murderer  
summarized arguments: impact angle, weight of hammer, lack of alibi

Fig. 14.5 Outline for the essay (Prillinger, 2018)

## 14.4 Evaluation

In the four semesters that the “Sherlock Holmes Principle” has been used in my language classes, student response has been consistently positive. Discussions in the activity phase are usually lively, and students bring forward their arguments if different groups’ opinions on the suspects differ, thus discussing and revealing weaknesses in argumentation. As for the analysis and explanation phases, the students often remark that the distinction between main idea, supporting ideas, and particularly the use of evidence has become much clearer to them. They also point out that the detective story analogy makes it much easier for them to relate to the

concepts illustrated in the text and to understand their usefulness in presenting an argument.

Students' subsequent argumentative essays usually reveal that the teaching material has helped the majority to better understand the principles of introductions and conclusions and apply them correctly in their texts; cases of nearly identical introductions and conclusions significantly decrease, as do introductions without thesis statements. With regard to the more complex issues of argumentative strength and argumentation structure, the "Sherlock Holmes Principle" seems to have less of an impact than it does for textual organisation; considering that it was primarily created to improve textual organisation skills, this may in fact be expected.

It should be pointed out that students rarely view the task as a "how-to" instruction and hardly ever write other essays following exactly the same pattern as the one in the task; instead, almost all of them are able to abstract the concepts and apply them to their writing as needed, resulting in an overall greater variety of approaches to structuring both an argument and the essay as a whole. Overall, this teaching unit does seem to increase students' awareness of the importance of clear paragraph topics; this and the noted improvements in overall essay structure certainly warrant its continued use in language classes.

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# Chapter 15

## Teaching Punctuation in Consecutive Courses



Galina Savukova

**Keywords** Punctuation anxiety · L1 punctuation interference · Teaching commas · Teaching semicolons and colons · Scaffolding

### 15.1 Contextualization

When I mention the word ‘punctuation’ for the first time in Integrated Language and Study Skills 1 (ILSS 1), the first of the two courses in the first language module of the English Language Competence (ELC) program at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna, most of the students, who are at B2+/C1 levels according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), are likely to roll their eyes in agony and I can hear some whispering “I hate commas.” Although knowledge of punctuation is assessed as part of the criterion *lexical and structural accuracy* when high school students in Austria sit their written English school-leaving examination (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2019), many ILSS enrollees consider commas the most boring and yet most intimidating aspect of English language learning.

Unlike in the assessment scale for the school-leaving examinations, in both ILSS 1 and ILSS 2, punctuation is designated a separate criterion in the rating scales; its importance increases from one to two points, respectively, out of the maximum 25 points students can obtain on their essays (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). The punctuation challenge within the ILSS module is manifold: motivating the

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G. Savukova (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [galina.savukova@univie.ac.at](mailto:galina.savukova@univie.ac.at)

students to enjoy learning about commas, helping them to see the relevance and logic of punctuation, and creating a coherent approach to reviewing it in the two consecutive courses, which students often take with different lecturers.

## 15.2 Objectives

To relieve the students' punctuation anxiety and make learning effective in ILSS 1, teaching punctuation requires a delicate balance between experiential tasks and extensive guidance. As Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006, p. 80) argue from the perspective of human cognitive architecture, minimal guidance rarely works for novices in a particular area because "the free exploration of a highly complex environment may generate a heavy working memory load that is detrimental to learning." Although ILSS 1 students may have had some punctuation-related instruction in school, most of them are indeed false beginners in this area. To make sure that their working memory is not overburdened, punctuation problems that the students solve without direct teacher input are carefully scaffolded (for the benefits of scaffolding, see, for example, Walqui, 2006) and limited in scope while building on their prior knowledge of sentence structure, revised in the lectures Language Analysis or Grammar in Use that students often take before enrolling in ILSS 1 (see Kaltenböck & Heaney, [this volume](#)).

In my ILSS 1 course, we spend four individual sessions on punctuation. Punctuation-related information is divided into several sections and practiced in chunks, in order not to exceed what is known in cognitive psychology as *capacity limits*, the necessity to limit the number of information units to be processed in the working memory (Cowan et al., 2008; Oberauer et al., 2016). Punctuation-focused activities in ILSS 1 aim to create a solid analytical foundation which rests on the initial teacher input on the logic of punctuation and on the inherent links between punctuation, sentence structure, and the development of ideas across sentences. This base is then reinforced, layer after layer, with scaffolded activities and exercises.

In my ILSS 2 course, explicit punctuation instruction is allocated two individual sessions in the second half of the semester. In addition, a tangential review of punctuation rules is interwoven into our discussion of contrast connectors, which takes place earlier in the semester.

When students progress from ILSS 1 to ILSS 2, they often switch lecturers to accommodate their schedules. As a result, my ILSS 2 course is usually much more heterogeneous than ILSS 1 regarding knowledge of punctuation because the students might have had different levels of exposure to punctuation training in the first course. The challenge here is to design a coherent approach to reviewing the rules that would suit both punctuation "novices" and punctuation "experts." Considering that among the latter, usually quite a number of the students have taken my ILSS 1 course, an additional requirement arises, namely for different or differently presented material, to avoid dampening those students' motivation due to the "I already had this in ILSS 1" attitude.

Such an uneven playing field necessitates a shift from a setting where the lecturer is a giver of rules to a scenario where the students act as detectives logically deducing and applying the rules, often working in pairs or groups that consist of both punctuation novices and experts. While the former still need substantial guidance so as not to overload their working memory, this guidance is mostly provided by their more experienced colleagues rather than the teacher, unlike in ILSS 1. For those who are likely to have already stored some knowledge of punctuation rules in their long-term memory, problem-solving becomes more effective than a simple repetition of the rules. Indeed, according to Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006, p. 80), while novices do require “extensive guidance because they do not have sufficient knowledge in long-term memory to prevent unproductive problem-solving search,” as expertise increases, “knowledge in long-term memory can take over from external guidance.” The lecturer’s role in such a context is to ensure that the peer guidance does not lead to misconceptions or to fragmented, disorganized knowledge.

## 15.3 Procedure

### 15.3.1 *Integrated Language and Study Skills 1*

#### Step 1: Punctuation between clauses

We start with punctuation between clauses and analyze different scenarios for compound and complex sentences, with the students mostly noting down the general rules and practicing them. The exercises range from inserting necessary commas or semicolons to improving the flow or upgrading the formality of texts, for example, by employing transitional expressions and conjunctive adverbs rather than coordinating conjunctions or by alternating between compound and complex sentences (see, for example, Oshima & Hogue, 2006, pp. 165–171). Such exercises necessitate distinguishing between the concepts of *clause* and *phrase* as well as *dependent* and *independent clause*, terms which constantly reappear in discussions about linguistic accuracy in the ILSS module. The students justify and defend their punctuation choices, especially if disagreement arises, which promotes logical reasoning, facilitates storing the information in long-term memory, and enables future teachers to practice their explanation techniques.

#### Step 2: Punctuation with relative clauses

During our next session, we focus on relative clauses, again starting with basic teacher input and proceeding to do gap-fills and transformation exercises. The latter enable learners to practice both defining and non-defining relative clauses, as well as different relative pronouns. The students transform each pair of sentences into a single sentence using a relative clause (Fig. 15.1).



*ILSS 1. Rewrite each pair of sentences as a single sentence using a relative clause:*

- 1) I was looking for glasses this morning. I have found them now.
- 2) Some protesters were arrested. They have now been released.
- 3) He showed me a photograph of his only daughter. She lives in Switzerland.
- 4) Many people applied for the job. Few of them had the necessary qualifications.
- 5) The speaker demonstrated three criteria. They determine consumer purchase decisions.
- 6) They are studying in New York. There are many opportunities to visit museums for free there.
- 7) I enjoyed the presentation of a young professor. She teaches at the University of Vienna.

**Fig. 15.1** Transformation exercise on relative clauses

### **Step 3: Commas in other scenarios**

Once punctuation with clauses has been explained, explored, and practiced, both in class and at home, the other punctuation-focused sessions in ILSS 1 are devoted to creating a more holistic picture. As the first step in this stage, the students are given a number of no-comma rules, some involving contexts with clauses discussed in the previous sessions and many representing recurring mistakes that stem from first language (L1) interference in the students' own texts. Even though ILSS 1 students are upper-intermediate/advanced learners, their mastery of punctuation lags behind, which corroborates the findings of research by Markov, Nastase, and Strapparava (2018, p. 3464) indicating that L1 punctuation interference does not seem to diminish with the increased level of second language (L2) proficiency. During this activity, the students match no-comma rules with the incorrect placement of commas in the sentences provided and identify contexts where they would use a comma if the sentences had been created in their mother tongue. I consider raising awareness of the strong influence of L1 to be essential in adult learners' progress towards counteracting this interference: indeed, activities promoting self-reflection and metacognition enable language students "to assume more control over their learning" (Wenden, 1986, p. 10).

Subsequently, yes-comma rules come into play. The students first search for illustrations of these rules in an authentic English text which has been selected for its multipurpose use of punctuation, with a few final paragraphs withheld from the learners for a further activity. Then the students insert the necessary commas in sentences provided by the lecturer and justify their choices in accordance with no- or yes-comma rules. As a home assignment, they study comma misuse in their own essays that have already been graded and determine why a comma should or should not be used in each case marked as incorrect by the lecturer. The students are also encouraged to create personalized lists of comma-related contexts where they make mistakes most often.

*ILSS 1. Replace the commas with semicolons or colons where necessary:*

- 1) True friends exhibit four main qualities, openness, trust, loyalty, and love.
- 2) Although the weather forecast was far from favorable, they decided to proceed.
- 3) Mary has lived in many places, Newark, New Jersey, Charleston, South Carolina, Miami, Florida, and Austin, Texas.
- 4) It snowed very little that winter, nevertheless, sales of ski equipment soared.
- 5) The film had an unexpected ending, the hero joined the villains.
- 6) He got a job teaching mathematics, his wife was hired to copy-edit scientific texts.

**Fig. 15.2** Replacing commas with semicolons or colons

#### **Step 4: Semicolons and colons**

The remaining session of ILSS 1 punctuation-focused instruction concentrates on semicolons and colons, with the knowledge of clauses and commas serving as the necessary background. Having identified the uses of semicolons and colons from the examples provided, the students then do an exercise where they need to replace commas, where necessary, with semicolons and colons and to justify their choices (Fig. 15.2).

#### **Step 5: Summary and reinforcement**

As their crowning achievement, the students punctuate the final paragraphs of the text which was previously used for the comma hunt and compare the results of their efforts with the original. At home, they return to their own essays and work on the areas where semicolons and colons might have been used incorrectly as well as expand their personalized lists of the most common punctuation-related mistakes, to which they are encouraged to refer in the process of editing and proofreading their texts in the future.

### ***15.3.2 Integrated Language and Study Skills 2***

#### **Step 1: Tangential review of punctuation between clauses**

In the first half of the semester, when we discuss comparing and contrasting, the students complete a gap-fill exercise, using the contrast connectors provided (Fig. 15.3).

We analyze the structure of these sentences, and the learners account for the comma and semicolon use between the clauses that form the sentences. This activity enables the teacher to gauge the level of individual students' punctuation expertise. For reinforcement, the students later work with their own essays and provide peer feedback, focusing on contrast connectors and punctuation in clauses.

*ILSS 2. Choose an appropriate connector from the box below to fill in the gaps:*

on the contrary    despite    even though    on the other hand    by contrast    whereas

- 1) The author insists on the novelty of his ideas \_\_\_\_\_ having introduced only minor changes to the existing framework.
- 2) Universities have been accepting more students every year \_\_\_\_\_ the funding has not increased since the beginning of the century.
- 3) His opponents claim that he has amassed a fortune through shady speculations on the stock market. \_\_\_\_\_ he has never trusted stockbrokers with his money, which he inherited a decade ago.
- 4) The presentation of the first group highlighted all the major points; the members of the second group, \_\_\_\_\_, focused on minor details and did not manage to create a holistic picture.
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ the results of the referendum suggest that the initiative has popular support, the majority of the people interviewed voiced their opposition to the proposed legislation.
- 6) The committee reports that the current situation may prove to be beneficial to the company; \_\_\_\_\_, the report concedes that there is a danger of tougher competition.

**Fig. 15.3** Gap-fill exercise in contrast connectors

### **Step 2: Re-punctuating the sentences**

In the second half of the semester, the week when punctuation is in the limelight begins with an activity that requires the students to re-punctuate the same sentences with contrast connectors that we analyzed earlier in the course. This exercise aims to reactivate their recently acquired knowledge and aids in creating groups that include both punctuation novices and experts.

### **Step 3: No-comma and yes-comma rules**

The groups first sort the contexts provided into no-comma and yes-comma rules. The experts, who dealt with the same or similar contexts in ILSS 1, are equipped to provide the necessary guidance to the novices; at the same time, the former also benefit from extracting the relevant knowledge from their long-term memory and reinforcing it through explanation and practice. Collectively, the students always succeed in re-establishing the no-comma and yes-comma contexts.

The subsequent comma-related activities are scaffolded to provide a smooth progression from easier to more difficult assignments. Still working in groups, the students insert the necessary commas in the sentences provided while matching these examples to the yes-comma rules; then, in another set of sentences, they remove some commas and keep others while identifying both the no-comma and yes-comma contexts.

### **Step 4: Semicolons and colons**

Once commas have been practiced in isolation, semicolons and colons make their entry. The students discuss which comma-related contexts can be slightly modified to warrant the use of a semicolon or a colon (for example, removing a coordinating conjunction between two independent clauses or transforming a relative clause into an independent clause). Examples with colons that are not tied to

clauses are provided as a separate chunk, and learners formulate structural and communicative reasons for the use of a colon.

### **Step 5: Consolidation**

To consolidate their newly acquired or refreshed knowledge of punctuation rules, the students then work with their own essays, identifying their problem areas and creating personalized checklists, which gives the experts an additional bonus of being able to compare their progress between ILSS 1 and ILSS 2.

## **15.4 Evaluation**

Although in ILSS 2 the more technical scaffolded activities are somewhat similar to the ones in ILSS 1, the fact that the more experienced students take over the role of guides and that different sets of examples are provided ensures that both novices and experts are motivated to expand their knowledge. Acting as a facilitator, the lecturer uses the plenary discussions during which the solutions to the problems are checked as an opportunity to monitor the outcomes of group work, to provide corrective feedback where necessary, and to unify the disparate elements into a coherent picture while addressing students' punctuation-related questions.

Upon completion of all the punctuation-related sessions in ILSS 2, the ideal scenario would be that all the students have acquired the tools necessary to become and continue being punctuation experts. However, ensuring that the information from the students' working memory consolidates into long-term memory deposits requires continuous rehearsal and practice, and how conscientiously and regularly students work on their own will influence this process. As is evident from the results of the Common Final Test which students take at the end of ILSS 2 (see Martinek & Berger, [this volume](#)), the process of consolidation may take longer than one semester or even one year, and it is essential to continue with punctuation training beyond the ILSS module. As teachers, we can equip learners with an arsenal of tools to facilitate their progress, can incorporate punctuation-related activities into lessons focused on other topics, and can provide a plethora of additional practice material.

On a final note, the relative success of our collective punctuation endeavors in the ILSS courses is clearly demonstrated in student feedback provided anonymously online. Each semester when I teach ILSS 1 or ILSS 2, quite a number of my students identify learning about punctuation as one of the most helpful aspects of the course. Among the reasons often listed are: "because I always had trouble placing punctuation marks correctly / because it was never explained in school properly / because in this class everything was explained in a clear way and there were a lot of activities that forced us to apply what we learned / because I still remember the rules, even right now without checking." By contrast, not a single student has ever written that punctuation practice was boring or intimidating. The results are encouraging and confirm that it is possible to alleviate punctuation anxiety while helping students to actually learn and enjoy the process.

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# Chapter 16

## Dealing with Stage Fright



**Karin Richter**

**Keywords** Public speaking skills · Presentation skills · Spoken production · Academic presentations · Public speaking anxiety

### 16.1 Contextualisation

For many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, stage fright – the fear of nervousness about speaking before an audience – plays a major role in determining the success or failure of a presentation. Payne and Carlin (1994) even go so far as to claim that public speaking is the most anxiety-provoking classroom activity. This may result in physical reactions, such as shaking hands, a general unsteadiness and tension, blushing, sweating, a dry mouth, a queasy stomach, or in the worst case a complete breakdown of the speaker. Such an acute state of anxiety can have a detrimental effect on how the audience perceives the speaker in terms of their language competence but also their professional expertise. Research carried out by Kant (2000) found that audiences are indeed inclined to negatively appraise those speakers who overtly demonstrate their fears towards public speaking. These physical signs of anxiety, which are experienced by many speakers, can in some cases turn into unsurmountable barriers as far as achieving one's personal or professional goals is concerned. This can also be seen in the classroom. As teachers, we all know that those learners who manage to cope with anxiety more effectively are likely to receive a better grade than those who apologise in the middle of the talk by saying "I am sorry. I am so nervous." It is therefore essential for EFL teachers to point out that knowing how to help English language learners deal with speech anxiety and

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K. Richter (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [karin.richter@univie.ac.at](mailto:karin.richter@univie.ac.at)

stage fright should be a major concern of EFL teachers (e.g., Verderber & Verderber, 2003).

The English Language Competence (ELC) speaking module addresses this issue in Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 2 (PPOCS 2, see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)) and Advanced Speaking Skills for Teachers (ASSET, see Richter, “Advanced Speaking Skills for Teachers,” [this volume](#)). In these two classes, the first session is generally dedicated to an introduction to oral presentations of which the discussion of stage fright is a core part.

In the rating scales for PPOCS 2 and ASSET exam presentations, every single criterion can be affected negatively by stage fright: lexico-grammatical resources and fluency (e.g., frequent pauses in inappropriate places, hesitation markers, loss for words, reformulations), pronunciation and voice (e.g., low volume, inappropriate chunking, strain on the listener), structure and content (e.g., restricted awareness of audience, parts of the talk are left out or occur in the wrong order), and also genre-specific presentation skills (e.g., unsuccessful audience rapport, weak body language, unconvincing performance overall). This clearly demonstrates the necessity to include the topic of dealing with speech anxiety in PPOCS 2 and ASSET but also in any EFL classroom which teaches and assesses presentation skills.

## 16.2 Objectives

The following teaching sequence addresses the issue of stage fright and thereby seeks to raise awareness of the physiological and psychological issues involved in experiencing speaking anxiety during an impromptu speech. The described spontaneous mini-talk activity lends itself particularly well to the aims of the very first lesson as the students get to know each other (“Present yourself and give one interesting fact about you”), reflect on the main aims of the course (“What you hope to learn in this course”), gain first-hand experience of stage fright, reflect on their own experience of presentation anxiety, discuss methods to reduce stage fright, and identify possible means to help them reduce their stage fright.

## 16.3 Procedure

As a warm-up, I usually start with a brainstorming activity. In this exercise, the students are asked to brainstorm potential answers to the question “What are the top 10 fears in the United States?” Then I show them a graph representing the most common fears from the Chapman University Survey on American Fears (Ingraham, 2014). According to this graph, the number one fear was public speaking, which ranked higher than being afraid of heights (second place) or bugs and insects (third place). This is further supported by research in the field. For instance, Spijck (2011)

found that in his study, almost 80% of the participants experienced a certain degree of public speaking anxiety.

As a next step, I show the students the following quote by the famous comedian Jerry Seinfeld:

“I read a thing that actually says that speaking in front of a crowd is considered number one fear of the average person. I found that amazing – number two was death! That means to the average person if you have to be at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy” (as cited in Erwin, 2013).

Instead of showing the quote on a slide, a video of the very same passage (Weissmann, 2014) could also be shared.

In small groups, the learners then discuss the meaning and practical implications of the results of the survey and the quote. The main objective here is to realise that stage fright is a perfectly normal, natural, and human reaction. In fact, everyone feels a certain degree of adrenaline rush when standing in front of a crowd to give a speech. According to Lucas (2011), “many people who converse easily in all kinds of everyday situations become frightened at the idea of standing up before a group to make a speech” (p. 9). This idea is further elaborated on in the article “The thing we fear more than death. Why predators are responsible for our fear of death” by Glenn Croston (2012), which could be used as a follow-up reading task, perhaps assigned for homework and then discussed in class.

In the next step, the learners engage in an in-class activity which aims at exploring their own feelings about and experience with stage fright. The teacher informs them that they all have to give a short presentation in front of the whole class in a few minutes. In particular, they should speak freely (without notes) and tell the group their name, what they study, what they hope to learn in this course, and one interesting fact about themselves. Having received these instructions, the students need to answer the following two questions on a piece of paper:

1. How nervous are you now on a scale from 0 (not nervous at all) to 10 (dying)?
2. What exactly are you afraid of?

The students then take turns, come to the front of the classroom, and present themselves to the whole class. As soon as everyone has had their turn, they are all asked to answer three more questions:

3. During the talk, how did you know you were suffering from stage fright?
4. When was the level of anxiety the highest? (When they heard that they had to give a talk? As they were waiting for their turn? On the way to the stage? At the beginning of the talk? At the end of the talk? After the talk?)
5. What has helped you so far to reduce stage fright?

Next, the students get together in small groups and compare their notes and experiences. The small groups then report back to the large group trying to find similarities and differences. The aim of this short questionnaire is to realise that everyone experiences stage fight albeit at different degrees and in different forms. In the class discussion, a general focus on tips and tricks for how to deal with stage fright is



advisable. To this end, all suggestions are collected on the board and then discussed with the group.

After that, the learners watch the short Youtube talk by Bill Lampton titled “6 ways to control your stage fright” (Lampton, 2007) and take notes. In this video, the speech coach shares six tips on how presenters can learn to reduce their speaking anxiety. According to Lampton (2007), as a successful speaker you need to prepare well, put your speech in perspective, consider the symptoms (which are internal rather than external), regard audiences as friendly, forget about great impressions, and remember that you hold the trump card.

Afterwards, a discussion in small groups of these tips and which ones would perhaps also work for them and why/why not follows. The outcome could be a ranking of the top three tips (including the ones they came up with before they watched the video).

What is essential here is to see that the increased adrenaline rush, which is often induced before a public speech, in many cases requires a re-channelling of the energy which is released. In fact, there is scientific evidence that speakers need to reappraise their emotional circumstances to cope with stage fright more effectively. In other words, the section of the human brain, which prompts the so-called “fight/flight/freeze response” (Eunson, 2016, p. 399) is more easily tamed when the internal thoughts are switched from negative to positive. For instance, in a seminal article titled “Rethinking feelings” (Ochsner et al., 2002), researchers from Columbia University have found that speakers can change the way they feel by changing the way they think. This notion is clearly engrained in the tips presented by Bill Lampton. All the ideas shown in this video evidently aim at reframing the negative associations prompted by the event to a positive experience which focuses on the bright rather than the dark side of giving presentations. It is therefore also the task of the teacher to help students achieve this switch.

## 16.4 Evaluation

This teaching sequence addresses an issue which is often neglected in presentation skills activities in the EFL classroom. Many teachers tend to underestimate the role of confidence conveyed by the speakers when assessing presentations. As has been shown, stage fright not only affects the speakers’ body language, but also their vocal quality and rapport with the audience and ultimately how convincing their performance is perceived to be. In many course evaluations at the end of the semester, students comment on this very first session saying that they remember it as one of the most helpful and valuable aspects addressed in the course. Although most of them have already given several presentations in their lives as university students, they often realise for the first time that speaking anxiety affects most speakers albeit to different degrees and in different ways. Many assert that they have come to accept that the discomfort experienced during a talk is part of the game and that these emotions can in fact be beneficial rather than destructive. This shows that the stage fright

lesson as detailed above successfully achieves its goal of helping learners see the increased adrenaline level during academic presentations in a fresh light.

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# Chapter 17

## Improving Advanced Interaction Skills



Galina Savukova and Karin Richter

**Keywords** Teaching advanced speaking · Turn-taking skills · Formal discussions · Persuasive appeals · Role plays

### 17.1 Contextualization

Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 2 (PPOCS 2), offered for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in English and American Studies degree, is part of the English Language Competence (ELC) program at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. The major goal of the course is to enhance the learners' spoken language competence (see Richter, "Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills," [this volume](#)). Since the advent of communicative language teaching, where communicative competence is viewed as the intersection of knowing what to say and how to say it appropriately in a specific context (e.g., Richards, 2006), learning has often been envisioned as engaging in interaction that involves negotiating meaning. Interaction skills in PPOCS 2 are developed within the context of *formal discussions (meetings)*, an interactive activity outlined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001, p. 78) and elaborated on in the *CEFR Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 76).

In times of globalization and internationalization, it is essential to be able to communicate and interact successfully across cultures. During meetings, which are an integral part of many professionals' work life, organizational relations are negotiated, opinions and options are discussed, and crucial decisions are made (e.g., Holmes et al., 2011). When held in a foreign language in an international

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G. Savukova (✉) · K. Richter

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [galina.savukova@univie.ac.at](mailto:galina.savukova@univie.ac.at); [karin.richter@univie.ac.at](mailto:karin.richter@univie.ac.at)

environment, such formal discussions are likely to entail a heavy mental workload due to highly specific demands on participants' second-language (L2) competence and to profound socio-cultural differences. Since the ELC program seeks to prepare students for the communicative requirements of their prospective academic and professional careers, we familiarize our learners in PPOCS 2, *inter alia*, with the fundamentals of professional meetings (e.g., the structure of a meeting, types of meetings, chairing) as well as develop key linguistic and strategic competences necessary to succeed in such demanding settings. The two greatest challenges our PPOCS 2 students face when engaging in spontaneous interaction – effective turn-taking and producing longer persuasive turns – are the focus of the teaching activities presented in this chapter.

Participating in a formal discussion is a complex activity which involves processing what has been said, planning what to say, constructing utterances while drawing on linguistic resources and strategic means, as well as monitoring one's own speech and other participants' contributions. As Dakowska (2005, p. 233) phrases it, such operations “must be coordinated and executed in fractions of seconds to keep pace with the communicative fluency demands of the task.” The development of these interrelated operational skills is often fostered in L2 learning through role plays and simulations. In fact, participating in simulated meetings or outcome-based discussions is likely to trigger many constructive student-student interactions, which, in turn, can enhance the learners' educational achievement (e.g., Segura, 2012), aspirations, motivation, self-esteem, and positive attitudes to learning (e.g., Liu & Ding, 2009; Maley & Duff, 2001), while at the same time developing their social and intercultural skills (e.g., Di Pardo Léon-Henri & Jain, 2017).

The two consecutive teaching sessions described in this chapter aim to develop the skills necessary to participate in formal discussions in the form of unrehearsed role plays which simulate a meeting in a professional context. The format of the 15-min role play, which is part of the final PPOCS 2 examination, involves arguing a given position in a group of four participants with the ultimate aim of finding a solution to a given problem or deciding on a plan of action. Each student receives a role card with the major goals and arguments their role entails and has 3 min to prepare. In this format, all participants are equal and, as such, are expected to internalize the chairperson's role (for a detailed discussion of the role of the chair in meetings, see Angouri & Marra, 2010).

## 17.2 Objectives

The two sessions revolve around the macro-function termed *evaluative, problem-solving language use* in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 33). The first session focuses on turn-taking, which, according to the CEFR, is both an *interaction strategy* (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 87) and a *pragmatic communicative language competence* (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 129). The second session centers on

developing persuasive longer turns, which contribute to the C2-level ability to put forward “an articulate and persuasive argument” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 76).

Being both a strategy and a competence, turn-taking is integral to any discussion format and warrants guided, multi-stage practice. The turn-taking activities practiced in our first session additionally target a number of other competences identified in the CEFR, in particular general linguistic range and vocabulary range (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 130–131) as well as pragmatic competences: flexibility, propositional precision, and spoken fluency (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 138, 141–142). When students are encouraged to use different phrases for agreeing and disagreeing, as well as varied turn-taking cues, they expand their arsenal of what the CEFR refers to as *prefabricated expressions* (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 139), or what researchers often term *lexical bundles* or *multi-word sequences* (e.g., Biber et al., 2004). Moreover, when explaining the rationale for their full or partial disagreement, students practice “reformulating points in different ways to emphasize points, express degrees of commitment, confidence and to avoid ambiguity,” a key concept of flexibility (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 138), and develop their “ability to qualify, emphasize and disambiguate likelihood, commitment, [and] belief,” a key concept of propositional precision (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 141), all the while building a foundation to attain “ease and spontaneity of expression,” a key concept of spoken fluency (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 142).

In a context where a consensus has to be reached, interaction necessarily involves persuasive longer turns, which are an amalgam of both interaction and production. Our understanding of teaching and assessing longer turns is in line with the newly added description of the category “sustained monologue: putting a case (e.g., in a debate)” in the *Companion Volume*, where this category of spoken production is explicitly linked to “the ability to sustain an argument, which may well be made in a long turn in the context of normal conversation and discussion” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 61). Advancing a coherent argument in the form of longer turns at the intersection of production and interaction is the focus of the second session.

## 17.3 Procedure

### 17.3.1 Session 1: Agreeing/Disagreeing and Turn-Taking

This session aims to develop turn-taking skills, including the linguistic and strategic means of expressing one’s opinion, agreeing or disagreeing with the interlocutors, and interrupting effectively. During this session, we tend to follow the three stages proposed by Thornbury (2007, p. 40): awareness, appropriation, and autonomy. During the first stage, the students become *aware* of a wide range of prefabricated expressions and turn-taking cues. Then the learners *appropriate* these resources into their existing knowledge base. Finally, the students learn to actively draw on these expressions and cues in real-life contexts, acting *autonomously*.

### **Step 1**

The initial awareness-raising activity is completed by individual students at home before they come to class, in line with the ‘flipped classroom model’ (e.g., Brinks Lockwood, 2014; Herreid & Schiller, 2013). On the basis of meeting-related materials provided for the course on the university’s online platform Moodle, the learners compile a chairperson’s and a participant’s preparation lists by adding relevant expressions to each function specified (e.g., opening the meeting, referring to the agenda, giving one’s opinion, agreeing, disagreeing, interrupting) and note down turn-taking cues.

### **Step 2**

In class, as a first activity, we zoom in on agreement and disagreement. The students classify phrases projected onto the screen into those signaling full agreement, partial agreement or disagreement, and full disagreement, after which we discuss in which scenarios the speaker would be expected to continue their turn beyond a simple prefabricated response, so as to avoid communication mishaps when the turn is finished after, for instance, an ambiguous “I partly agree.” Then a controversial statement is projected onto the screen, one at a time, for individual students to agree or disagree with, fully or partially, while providing a very short justification. This activity helps the students to transition to the appropriation stage.

### **Step 3**

The prefabricated expressions with which the students familiarize themselves at home and in class serve as a foundation for a group activity which gives the learners an opportunity to practice these newly acquired phrases in a controlled context and appropriate them. Each group, consisting of three students, receives a number of controversial questions (e.g., Do you think a smoking ban should be implemented in all public places in Vienna?) and works with one question at a time, in a pre-determined order. The first student gives a very brief answer to the question, the second student briefly agrees or disagrees with the first opinion expressed, and the third student then agrees or disagrees with what has already been stated. Each time they speak, they are required to signal their agreement or disagreement in a different way and to briefly justify their position. Midway through the activity, all expressions incorporating words stemming from “agree” are banned, which forces the students to become more creative and flexible in their responses.

### **Step 4**

Once the phrases of agreement and disagreement have been extensively practiced in context, the attention is re-focused on another set of prefabricated expressions: turn-requesting and turn-maintaining cues, which help to fulfill the functions of interrupting and preventing interruptions respectively. Together we create a list of such verbal cues based on the chairperson’s and participant’s preparation lists that the students compiled at home and discuss non-verbal cues that discussion participants often use intuitively, such as hand gestures, variations in the volume and rate of speech, or changes in gaze direction and posture (e.g., Knapp et al., 2017).

### Step 5

After the necessary linguistic foundation has been created, new groups of four or five participants are formed to engage in a more detailed discussion of a question that they previously tackled only briefly. This activity, which has been adapted from Anderson, Maclean, and Lynch (2004, p. 76), simulates a real-life discussion, where participants autonomously decide when to join the conversation, what to say, and how to say it. The students are provided with a set of instructions that serve to support rather than control the activity:

1. Within your group, choose one topic from those briefly discussed that you want to explore in detail.
2. Individually, prepare for 2 min, planning what to say.
3. One member of the group should initiate the discussion.
4. Wait for an opportunity to add a relevant comment and take the floor: you could agree or disagree, describe a related experience, etc. Continue talking until someone else interrupts you. When an attempt at interrupting is made, decide whether you want to keep or yield the floor. When you spot another opportunity, interrupt again.
5. Try not to let anyone speak for more than 15 seconds at a time. Take the floor as often as you can.

### Step 6

After approximately 10 min, the discussion is stopped, and the students reflect on their performance within the groups considering the following questions:

- Did you manage to bring in all the points you had planned?
- How many times did you speak?
- Did anyone monopolize the discussion?
- What did you do to take the floor?
- Did you manage to maintain the turn and delay unwanted interruptions? How?

The ensuing whole class discussion demonstrates that the learners invariably have disparate experiences and feelings regarding their turn-taking skills, with some having enjoyed the activity immensely and others having found it very challenging. In the latter case, the reasons provided include personal characteristics and the belief, to which incidentally female learners subscribe more often, that interrupting others is considered rude and unprofessional behavior. Indeed, research has shown that cultural values and gender, as well as personality traits, substantially influence discourse management skills (e.g., Ladegaard, 2012; Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989).

### Step 7

As a follow-up home assignment, the students read a preferably controversial text on the topic, such as Snyder's (2014) "How to get ahead as a woman in tech: Interrupt men," and then participate in an online forum discussion on Moodle. They express their opinions on the main ideas presented in the article employing prefabricated expressions practiced in class that are equally appropriate for written

contexts. They also share their own experiences with interrupting others or being interrupted in a professional or private context and comment on the posts of other students. In addition to consolidating the knowledge acquired in class, this type of blended-learning activity fosters student engagement and may enhance learner satisfaction and motivation (e.g., Çelik, 2013), while also preparing them for the sessions to come.

### **17.3.2 Session 2: Developing Persuasive Longer Turns**

The activities in this session are carefully scaffolded: the tasks, which increase in difficulty, build on the preceding ones; the students explore concepts and practice implementing them together, while relying on the “supportive structure” and engaging in “collaborative construction work” (Walqui, 2006, p. 164).

#### **Step 1**

At home, in preparation for class, students watch the video *6 Phrases That Instantly Persuade People* (Charisma on Command, 2017) and read tips on how to be persuasive (e.g., Bradbury, 2015). These resources help advanced students to expand their vocabulary of persuasion and to consider the art of persuasion from a pragmatic perspective. The students also study instructions for a role play in which they will engage in class and read the prompts for all the roles (e.g., “Chocolate Factory” in Crowther-Alwin, 1997).

#### **Step 2**

In class, we start with a brief discussion of what it means to be persuasive, and we focus on three persuasive appeals that stem from Aristotle’s modes of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (e.g., Heinrichs, 2007). The students classify the strategies projected onto the screen, such as using positive body language, giving credit to others, quoting statistics, connecting on a personal level, and employing intensifiers, into those relying mostly on *ethos*, *pathos*, or *logos*. From this discussion, it invariably emerges that the majority prefer *logos* when they argue and often view the other two as unprofessional in formal contexts. The next steps aim to overcome the students’ reluctance to incorporate non-logical elements into their argumentation.

#### **Step 3**

Working in groups of three, the students are given the task to develop persuasive turns (around one minute of talking time) about each of the following points related to the issue of buying new ergonomic chairs for their shared office:

- The chairs would improve employees’ posture and health
- The chairs would be too expensive
- The chairs would boost employees’ work motivation



Students prepare individually for 3 min, considering what support to provide for each point and how to refute anticipated opposing views. They are encouraged to employ a different persuasive appeal for each consecutive point.

Then one of the students selects a point and pitches their argumentation to the others, whose task is to identify which persuasive appeal has been employed. The next student chooses between the two remaining points, and the third addresses the final one. Once all three have spoken, the students can optionally present their own takes on the points tackled by the others. This group work concludes with a brief reflection on whether the individual arguments were perceived as persuasive by the group members and why.

#### **Step 4**

The lecturer announces to the class which students will be representing which roles in the role play they prepared for at home (see Step 1). The students who have the same roles get together to develop arguments and support for their position, while considering how to incorporate the three persuasive appeals, so that they could hold longer persuasive turns when engaging in the role play later.

#### **Step 5**

New groups are formed according to the setup of the role play, and the students test their prepared argumentative points and strategies in action. For example, in the “Chocolate Factory” role play, the objective of the meeting is to decide in which city among the options provided the company should build a chocolate factory. Each participant strives to promote their own position, forming alliances, and evaluating contributions of others. The interaction involves expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, and turn-taking, which were practiced in the previous session, as well as creating longer persuasive turns. The students have to reach a consensus within 15 min.

#### **Step 6**

The final step involves a whole class discussion where students reflect on their individual and collective performance. They analyze what facilitated reaching a consensus and what might have prevented fruitful collaboration.

### **17.4 Evaluation**

These two consecutive sessions create a solid foundation for future role plays and for any other format of spontaneous interaction. The focus on evaluative, problem-solving language use and the related communicative competences and strategies not only addresses learning outcomes at levels C1 and C2 as outlined in the CEFR but also helps students to advance the skills, competences, and confidence necessary to

engage in decision-making processes and different interaction scenarios, in particular in professional meetings. This foundation is reinforced in the PPOCS 2 course with constant practice: students participate in at least five other role plays, where they continue to hone their interaction skills and ability to argue persuasively.

Students' reflections on their progress as participants in role plays, which they submit as a final written assignment in the course, testify to the value and success of such interaction-focused sessions. The majority of students usually write that at the beginning of the semester, they felt apprehensive about the prospect of participating in formal discussions without much preparation, often due to their introverted personalities, unwillingness or inability to interrupt, or the fear of being judged for making mistakes in unrehearsed longer turns. At the end of the course, as their written reflections reveal, most students feel that they have made substantial progress and have become more confident and perceptive interlocutors. One quote from a student's reflection can serve as a good summary of the different threads that many other students often mention: "The positive experiences during the semester helped me gain confidence and skills for participating in a group discussion, and finally I am able to use discussion phrases consistently, my strengths are overall engaging others in the discussion by asking for clarification, making suggestions, backchanneling, and recapping, but also evaluating their points, clarifying and being consistent with my own position from the start." What is even more encouraging is that the students are also able to pinpoint the areas which need further improvement and that they are aware of strategies that can help them enhance their communicative competence.

**Acknowledgements** We would like to acknowledge instrumental contributions of our colleagues who have been teaching PPOCS 2 to shaping our approach to improving advanced interaction skills as described in this chapter. Amy Bruno-Lindner, in particular, has introduced the idea of bringing in the three persuasive appeals and substantially contributed to designing many of the in-class activities outlined here.

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# Chapter 18

## Fostering Awareness of Academic Writing Through Speaking: Speech Days



Brigitte Roth and Elisabeth Weitz-Polydoros

**Keywords** Fluency · Accuracy · Writing through speaking · Presentation skills · Mind maps

### 18.1 Contextualisation

The core content of the Integrated Language and Study Skills 1 (ILSS 1) course at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna is the production of coherent and cohesive essays in an academic environment (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). One of the main features of ILSS classes is writing argumentative essays. Mini-speeches can help students develop some of the competences required for this task.

The short oral presentations we ask our students to give are in many respects similar to writing tasks. It is essential that the students have understood the task, are able to present a reasoned argument, and can express a well-founded personal opinion. The speech should also be organised into individual parts with topic statements, and the structure should reflect that of an academic essay.

According to Richards (2015, p. 426), fluency and accuracy are two important dimensions of speaking ability. Delivering speeches practises both. A common problem of ILSS 1 students is that they often learn the text of their presentations by heart or use inadequate prompt cards, and therefore such an activity often trains

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B. Roth (✉)

University College of Teacher Education Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [brigitte.roth@univie.ac.at](mailto:brigitte.roth@univie.ac.at)

E. Weitz-Polydoros

University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Baden, Austria  
e-mail: [elisabeth.weitz-polydoros@univie.ac.at](mailto:elisabeth.weitz-polydoros@univie.ac.at)

memory and reading aloud rather than speaking freely. The speech day activity outlined here, however, encourages students to deliver a short unprepared speech. This also corresponds to C1 descriptors in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*:

Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

## 18.2 Objectives

One of the major aims of ILSS classes is to foster students' academic writing skills; the speaking activity discussed here focuses on skills that can be equally valuable in the context of writing. Richards (2015, p. 424) suggests that presentations "often follow a recognizable format [...] and are closer to written language than conversational language." Many of the skills that he lists as important for delivering good presentations, such as using appropriate register, presenting information coherently, using grammar accurately, and maintaining audience interest (2015, pp. 424f), are also relevant to essay writing.

Speech days aim to develop the skills required to create a coherent statement on a given topic and to enhance the use of topic-related vocabulary. After analysing the prompt, the students collect background information, as well as relevant expressions, and structure the speech in the form of a mind map. Unlike in more common presentation assignments, they prepare these mind maps not for themselves but for other speakers. By doing so, they develop a feeling of responsibility as the speakers largely depend on informative and well-structured mind maps.

The students not only prepare the mind maps but also give feedback to the speakers after the presentation. This evokes a strong feeling of team spirit. Due to this type of cooperation, the students are more likely to prepare the mind maps conscientiously and listen attentively to the speeches.

## 18.3 Procedure

### Step 1

A week before speech day 1, the lecturer explains the different steps of the activity. Together with the students, guidelines for delivering good speeches are analysed, focusing on the structure of the presentations (introduction, main body, conclusion). Then the use of appropriate register and discourse markers is discussed. Students are also invited to reflect on other criteria for effective talks, such as good eye contact with the audience, posture, confidence, and fluency. Then the class is divided

into two teams: team A and team B. Each student from team A is allocated a card with a prompt on topic areas such as education, society, environmental issues, and technology. Possible prompts might be: why foreign language education should begin in kindergarten, why stereotypes are harmful, why we (do not) need a carbon tax, or why human cloning is (un)ethical. There can also be more humorous topics, such as the real origin of the fortune cookie (My Speech Class, n.d.).

### **Step 2**

At home, the students from team A individually prepare mind maps on their respective topics. These mind maps should include relevant data and background information, as well as helpful vocabulary, idioms, and phrases. Furthermore, the students should provide a basic structure for the presentations. As the mind maps will then provide visual support, they need to be clear and legible, and they have to be handed in on speech day 1.

### **Step 3**

At the beginning of speech day 1, the lecturer collects the mind maps and distributes them to the students of team B randomly. The students have 5 minutes to read the mind maps and to plan their presentations, which should be no longer than 2 minutes. These ad hoc speeches should follow the structure of an academic presentation: introduction, main body, and conclusion.

### **Step 4**

Each student from team B delivers their short speech. One student acts as a time manager, giving a short notice 20 seconds before the 2-minute mark. After each speech, the author of the mind map provides feedback using a template supplied by the lecturer, which focuses on verbal and non-verbal features of presentations and serves as a general guideline for evaluating the performance of the speaker. Subsequently, the lecturer gives feedback on the organisation and delivery of the speech, on linguistic range and accuracy, and on pronunciation and intonation. The speaker's motivation, confidence, engagement with the audience, and body language are then analysed in a plenary session.

### **Step 5**

Speech day 2 follows the same pattern: students from team B prepare mind maps at home, and students from team A present in class.

## **18.4 Evaluation**

Speech days offer students the opportunity to train essential academic skills in a playful and relaxed way. They encourage students to work cooperatively on meaningful tasks and thus prepare them for future challenges. Speech days have proved to be a useful tool to initiate the collection of meaningful ideas and vocabulary and

the creation of mind maps on different topics. Students express their opinions and support them with evidence, skills that are necessary for academic speaking and writing.

Since speaking in front of others can easily be perceived as intimidating (Harmer, 2007, p. 345), shy or reserved students in particular may find their colleagues' mind maps helpful, and the low-stakes nature of the assignment partially alleviates the fear of public speaking. In addition, the presenters benefit from the immediate structured feedback provided by their peers and the lecturer.

Finally, ILSS 1 students have affirmed that they find the activity both pleasurable and motivating. They enjoy the team spirit and the challenge of giving ad hoc speeches. They work hard to produce effective mind maps for their colleagues and then listen attentively because they have to give feedback. Both delivering a structured speech on a given topic and providing feedback enhance the learners' ability to produce coherent written essays.

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# Chapter 19

## Using Text Comparison to Illustrate the Concept of Audience



Lisa Nazarenko

**Keywords** Mediating a text · Audience awareness · Text analysis · Text transformation · Textual features

### 19.1 Contextualization

At the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna, the second module of the English Language Competence (ELC) program, Language in Use (LIU, see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)), focuses on expanding students' understanding of text through guided text analysis, particularly of the text type, purpose, and audience of the text, as well as the language features that focus on those aspects. The LIU 1 course introduces the students to text analysis, in which they learn to identify not only different text types but also the intended audience and purpose. In the second part of this module, LIU 2, students extend these abilities by transforming texts for specific audiences and purposes. In order to achieve these goals, students have to understand what these features and their characteristics are.

Of the three analysis components, the concept of audience seems to be the most difficult for students to grasp. In the information they are given about text analysis, they are told that “audience” refers to whom the text was intended for, rather than who might actually read the text. More specifically, audience is “the writer’s construction of his or her readers, whose imagined beliefs, understandings and values are anticipated and appealed to in the conventional features and structure of a text” (Hyland, 2009, p. 243). Yet, in students’ analyses, their identification of audience is usually vague, with descriptions such as “the audience is people interested in [the topic of the text]” being quite common. This creates problems in LIU 1: since this

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L. Nazarenko (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [lisa.nazarenko@univie.ac.at](mailto:lisa.nazarenko@univie.ac.at)



identification of audience is not clear, there is usually too little focus on language features related to a specific audience. In LIU 2, if students still have difficulty in understanding the concept of audience, they are hindered from successfully creating their own transformations (i.e., being able to mediate a text). Mediating a text involves passing on to another person the content of a text to which they do not have access, often because of linguistic, cultural, semantic, or technical barriers. The Council of Europe's *Companion Volume* indicates that in mediation, "one is less concerned with one's own needs, ideas or expression, than with those of the party or parties for whom one is mediating" (2020, p. 91) – in other words, with one's audience (for a take on mediation within the context of English for Specific Purposes, see Bruno-Lindner, "Improving Students' Writing and Mediation Skills in English in a Professional Context," [this volume](#)).

## 19.2 Objectives

To help LIU 1 students understand the concept of audience more specifically, I developed a lesson that has them read a variety of texts written on the same topic but targeting different audiences. Students focus on specific features of each text to notice how the writers aim at their specific audiences to achieve their purpose(s).

The students are guided to identify the register and specific word choice to consider what reading expertise the audience is expected to have in order to understand the text properly. The type of information and the structure of that information connect to what the writer expects the audience to already know as well as what information the audience needs to understand the text. Further features, such as choice of visuals and intertextuality, provide further connections to the intended audience. By the end of a 1.5-h lesson, the students are expected to be able to describe the audience of each text more specifically than "people who want to read it."

## 19.3 Procedure

### Step 1

To prepare for the lesson, I assign two texts for the students to read: the abstract of a scientific article from *Scientific Reports* by the scientists who discovered a previously unknown dinosaur that was the largest ever found to date (Lacovara et al., 2014) and an article from a quality newspaper (*The New York Times*) about that discovery (Chang, 2014). The former targets experts in the field (paleontologists, zoologists), and the latter is written for an educated adult audience. Students are also assigned a Reading Guide to encourage them to notice similarities and differences of vocabulary, information, and text type features (see Nazarenko, "Reading Below the Surface: Guiding Students to Getting More out of Texts," [this volume](#)).

## Step 2

In the following lesson, students sit in groups of three (which is the number of further texts they will read during the lesson) and discuss their analysis of the two texts, including their answers to the questions in the Reading Guide. This discussion leads to confirmation of each text type and register, and a comparison of how they are written to suit the text type.

## Step 3

Students are given a “grid” to fill in with information features from the two texts (see below). The grid has the information for the first two features so students can see how to record the information for the other features and for information they will add from another text they each will read.

Feature	Original journal article	<i>New York Times</i> text	Class text
Description of size	represented by approximately 70% of the postcranial skeleton; estimated mass of about 59.3 metric tons; etc.	an estimated 130,000 pounds and still growing; eighty-five feet long; 30 feet tall; etc.	
Vocabulary for <i>big</i>	gigantic; large-bodied; massive; etc.	among the largest; biggest; huge; etc.	
etc.			

Grid to be completed

The additional features the students have to record are the explanation of how the dinosaur was named, vocabulary used that means *dug up*, and the description of where the fossil was found. Students fill in the grid with their group.

## Step 4

Each group is given three more texts, one for each member of the group. Each of the additional texts has a different audience from the two texts students read for homework: adult readers of a tabloid (Dunham, 2014), older school-age children (Scholastic News, 2014), and younger children (Gilbert, 2010–2020). Students are instructed to read their respective text and then fill in the final column of the grid with the information from their text.

## Step 5

Students then compare the information from their three texts and also with the two texts they read beforehand. The specific focus of their discussion is on differences and similarities in the register of the language, use of vocabulary, amount of detail given, information left out, and what the audience is expected to know already.

Among the differences the students note are more/less dramatic language (for example, “mega dino” instead of “large-bodied herbivore”), knowledge of geography to understand where the dinosaur was found (“the Patagonia region of

Argentina” as compared to “the Patagonia region of Argentina, on the continent of South America,” or the use of a map for the youngest readers), and explanations of vocabulary. For example, the older children’s text explains terms in this way: “**paleontologist** (a scientist who studies the remains of ancient life)” and “even though sauropods were huge, they were **herbivores**. That means they ate only plants.” In the text for younger children, interestingly enough, the word *herbivore* is not explained, but students assume that since it is a dinosaur website, the children who read it presumably know this word already. Another example is how the size is explained. In the texts for adults and older children, the size is described by using weight, length, and tonnage. In the text for younger children, it is explained with an illustration comparing the dinosaur with a human, a list of measurements, and the comparison “this means that it was about the length of a basketball court, and weighed more than an airplane.”

Since these differences are obvious enough for the students to identify, they realize that these features focus on the particular audience of the text and that the audiences are therefore different. I review this information with them for each text, and at the end of the lesson, all three classroom texts are uploaded on the university’s e-learning platform Moodle so that students can further study the texts they did not read in class.

## Step 6

To create a connection from analyzing these transformations to students writing their own transformations, I give a follow-up assignment where students write a different text type, a tweet, about the same news for a different audience chosen by the student.

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### Assignment: Twitter Transformation

1. Write a ‘tweet’ about the discovery of the dinosaur *Dreadnoughtus schrani*. You can focus on any aspect of the news that you wish and can choose vocabulary items and/or phrases from any of the texts we looked at in class.

A tweet (on the website *Twitter*) is a message of no more than 140 characters (not including spaces) that is intended for the tweeter’s friends, followers, or a particular group.

2. After your tweet, write a short justification (on the same page) that explains your language choices, including:

- Who your intended audience is and how you focused on them;
- Any particular purpose(s) you intended and how you achieved it;
- Why you chose the particular information in your text;
- Why you chose the specific vocabulary items (rather than a synonym, for example). This should focus on specific word choices – and can include why alternate vocabulary items were not chosen.

Think of your justification as a short ‘text analysis’ of your tweet! Give examples from your tweet to support the choices you explain.

I will not grade your tweet – you can be as creative as you wish. Instead, your grade will focus on how well you explain and support your choices.

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Instructions for the task

The assessment depends on how well they analyze their choices, so that it is clear to me how they have focused on their audience. The task is motivating to students since they enjoy the creativity of the assignment; as a result, they usually produce very interesting texts.

## 19.4 Evaluation

The differences among audiences are most obvious if the texts used span a wide range of readers (e.g., quality vs. tabloid newspaper, adult vs. child, expert vs. lay-person). The number of students in the group during the lesson is equal to the extra texts there are to read. In this example, I had three more texts, but if there had been only two, then the exercise could have been done in pairs or in groups of four, with two students in each group having the same text. Moreover, this activity can easily be adapted to different academic levels or study areas (e.g., English for Specific Purposes fields) by using a variety of texts about the same topic, preferably including the original journal article.

This assignment also connects well to the focus on mediation in LIU, which further helps students get the most out of the texts they have read. Nuttall (2005, p. 204) argues that “[a] good means of ensuring that students get to grips with the text is a task requiring them to make use of what they have read.” Further support for this idea is from Caudery (1998, para. 1), who explains that

transforming texts from one genre to another, using information and ideas in the source text to create new texts for different audiences and purposes, helps students to become aware of and take into account genre-related features such as writer-reader relationship, purpose of writing, and medium.

By the end of the lesson, students are able to identify the audience more specifically, especially the difference between an expert and lay audience, adults and children, educated adults and those wanting an easier read, and different ages of children. The more important achievement for students is to notice how the language helps to reach the audience and achieve purpose(s) for that particular audience.

In informal face-to-face feedback sessions, students have indicated that this exercise not only helps them understand the concept of audience in text analysis but also illustrates various ways that writers focus on those audiences. Moreover, it gives them ideas of how to conceptualize different audiences when writing a text analysis, inspired by the descriptions we discussed in relation to the different audiences of the texts used this lesson.

Students are better able to apply these techniques to their text in the follow-up assignment (the tweet) and in the analysis of further texts used in the course. They also come to understand that the audience of a text is not “people who are interested in reading it.” In the lesson, the audience is not people “interested in dinosaurs” because *all* of the audiences are interested in dinosaurs. If students *do* identify audience that way in a future text analysis, then I can refer to the lesson with dinosaur texts to correct them.

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# Chapter 20

## Text Transformation: The Art of Parody



Elisabeth Müller-Lipold

**Keywords** Mediating a text · Genre analysis · Literary devices · Poem · Sonnet

### 20.1 Contextualisation

In the two Language in Use (LIU) classes offered at the Department of English and American Studies, students are sensitised to, and encouraged to experiment with, various aspects and procedures of writing, which raises their general awareness of language and develops their appreciation of texts (see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)). They also improve their ability to determine connotative and figurative meanings of words and phrases and to distinguish between multiple meanings. In LIU 1, students focus more on text analyses, while in LIU 2, they are required to do both text analyses and text transformations. However, as being able to analyse a text is prerequisite for being able to transform it, the two skills are intertwined and complement each other (Paltridge, 1996, p. 235). Therefore, in both LIU 1 and 2, we study a huge variety of genres and text types – stories, e-mails, newspaper articles, book reviews, poems, proverbs, and many more.

In “Worlds of genre – metaphors of genre,” Swales (2009, p. 6) quotes Bazerman (1997), who says that genres are “ways of being,” and “frames for social action” that “shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact” (p. 19). Indeed, genres often depend on their communicative purpose, which usually evolves over time, and are thus subject to change. However, it is important to differentiate genre from text type (Paltridge, 1996, p. 237). Paltridge argues that this distinction is an important one for the language learner as the two terms provide different perspectives on a text: while ‘genre’ refers to pre-defined categories such as those

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E. Müller-Lipold (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

e-mail: [elisabeth.mueller-lipold@univie.ac.at](mailto:elisabeth.mueller-lipold@univie.ac.at)

mentioned above (e.g., blogs or recipes), ‘text type’ denotes texts grouped according to the rhetorical patterns that they have in common. However, Paltridge (1996, p. 237) deplors the fact that the notions of genre and text type are often blurred in the classroom application of ‘genre analysis,’ and that some structural elements of texts can thus easily be disguised if students only learn about either one. In fact, a single genre can incorporate more than one text type; for example, a poem may include both persuasive and evaluative patterns. On the other hand, different genres often share the same text type: both a TV commercial and a student assignment may be descriptive (Paltridge, 1996, p. 239). Considering this aspect in the language classroom is important as it clearly informs not only the analyses that students are required to do but also their text transformations. Indeed, their task may be to change one genre category to another, taking into account both changes in generic structure and in text structure.

Students especially enjoy the creative and more inventive procedures of text transformation, although, of course, they may never have to write a limerick or an epitaph in ‘real life.’ Still, the combination of first analysing and then transforming texts makes sound sense as the realisation of *how* and *why* certain changes affect, for example, the tone, purpose or genre of a text is a skill that students will keep using (Grellet, 1996, p. 59; Newman, 2017). Similarly, Caudery (1998) stresses the relevance of making students aware of genre, and how this awareness can be translated into effective writing. Especially, he states that, “for improving general writing skills, teaching general principles on how genre-related factors relate to the internal features of a text is likely to be more effective than teaching specific features associated with individual genres,” and that students need to be exposed to a wide variety of genres to be able to appreciate the differences. In fact, we as teachers should not unnecessarily restrict the range and complexity of the texts we ask students to read. Rather, we should encourage them to go beyond the usual genres to be able to identify, and appreciate, the boundaries of specific ones (Caudery, 1998).

One task that is highly appreciated by LIU 2 students is parodying. Parody, its name deriving from Greek *parodia* (i.e., a mocking version of an epic), is “a composition in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase of an author are mimicked and made to appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects” (Dear, 1985, p. 521). Parody comes in an abundance of variations and types of artistic medium, from Friedrich Gulda’s Cello Concerto (1980) to Benny Hill’s song “Ernie (The Fastest Milkman in the West)” (1971), from the Ancient Greek satyr plays to Mel Brooks’ “Men in Tights” (1993). Another example, which I also use in class, is “The Onion” (n.d.), a well-known fake-news website that twists everyday occurrences into hugely funny and at times grotesque opposites, usually employing the strategy of exaggeration. Indeed, parody uses a range of different, sometimes overlapping, techniques. Often, humour is based on inversion or trivialisation, as it reverses commonly accepted values: the parodist distorts a serious or a trivial aspect in order to entertain or shock (Crystal, 1995, p. 404).

## 20.2 Objectives

Both LIU courses aim to familiarise students with a variety of text types and genres (see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)). Students learn to identify characteristic features of each such genre or text type. They become aware of the way in which texts and other discourses can be used, for example to explain, inform, or persuade, and what effects can be achieved thus. Moreover, students learn to recognise how an author's structural, lexical, and grammatical choices influence the tone of a text. These insights are expected to have a positive influence on the students' own writing and speaking skills. Using the analytic grid provided (see Appendix 1), students are required to contextualise the respective text, and to find out how and why the author has used distinctive features. They first identify and describe such features, giving concrete examples, and then comment on and evaluate the effects achieved.

In this specific case, students learn to recognise the literary devices of parody, satire, and irony in pieces of writing, and to create such a text themselves. In addition, they need to keep in mind the notion of context, that is, the "particular circumstances surrounding the way the text is produced and received," as the writer's intention could have been quite different from the reader's interpretation of the text (Beard, 2003, p. 26). According to Carter and Goddard (2016), every writer creates a sort of "narrative voice" to address a specific "implied" readership, a fact which one has to be aware of when analysing a text. Guided by the features of an original work, students are then encouraged to provide humorously or ironically exaggerated imitations or even complete distortions of the author's style, or of the genre itself. In doing so, they need to pay careful attention to detail, thus acquiring an in-depth knowledge of the textual and linguistic features of various genres. Indeed, such activity usually proves to be highly stimulating and motivating as students develop their own writing styles in the process.

## 20.3 Procedure

In the course of my LIU 2 classes, I have had my students produce parodies of a wide variety of genres; as an example, I have decided to provide a lesson parodying love poems, which spanned two sessions (via Moodle, the university's e-learning platform, students were given the assignment of finding and analysing a poem; in Session 1, they received my feedback on their choices; in Session 2, they did the text transformations). Session 2 consisted of the following four steps:

Step 1 included the preparatory activities of selecting and analysing a poem. Having discussed the aspects of parody with my students at length, and having analysed several examples in detail, I divided the class into pairs using the online platform Moodle and had them find a love poem, such as a sonnet, of at least twelve lines as a homework assignment (either on the internet or in the library), and analyse the poem of their choice according to the grids provided (see "Framework for



Analysing Texts” and “Approaching Texts – A Checklist for Language in Use,” Appendices 1 and 2). In this analysis, students first established a hypothesis about categories such as the author’s intended readership and purpose, then selecting examples of lexical, grammatical, and structural features from the text to support their choices.

One pair chose Sonnet XLIII by Elizabeth Barret Browning (1844/2015), which will serve to illustrate the procedure:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
 For the ends of being and ideal grace.  
 I love thee to the level of every day’s  
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
 I love thee freely, as men strive for right.  
 I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.  
 I love thee with the passion put to use  
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith.  
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
 With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,  
 Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,  
 I shall but love thee better after death.

Prior to the next stage, the pairs had to submit their poem and analysis for my approval and feedback, which I provided individually in the following session.

Step 2 was the actual transformation task, which students did in pairs in class (45 minutes). In LIU, the analysis of a text is intended to prepare students for its transformation, here for parody: what would have to be changed or adapted to make the love poem appropriate, that is, funny or ludicrous, for a different readership, purpose, or time? How would changing the genre affect this purpose? Which lexicogrammatical features would have to be different? In Session 2 of the procedure, students were asked to parody the poem by changing either merely its wording and/or structure or the genre itself; they were also informed that they were expected to explain and justify their choices vis-à-vis their classmates and myself. Otherwise, I gave them free rein in this phase of the activity so as not to curb their creativity. However, while they were working, I moved from pair to pair and provided some assistance, mainly suggesting some lexical changes and making sure that they were able to cope.

Again, students made very different choices. Some turned their poem into an e-mail or cooking recipe, while others stayed within the genre of poetry but gave theirs a completely different gist and direction, for example using modern language and idioms. One pair even transformed a Shakespearean sonnet into a modern-day hip-hop song and performed it in class.

After contextualising and analysing the poem especially with regard to its archaic lexis and special structure, the pair with the sonnet by Elizabeth Barret Browning chose to turn it into a hate poem, in a style reminiscent of gothic poetry. This

fourteen-line Petrarchan sonnet, with its traditional rhyme scheme (ABBAABBA CDCDCD) and iambic pentameter (Dear, 1985, p. 524), proved a very good choice as its love theme lent itself to being twisted and ridiculed. However, in the preceding analysis, for which they had used the grid provided, the students took note of the fact that the special form they had chosen would strongly influence and restrict their transformation. As Lennard (2005, p. 33) notes, every poetic form prescribes aspects such as structure, punctuation, rhyme, and tone, and it has become associated with a certain content, such as love. In order to achieve the parodic effect required, the students decided not completely to adhere to the rhyme scheme of the original sonnet but rather to make several lexical and structural changes. This also ties in with Crystal's claim that parody must not be a complete, consistent imitation of an original poem but that it must contain "a designed imperfection" (Crystal, 1995, p. 404). The result of the pair's effort was the following:

How do I hate thee? There are endless ways.  
 I despise thee to the depth and breadth and height  
 My soul can reach, when darkness gives me fright  
 For this will surely end my infernal grace.  
 I hate thee to the level of every day's  
 Most evil thoughts, of death and torturing.  
 I hate thee compulsively, as men kill men.  
 I hate thee strongly, as they gloat and cheer.  
 I hate thee with a passion put to use  
 In my old griefs, and with my unjust reasoning.  
 I despise thee with a hate I would not lose  
 As I've lost my saints. I despise thee with the breath,  
 Rage, tears, of all my life; and if mercy choose,  
 I shall but cease to hate thee after death.

Although they had not quite kept to the Petrarchan rhyme scheme (lines 6, 8, 10), the two students had quite successfully captured the tone of the original work both lexically (e.g., *thee*, *but*, *infernal*) and structurally (by retaining, e.g., the parallel, even anaphoric structure *I hate thee* and some of the parataxis of the original, as well as the enjambment, where the syntax continues into the next line, e.g., lines 2/3) but managed to give it a completely different tone. The humorous, or rather ironical, effect was achieved through the ludicrous twist to what was originally a love poem.

In the ensuing 30-minute peer feedback phase, which constituted Step 3, students were asked to give and receive detailed feedback. For this purpose, they formed small groups of four (consisting of two pairs each) and swapped both the original sonnets and their parodies, to analyse them in a similar manner as they had done their own original texts in the preparatory phase, focusing, however, mainly on lexical and generic choices. This took them approximately 10 minutes. Then, they exchanged their feedback on the respective other pair's parody in the groups assigned.

The final step, Step 4, consisted of class feedback and took 45 minutes. We discussed what everybody had discovered in both the pair and the group work sessions. Given a time frame of 10 minutes each, every group of four first presented their feedback sessions and projected the respective texts onto the wall. Then, everyone was invited to join the discussion and to share their ideas. Finally, each group was asked to upload the results of their work onto our Moodle platform as a final assignment.

## 20.4 Evaluation

The combination of guided (i.e., the analysis) and independent activity (i.e., the parody) proved highly effective as “students become more aware of writing as a process of problem solving” and realise “that choice of language and text organisation to communicate their message depends to a large extent on audience, communicative purpose and generic convention” (Caudery, 1998). Students also appreciated that I merely acted as facilitator since this gave them sufficient space for their own creativity. The fact that they were then entrusted with another pair’s parody to evaluate the lexical, stylistic, and/or generic choices made, and to exchange individual feedback, served to raise general learner autonomy and responsibility. Indeed, often merely reading somebody else’s work of a similar nature serves to give a learner a new understanding of the task at hand and the variety of possible ‘solutions’ (Caudery, 1998). In the final in-class feedback round, all students confirmed that they had found the task highly engaging as it had sparked their interest and participation, and that they appreciated the fact that I had left them so much freedom in their choices. They had learnt about the way that language works in achieving certain effects – here humour and parody – and how small changes can make a huge difference in terms of meaning and reception. My students also stressed that not only had they learnt new vocabulary, but they had also gained a deeper insight into the workings and intricacies of language in general, and of poetry in particular – which, after all, had been one of the central objectives of the task.

## Appendices

### *Appendix 1*

A Framework for Analysing a Text

Description of features	Choices made for features (examples)	Justification of choices
Genre/text type		
Structure		
Audience/ relationship to audience		
Purpose		
Vocabulary		
Grammar		

## Appendix 2

### Approaching Texts – A Checklist for Language in Use

TEXT IN ITS CONTEXT (‘Top-down’ approach)	TEXTUAL FEATURES (‘Bottom-up’ approach)	
<p><b>WHO</b> is talking with whom?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresser</li> <li>• Addressee</li> <li>• Relationship between them</li> <li>• Social group</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Age</li> </ul> <p><b>WHERE</b> was it produced?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area: e.g., region, culture, language variety</li> <li>• Mode (of discourse): spoken – written</li> <li>• Medium: radio, TV, newspaper, etc.</li> <li>• Situation: e.g., formal – informal, public – private</li> </ul> <p><b>WHICH</b> text type does belong to?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text type (genre): e.g., recipe, business letter</li> </ul> <p><b>WHAT</b> is it about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject matter</li> </ul> <p><b>WHEN</b> was it produced?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> </ul> <p><b>WHY</b> was it produced?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose, function: e.g., to persuade, inform, explain, amuse, instruct, please</li> </ul> <p><b>HOW</b> does the text try to achieve its purpose? (= rhetorical effects, see also Text column)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intertextuality (=reference to other texts)</li> </ul>	<p><b>LEXIS (word choice)</b></p> <p>Core or non-core?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal vs. informal (Romance/Latinate – Germanic, long – short, mono-/polysyllabic, simple – complex)</li> <li>• Archaic, obsolete, rare, dialect words vs. colloquial, common, everyday words</li> <li>• Features of spoken language: (e.g., discourse particles/fillers, interjections)</li> <li>• Literal – figurative, plain – metaphorical, concrete – abstract</li> <li>• Field-specific or ‘technical’ vocabulary (e.g., chemistry, religion, advertising); jargon; acronyms</li> <li>• Are collocational restrictions broken? (familiar – unfamiliar collocations)</li> </ul> <p>Word class?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preponderance of ADJs &amp; ADVs (suggesting a descriptive or evaluative text)</li> <li>• Many nouns (a possible sign of high lexical density)</li> <li>• Pronouns (e.g., direct addressing of <i>you</i>, expressive <i>I</i>, impersonal <i>it</i>, inclusive/exclusive <i>we</i>, lack of 1st &amp; second person pronouns in impersonal texts)</li> </ul>	<p><b>GRAMMAR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tense &amp; aspect: e.g., simple present tense suggests generalisation (e.g., informational texts), past tense is used in narratives</li> <li>• Passive voice (may be used for its impersonal effect)</li> <li>• Modal auxiliaries: express modality (e.g., certainty, obligation), politeness</li> <li>• Lightly – heavily modified nouns (pre- or postmodified)</li> <li>• Pronouns</li> <li>• Heavily adjectival/adverbial or mainly nouns/verbs?</li> <li>• Long – short sentences</li> <li>• Sentence types: simple (just main clause), complex (subordination), compound (coordination)</li> <li>• Repetition, parallelism of structures</li> <li>• ‘Marked’ structures (e.g., inversion, clefts, dislocation)</li> <li>• Direct – indirect speech</li> <li>• Ellipsis, sentence fragments</li> </ul> <p><b>STRUCTURE &amp; ORGANISATION</b></p> <p>A cohesive text? (are there formal links between sentences?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lexical chains/sets (same semantic field)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allusion</li> <li>• Juxtaposition</li> <li>• Irony</li> <li>• Metaphor &amp; simile</li> </ul>	<p>• Phrasal verbs (typical of informal, spoken language)  <u>Neutral or 'loaded'?</u> (denotation vs. connotation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biased, emotive lexis</li> <li>• Vogue/'buzz' words, euphemism</li> <li>• Slang, swearing, taboo words, innuendo</li> <li>• Superlatives, hyperbole (e.g., advertising)</li> <li>• 'Modal' words: e.g., attitudinal adverbs (<i>unfortunately, perhaps</i>), intensifiers, hedges/downtoners</li> </ul> <p><b>VISUAL PRESENTATION &amp; AURAL EFFECT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Layout &amp; visual presentation</li> <li>• Charts, tables, graphs...</li> <li>• Spelling &amp; punctuation</li> <li>• Alliteration, repetition of sounds, rhyme &amp; rhythm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking words (conjunctions)</li> <li>• Pronouns, reference</li> <li>• Parallelism, repetition</li> <li>• Information structure: given – new</li> </ul> <p>A coherent text? (are the meanings of sentences / utterances linked? e.g., by way of inference, by our knowledge of the world, i.e., does it make sense?)  <u>Textual development?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General –specific, chronological, frames...</li> <li>• Enumeration, exemplification, comparison, contrast...</li> <li>• Paragraphing (topic sentences)</li> <li>• Identification of moves (= communicative function of passages, e.g., introduction)</li> <li>• Turn taking structure (in spoken texts)</li> <li>• Theme/topic – rheme</li> </ul>
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# Chapter 21

## Improving Students' Writing and Mediation Skills in English in a Professional Context: Guiding Student Writers Through the Transformation of Specialist Legal Texts into Texts for Non-Specialists



Amy Bruno-Lindner

**Keywords** English for Specific Purposes · Text analysis · Mediating a text · Mediation strategies · Audience awareness

### 21.1 Contextualization

English in a Professional Context 2 (EPCO 2) is offered in the master's programs (Master of Arts in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures; Master of Arts in English Language and Linguistics) at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. Building on a foundation of awareness and skills acquired in EPCO 1, EPCO 2 aims to help students to further develop their ability to cope with specialist texts and to work with new genres (see Bruno-Lindner, "English in a Professional Context," [this volume](#)). The overarching goal is to enable students to function as text mediators; they learn to transform highly specialized texts from a specific professional domain (either law, medicine, or technology) into texts suitable for different non-specialist target groups and purposes. The present chapter introduces a set of analysis and transformation tasks from the EPCO 2 course focusing on texts from the professional domain of the law.

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A. Bruno-Lindner (✉)  
Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [amy.bruno-lindner@univie.ac.at](mailto:amy.bruno-lindner@univie.ac.at)



Taking into account the fact that not all EPCO 2 students will have completed EPCO 1, Part 1 of the course deals with *Basic Terms and Concepts*. Students review a “toolkit” of concepts related to the genre-analytic approach, which include text type, audience, purpose, and moves (Swales, 1990, p. 58), learn to identify semi-technical and technical vocabulary (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 83) and to distinguish specialist from non-specialist texts. Moreover, students are introduced to specialist legal texts with a prescriptive purpose (Sarcevic, 1997, p. 11) as well as to the specific language features that contribute to realizing this purpose (e.g., intertextuality, modality, performative verbs) (Fiorito, 2006, p. 108).

Part 2 of the course, which deals with *Legal English and the Law*, lays the necessary groundwork for the analysis and transformation of specialist legal texts. Students gain a basic familiarity with the domain of the law by reading the text “Introduction to Law” (Riches & Allen, 2013, pp. 3–11) and by engaging with a selection of language exercises and tasks based on authentic texts (Bruno-Lindner & TransLegal, 2011). They also acquire a framework in which to place legal texts as they learn to ask a set of fundamental questions: for example, whether the text is prescriptive or not; whether the text has been written for specialists (e.g., lawyers, lawmakers, the courts) or non-specialists; whether the text has a single audience or a dual audience (e.g., a statute written both for legal specialists and for layperson citizens); whether the text is a template, or contains boilerplate language; what the text is about, what technical terms are used and what they mean. As students carry out the analysis of selected prescriptive texts in class, they learn to identify salient linguistic features of legal English texts, which, in addition to prescriptive language features, can include, for example, archaic language, pronominal adverbs, whiz-deletion, pro-forms, Latin terms, binomials and trinomials, doublets and triplets, catenative verbs, passive voice, and impersonal reference to agents.

Part 3 of the course concerns *text transformation*, and covers three sessions. Working in small groups, students move from the guided analysis of specialist prescriptive legal texts to the direct comparison of these texts with non-specialist texts that have been written on the basis of them (e.g., a blog, a newspaper article). In the process, students are encouraged to collect transformation strategies that they can use in their own writing. After analyzing the structural and linguistic features of non-specialist target texts (e.g., the informative public-service website), students independently transform specialist legal texts into the target non-specialist text type.

In Part 4 of the course, students carry out *independent project work* in pairs, working independently on the analysis of six text samples from one legal specialist genre. The project teams meet for private conferences with the instructor and discuss their work in progress. Subsequently, each project group writes an analytical essay about their selected genre, carries out the transformation of a text from this genre into a non-specialist text of another genre, writes a justification essay about the transformation process, and finally presents their project to the class.

The tasks described below are set in Part 3 of the EPCO 2 course and take two 90-minute sessions to complete.

## 21.2 Objectives

The general objective of the tasks described below is to lead students to engage receptively and productively with a specialist and a non-specialist text and learn how the former has been adapted for a non-specialist reader. More specifically, the objective is to enable students to acquire a set of mediation strategies. These include “strategies to explain a new concept for a new audience” and “strategies to simplify a text” (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 118–122). When explaining a new concept, text mediators can establish links to previous knowledge, adapt language, and break down complicated information (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 118); simplifying a text can involve amplifying a dense text and streamlining a text (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 121).

Students are led to observe the specific ways language is used to realize these mediation strategies. For example, in the tasks at hand, students work with a transformed text about the UK Equality Act (“Equality Act 2010,” n.d.) written for an audience of older laypersons (“Age UK,” 2019) and look at the ways language is used to explain new concepts. When students ask which linguistic structures are used to define a technical term, they observe that colloquial functional language of defining is employed: for example, “This is when you experience behaviour that makes you feel intimidated, humiliated, or degraded, or that creates a hostile environment” (“Age UK,” 2019). When students ask how links to previous knowledge are created to illustrate a technical term, they observe that the writer employs comparisons to everyday situations: for instance, “For example, if a nurse repeatedly made jokes about your age” (“Age UK,” 2019). Additionally, students focus on characteristic features of legal texts such as prescriptive language and impersonality, and identify how the author of the target text transforms these. The main objective of the subsequent follow-up task is to encourage students to reflect on and implement these and other strategies in their own transformations of specialist texts.

## 21.3 Procedure

### 21.3.1 *Warm-Up: Gathering Useful Techniques*

The lesson begins with brainstorming, and students form small groups. They are asked to list different ways of structuring information in a non-specialist text in order to make the information easier to grasp, to remember, and to act upon. The responses elicited are written on the board for all to see and to refer back to during the lesson.

Possible answers include the use of the following: bullet points; headings (e.g., question headings, statement headings, topic headings); an FAQ section; numbering of sections or steps; info boxes; checklists; diagrams and tables and other visual representations, such as photos; typographical features such as bold text,

underlining, font type and size; layout and visual features such as use of color, use of space; links to further information.

### ***21.3.2 Introduction to the Topic of the Texts and to the Activity***

Students are asked to respond spontaneously to the following questions:

- What do these words (written on the board) mean to you? *Harassment, discrimination, ageism*. How would you define them?
- What can people do when they experience these behaviors in public?

Students are told that they will be analyzing two texts, and that the outcomes of this lesson will serve as preparation for the next lesson, which will be a writing workshop.

### ***21.3.3 Activity***

#### **Step 1: Getting oriented with the GAP (i.e., Genre, Audience, Purpose)**

Students are given two texts:

1. an excerpt from the Equality Act (“Equality Act,” 2010) and
2. a section of a website produced by Age UK about the Equality Act (“Age UK,” 2019).

Working in small groups, students answer the GAP questions about each text and then share their answers with the class.

#### **Step 2: Analyzing the language features of the specialist text**

Students are asked to identify salient linguistic and textual features of the specialist text with examples of each feature. Students’ findings are shared with the whole group.

#### **Step 3: “Unpacking” the mediation strategies used in the transformation text**

Students are given a list of questions and are asked to answer these with regard to the transformed text and to provide examples of language use to illustrate their answers.

- Which linguistic features does the writer use to establish a relationship to the target audience? Characterize the writer-reader relationship.
- Which register features can be identified?
- Does the writer make use of common core vocabulary, semi-technical vocabulary and technical vocabulary? To what extent? How does the writer deal with technical terms?

- How does the writer transform the prescriptive language of the original text to suit the informative purpose of the new text?
- Does the writer amplify or streamline content from the original text?
- How is the text structured, and what layout-related and visual elements are used to make it accessible for the reader?

#### **Step 4: Sharing findings and reflecting**

The individual working groups report their answers to the class and students reflect on the mediation strategies they have identified. In addition to those mentioned above, some examples of possible findings include the following: use of an FAQ section at the beginning of the text as a kind of table of contents; definitions given as explanations followed by “This is called ...;” use of table format for technical terms and their definitions; use of semi-technical language in quotation marks followed by explanation: “when it can be ‘objectively justified’. This is when ...;” use of bullet points; list of items inserted in table for clarity; use of you-orientation to establish a close relationship to the reader: “You are protected;” use of question headings; use of questions containing “me” to draw in reader; use of informal/spoken language features to establish friendly rapport: contractions, “a lot of,” “to get;” prescriptiveness rendered with modals and prepositional phrases: “This means they must,” “employer could put,” “under the Equality Act,” “due to the Equality Act” (“Age UK,” 2019).

### **21.3.4 Follow-Up Work**

#### **21.3.4.1 Homework Assignment**

An essay writing assignment gives students the opportunity to deepen their understanding of what they have learned in the lesson. They are tasked with writing an analytical essay comparing two texts, one being a prescriptive text for legal specialists, the other a text about the same subject matter written for non-specialists. Both of these texts, which are either provided by the instructor or found by the student, can be of the same genres as those already analyzed in class, but need not be. The focus of the essay should lie on the transformation techniques employed by the writer of the transformed text; this focus should be reflected in the thesis statement of the essay.

#### **21.3.4.2 Workshop Session**

In the following 90-minute workshop lesson, students are told they will be transforming a prescriptive legal text into a text for non-specialists. They are introduced to the specialist text through questions that elicit previous knowledge of the subject matter and probe students' understanding of selected technical terms in the text (see

description of previous lesson). Students form groups of three and are asked to read the text and briefly discuss its contents with their fellow group members. Once they are sure they have a working understanding of the text's contents, they are given the task of transforming it; the target text will be of the genre that was analyzed in the previous session (i.e., an informative public-service website explaining what a law means for a specific audience). Each group is to produce one text together. While the groups are writing their texts, the instructor is available for questions; issues of relevance to all are addressed and discussed with the class as a whole. At the end of the session, students are requested to upload their texts to Moodle into a folder accessible to all. As a follow-up, students can be asked to assess or edit the text of another group; to rank the texts produced; or to re-work their own text, incorporating elements from the texts of other groups.

## 21.4 Evaluation

The analysis and writing tasks described above result in a variety of outcomes: a body of student-produced texts (which can be discussed, reworked, and showcased); student essays in which the emphasis lies on comparative linguistic analysis; and the acquisition of a repertoire of text mediation strategies. As such, the tasks play a central role in achieving the objectives of EPCO 2 as a whole. While the carrier content (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) of the activities described above is English for Law, EPCO 2 courses focusing on English for Medicine or English for Technology can make use of the same task format.

In closing, the student perspective on EPCO 2 is worth relating. At the outset of the course, students commonly express apprehension about working with specialist text types from an unfamiliar field. In comments shared in end-of-semester course evaluation questionnaires, students sometimes mention the initial uneasiness they feel due to their lack of familiarity with legal texts or a sense of inadequacy at the prospect of working with laws, contracts, and other legal documents, texts which students may even find inscrutable and inaccessible in their first language. However, this initial response constitutes a rationale for the focus on specialist texts; the course aims to reduce students' fear of working with unfamiliar genres and to empower students for their future work with texts. The gradual, step-by-step analytical approach employed in the course helps students learn how to unlock specialist texts and gain access to what was previously inaccessible to them. After completing EPCO 2, students often report a satisfying and rewarding learning experience: "The course enriches linguistic skills and provides insights into legal English, which is very interesting!" (Student evaluation, WS 2018, EPCO 2). Thus, a further outcome of EPCO 2 can be highlighted: greater student confidence in their ability to cope with specialist texts.

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**Part III**  
**Teacher Research on Learning, Teaching,**  
**and Assessment**

# Chapter 22

## Students' Conceptions of Academic Writing in a Second Language: Perspectives of Advanced Students of English



Angelika Rieder-Bünemann and Pia Resnik

**Abstract** In today's globalised world, English is the dominant language in academic writing contexts. While mastering academic writing is a demanding task in itself even in one's first language, undertaking this task in a second language clearly poses unique challenges to learners and teachers alike. Recent research has shown that learner beliefs seem to constitute an important influencing factor in this language learning process. Thus, the present study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of students' conceptions of academic writing in their second language (English) by adopting a contextual, student-centred approach. Data collection involved 50 advanced students of English comprising written guided reflections on their experiences as academic writers at the beginning of the semester and a follow-up questionnaire at the end. A category-based qualitative analysis identifies students' perceived challenges of academic writing in English and similarities and/or differences to first language contexts, as well as shedding light on the development of students' perceptions over the course of one semester with English for Academic Purposes teaching input.

**Keywords** Learner beliefs · Learner needs · English for Academic Purposes · Guided reflections · Qualitative analysis

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A. Rieder-Bünemann (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [angelika.rieder@univie.ac.at](mailto:angelika.rieder@univie.ac.at)

P. Resnik

University College of Teacher Education Vienna | Krems, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [pia.resnik@kphvie.ac.at](mailto:pia.resnik@kphvie.ac.at)

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215



## 22.1 Introduction

With the rise of globalisation, English has become the prevailing medium of choice in academic writing contexts. Clearly, mastering academic writing is demanding in itself, regardless of whether it is approached in a first language (L1) or a second language (L2), since it involves adherence to specific conventions approved by a certain discourse community (Ferguson et al., 2011); however, learning how to (inter-)act effectively in an L2 in these contexts poses unique challenges to learners (e.g., Lillis & Curry, 2010; Tang, 2012a) as well as teachers (e.g., Cumming, 2006). Not only does it involve acquiring new linguistic competencies but it also requires mastering cognitive skills and socio-cultural practices (Barkaoui, 2007; Hyland, 2002a) in a highly specialised context. Thus, developing academic writing expertise in an L2 is equivalent to twofold foreign language learning (Knorr & Pogner, 2015).

Research has shown that learner beliefs seem to have an important impact on the language learning process when developing competences (Barcelos, 2003; Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Mercer, 2011). Hence, the present study adopts a contextual (Barcelos, 2003), student-centred approach and, in this way, aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of students' conceptions of academic writing in their L2 (English). Data was gathered from 50 advanced students of English attending the course English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at the University of Vienna, Austria (see Rieder-Bünemann, *this volume*), involving written guided reflections on their experiences as academic writers in the L1 and L2 at the beginning of the semester and a follow-up questionnaire at the end. The data were analysed using Kuckartz' (2014) category-based qualitative analysis. This facilitated an explorative analysis of students' experiences in and attitudes towards academic writing while still ensuring the comparability of students' responses.

This way, the study identifies students' past and possible future challenges for academic writing in English and similarities and/or differences to L1 contexts. It also sheds light on the dynamic development of students' perceptions over the course of one semester.

## 22.2 Theoretical Background

### 22.2.1 *Academic Writing*

Due to the fact that English is used as a global language in academia, research on academic writing in English as a Foreign Language has experienced enormous growth (e.g., Lillis & Curry, 2010; Tang, 2012a). Within this extensive research landscape investigating problems faced by scholars and students writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), two complementary strands can be identified. The first research tradition tends to focus on L2-specific academic writing issues, such as L2 competence problems (e.g., lexis, grammar, or sentence construction issues, see Chan, 2010), contrasts between L1- and L2-specific features (e.g., Connor,

1996), or psychologically motivated problems like cultural differences and clashing expectations or attitudes (e.g., Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Hinkel, 2005).

The second research tradition developed from an awareness of the limitations of a 'deficit' view of the learning process, which was countered by adopting a social-constructivist viewpoint that is discipline sensitive and discourse based (Hyland, 2000). Here, the central hypothesis is that the problems academic writers face in an L1 or L2 are not fundamentally different (Ferguson et al., 2011). As Tang (2012b) puts it, "'academic discourse' is not the natural 'first language' of any writer." (p. 12) In consequence, academic discourse is seen as social practice (Fairclough, 1992) rather than as a set of skills to be learnt, where each discipline might be compared to a tribe with its own particular norms and practices (Becher, 1989). Being able to engage in these practices thus involves acquiring the agreed conventions of the particular academic discourse community one is part of (Swales, 1990). Within this social-constructivist view, academic writing is intrinsically linked to a writer's identity, since the former is seen as an interrelation of cultural practices in academic discourse, critical thinking, and writer identity (McKinley, 2015). It is within this framework that the EAP course is positioned, and, accordingly, the concepts of writer identity, academic genre conventions, and writing as a social practice feature prominently throughout the course.

At the same time, however, it is also acknowledged that the foreign language component can lead to additional obstacles for academic writers, which is nicely illustrated by Knorr and Pogner's (2015) characterisation of learning to write academic texts in an L2 as learning a 'doubled' foreign language (p. 16). Accordingly, the EAP course contains targeted activities focusing on textual competence (e.g., academic lexico-grammar, signposting, hedging) in each unit.

As regards the position of advanced English language students among L2 academic writers, these learners seem to constitute a specific group that stands out from other L2 academic writers in two ways. Firstly, they exhibit language competence and an awareness of textual properties that go far beyond that of non-language students; secondly, they also receive explicit training in academic writing and reflect on language conventions as part of their studies, which is usually lacking in many non-language university subjects. Since the study focuses on a group of advanced English language students, it was hoped that the increased awareness and reflectivity of its participants would lead to rich response results.

### **22.2.2 *Learner Beliefs***

Research into learner beliefs has become increasingly popular in the context of second language acquisition (SLA) in the past 30 years. Their previous neglect in scientific investigations was partly due to the fuzziness of the concept (Barcelos, 2003). From the lack of agreement and vagueness as to what beliefs are in educational psychology, Pajares (1992) concludes that defining them "is at best a game of player's choice" (p. 309).

Broadly speaking, learner beliefs refer to “opinions and ideas that learners have about the task of learning a second/foreign language” (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003, p. 1). These include, amongst other things, beliefs about themselves as language learners and their own language learning abilities, their own goals, views on language learning strategies, but also teaching practices and classroom interaction (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). As every language learner is unique, there is great individual variation. Still, investigating learners’ beliefs is crucial as “understanding students’ beliefs means understanding their world and their identity” (Barcelos, 2003, p. 8), which is a prerequisite for fruitful foreign language learning and teaching.

Approaches to investigating learners’ beliefs differ as do the terms used for the concept in the past, including “folklinguistic theories” (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 294), “foreign language self-concept” (Laine, 1988, p. 9), and “learners’ philosophy of language learning” (Abraham & Vann, 1987, cited in Leskovich, 2014, p. 26). According to Kalaja and Barcelos (2003), socio-culturally oriented approaches and cognitively oriented ones form the two ends of the spectrum of researching learners’ beliefs about language learning.

Whereas cognitive aspects were mostly in the focus in the beginning and included studies investigating metacognitive knowledge (e.g., Wenden, 1998), there has since been a trend towards socio-cultural approaches, proponents of which acknowledge the social nature of beliefs (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). According to Mercer (2011), considering “their situated, dynamic and complex nature” (p. 336) is important when conducting research into learner beliefs. This means that they need to be understood contextually as they are often socially situated (Horwitz, 1999), they are not static as they can change over time (Ellis, 2008; Mercer, 2011; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003), and they are multiply determined (Mori, 1999).

Methodology-wise, this change in perspective has also led to a stronger focus on qualitative analyses (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Ellis, 2008), for they are often thought to capture the complexity inherent in beliefs more effectively than quantitative analyses. Still, the latter also need to be acknowledged for their strengths as they, for example, allow us to understand links between learner beliefs and other variables (see, e.g., Horwitz’s well-known “Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory” [BALLI]; for a review of BALLI studies, see, e.g., Horwitz, 1999). Clearly, there are multiple expedient ways to investigate learners’ beliefs.

Generally, previous research has shown that learner beliefs are influential in language learning and achievements (Bernat, 2006) and that teachers play a decisive role in shaping students’ beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 2007). Thus, investigating learners’ beliefs has strong pedagogical implications, as a deeper understanding clearly equips teachers with the knowledge needed to adequately support students. Overall, learners’ beliefs “seem to play a crucial role in [learners’] agentic efforts to engineer their environment toward their language learning process. In this effort, reflection is decisive” (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011, p. 287). This view of learner beliefs and reflection as key factors is the foundation our study builds on.

## 22.3 Research Questions

The research questions the study aimed to answer were twofold: On the synchronic level, the investigation tapped into the beliefs and perceptions of advanced English language students as participants in the academic writing community by addressing the following questions:

1. What are the individual experiences and challenges perceived by these learners when engaging in L2 academic writing?
2. How do they rate their perceived competence in academic writing in their L2 in comparison to their L1 academic writing competence, and what similarities and differences do they see?
3. What is their perception of the role of writer identity in academic texts, and what conceptions do they have of how it can be realised in academic writing?

On a complementary level, the diachronic component of the study addressed the effect of the EAP course on the three levels of student conceptions listed above.

## 22.4 Study Description

### 22.4.1 *Participants*

Fifty advanced students of English who attended the EAP course at the Department of English and American Studies in either summer or winter semester 2016 participated in the study. Their age ranged from a minimum of 21 to a maximum of 47 years, the mean age being 26.42 ( $SD = 4.94$ ). Female students (86.00%,  $n = 43$ ) by far outnumbered the male ones (14.00%,  $n = 7$ ), which is a common pattern in survey-based research in SLA but also reflects the typical gender ratio of English language students at the Department of English and American Studies in Vienna (Unit for Reporting and Analysis of the University of Vienna, personal conversation) and females' greater interest overall in language-related professions (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010).

The most frequent L1 was German (76.00%,  $n = 38$ ), followed by Croatian (4.00%,  $n = 2$ ). Two students (4.00%) reported having grown up bilingually with German and Croatian, whereas another one grew up using German and English. The following L1s were spoken by one student each: Armenian, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Ukrainian. Thus, the sample mostly consists of foreign language users of English. The majority of the students (78.00%,  $n = 39$ ) were enrolled in the teacher education programme, and 11 (22.00%) were pursuing an MA in English and American Studies. The second subjects studied by those aiming to become teachers were rather diverse, with the most popular ones being history (26.32%,  $n = 10$ ), German (23.68%,  $n = 9$ ), philosophy/psychology (7.89%,  $n = 3$ ), and physical education (7.89%,  $n = 3$ ).

## 22.4.2 Methodology

Data collection involved guided written reflections on the students' experiences as academic writers in their L1s and L2s at the beginning of the semester and a follow-up questionnaire containing open-ended questions at the end of the course. The first survey focused on students' past academic texts and included questions on the text types they had produced prior to taking the course, the challenges they had faced, what they liked about academic writing, and the way they used source material. More specific questions on L1 versus L2 academic writing were included as well, as were questions on the role and place of writer identity in academic writing and possible realisations of it in such texts. A final set of questions focused on future academic texts. The second survey was similar in structure and included the same aspects, thereby allowing for an analysis of the dynamic development of students' perceptions of academic writing over the course of one semester, including possible changes in their attitudes towards academic writing as well as themselves as academic writers. To ensure that students were familiar with their previous answers, they had access to their filled-in initial survey while completing the second questionnaire. Overall, the students' responses amounted to a corpus of 48,655 tokens.

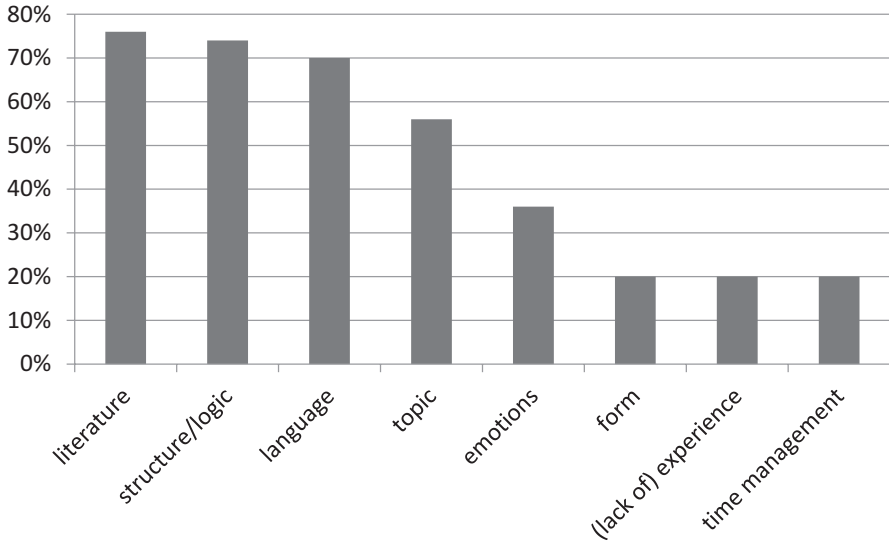
As a method of data analysis, thematic qualitative text analysis was chosen, and a combination of deductive and inductive category formation was employed (Kuckartz, 2014) using MAXQDA2018 (VERBI Software, 2018) for the coding process. In other words, based on the research questions, topic categories were developed deductively before data collection in accordance with the questionnaire sections (i.e., perceived challenges, perceived L1 vs. L2 competence, conceptions of writer identity) and coded after a close, initial analysis of the responses by both authors. In a first step, 20% of the data were assigned to the main categories by both researchers to ensure category applicability (Kuckartz, 2014). After having coded the rest of the data, refined inductive subcategories and groupings were established and coded by both researchers as a team, involving various cycles of data processing and the re-arranging of categories before the category system was fixed (Mayring, 2015). This enabled an explorative analysis of the data, while still maintaining the strengths of conducting a category-based analysis, such as a quantification of the results to illustrate overall trends (Kuckartz, 2014).

## 22.5 Results

### 22.5.1 Academic Writing: Experiences and Challenges

#### 22.5.1.1 Initial Experiences and Challenges

When asked about their previous experiences with L2 academic writing, 74.00% ( $n = 37$ ) mentioned having written seminar papers in English in the past, 22.00% ( $n = 11$ ) had written BA papers, and 4.00% ( $n = 2$ ) an MA thesis. Thus, they were all experienced users of EAP at the beginning of the course.



**Fig. 22.1** Perceived initial challenges in L2 academic writing

In relation to the particular challenges in producing these texts, eight predominant themes emerged. As illustrated in Fig. 22.1, literature-related challenges were the most frequently stated difficulty. Of the 76.00% ( $n = 38$ ) who mentioned them, 57.89% ( $n = 22$ ) explained that finding or selecting sources was difficult due to the topic having been new to them, making it difficult “to ‘orientate’ myself ... before I was able to find appropriate sources” (JSJ\_FI1). Others mentioned having “had problems deciding which ones [publications] were worth being read and cited” (KEC\_FI1). They mostly seemed to struggle with the “quantity of information” (LUG\_FI1) and, consequently, with “evaluating research” (LUF\_MI1). In cases where they succeeded in the latter but could not handle the former, this led to frustration, as one student explains: “When the feeling remains that there is more literature that I should have included, it is a very difficult and dissatisfactory experience” (RTA\_FI1). Organising sources (13.16%,  $n = 5$ ) and avoiding plagiarism (10.53%,  $n = 4$ ) were common difficulties mentioned here too.

Of the 37 students (74.00%) who mentioned structuring their texts as being an obstacle, 11 (29.73%) found it particularly challenging to produce a coherent, well-structured text; five students (13.51%) also described experiencing a lack of drafting competence, as illustrated by the following response:

I think my problems with text organisation were due to the fact that I did not see writing as a process requiring different drafts and various stages of revision. I always wanted to write a very good text in one sitting, which was simply not possible. (KNS\_FI1)

Additionally, a majority (70.00%,  $n = 35$ ) mentioned language-related issues in this context. These mostly related to academic vocabulary (42.86%,  $n = 15$ ) – including register, accuracy, and range – but also an overall lack of language competence

(20.00%,  $n = 7$ ), as described by participant GLL\_FI1: “I am not a native speaker. Fluency will always be an issue.” In the same vein, six students (12.00%) referred to the formal and impersonal writing style separately, as this was something entirely new to them and was, consequently, often perceived as particularly challenging:

The greatest difficulty for me was to adapt an academic writing style that is more or less objective and impersonal. It was hard at times to completely exclude the “I” from my writing and act as if the essay or paper I was producing was itself an agent (e.g., “This paper will discuss ...”). At times, I find this way of writing rather alienating and quite unnatural. (KSF\_FI1)

Topic-related difficulties were mentioned by 56.00% ( $n = 28$ ) of the students; within this group, they mostly referred to topic limitation (46.42%,  $n = 13$ ), staying focused on the topic (32.14%,  $n = 9$ ), and formulating a research question (21.43%,  $n = 6$ ).

Interestingly, 36.00% ( $n = 18$ ) described coping with their emotions as a perceived difficulty in the writing process. Half of those students based their explanations on self-doubt or a lack of self-confidence; as one student stated: “I always felt like I was just rephrasing what other people, who are much smarter than myself, have already said in a better way” (HGB\_FI1). Approximately a quarter of them (27.78%,  $n = 5$ ) found it particularly challenging to motivate themselves, and another 22.22% ( $n = 4$ ) had difficulty coping with anxiety, nervousness, and feeling intimidated:

It is difficult to start usually because I have waited too long and then get scared about not being able to finish. As a consequence of this anxiety I postpone the beginning of the work even further. But this anxiety also depends on the pressure the teachers put on us. ... I don't feel like I can adhere to the standard. (REV\_FI1)

Students typically struggled with formal aspects at the beginning too (20.00%,  $n = 10$ ), including citations, the bibliography, and sticking to the word limit. Additionally, they frequently perceived time management (20.00%,  $n = 10$ ) and the overall lack of experience in academic writing (20.00%,  $n = 10$ ) as challenging.

Students also explained what they enjoyed about academic writing. Nineteen students (38.00%) mentioned that they take pleasure in the sense of accomplishment (LUL\_FI1) that comes with finishing a paper, which they described as “satisfying” (BAS\_FI1), “rewarding” (KSC\_FI1), “relief” (AAS\_FI1), and making them proud (HII\_FI1).

Another 10.00% ( $n = 5$ ) explicitly mentioned the satisfaction when elements fall into place: “I like the feeling when I can finally begin to see a red [common] thread while reading the secondary literature and the vision of my paper starts to appear in front of me” (RTE\_FI1). Additionally, students frequently mentioned that they appreciated becoming informed about a topic in the process of writing a paper and gaining expertise in a certain research area (32.00%,  $n = 16$ ), which not seldom (14.00%,  $n = 7$ ) increased their interest in the topic, as the following response indicates: “When you choose an interesting topic, research can actually be a lot of fun, since there are always new things to learn about certain areas of research” (BAS\_FI1). Students also explained that they enjoyed experiencing and/or reflecting on their progress in developing academic texts (18.00%,  $n = 9$ ) and working with sources (16.00%,  $n = 8$ ).



### 22.5.1.2 Perceived Changes in Challenges

While 28.00% ( $n = 14$ ) reported no change in the perceived challenges of academic writing, the vast majority (72.00%,  $n = 36$ ) did indeed observe changes on this level. Twenty percent ( $n = 10$ ) stated they had generally improved their writing skills throughout the course, and 18.00% ( $n = 9$ ) observed an improvement in their knowledge of the typical genre conventions. The latter often also boosted students' confidence in themselves as academic writers, as one student explained: "I am now more confident with regard to producing written/spoken academic texts because of this term's material that provided basic guidelines and features of academic texts" (KIL\_MI2). Six (16.67%) of the students who perceived changes on this level linked them to having fewer difficulties in organising their ideas. Additionally, 13.89% ( $n = 5$ ) reported feeling more confident in selecting sources, and the same number of students observed an improvement in language competence. Besides mentioning fewer precision problems (11.11%,  $n = 4$ ), students also found it easier to argue for their own views (8.33%,  $n = 3$ ) and to structure their papers (5.56%,  $n = 2$ ). An increase in drafting competence was listed among those changes as well, as were fewer problems with starting the writing process as such (2.78%,  $n = 1$  each).

## 22.5.2 Academic Writing: L1 vs. L2 Competence

### 22.5.2.1 Initial Perceptions of L1 – L2 Competence

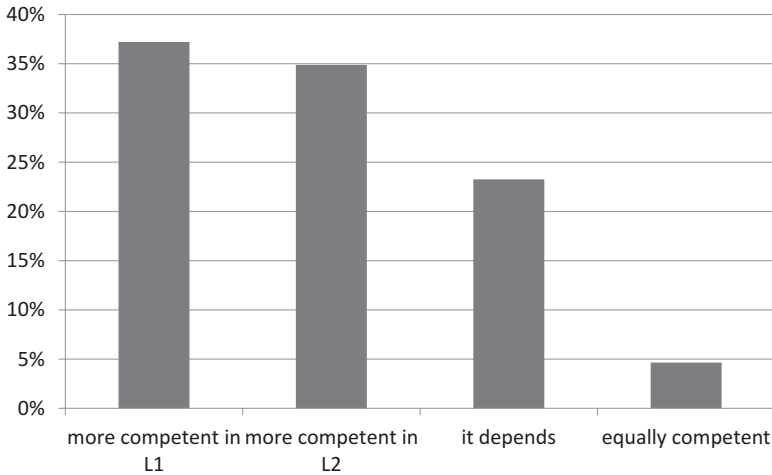
In the first survey, students were asked how competent they felt when producing academic texts in English compared to writing such texts in their L1. Of the 43 students who answered the question (seven students had not written an academic text in their L1), only 4.65% ( $n = 2$ ) mentioned feeling equally competent in both their L1 and L2. The vast majority (72.09%,  $n = 31$ ), however, reported perceived differences in competence, as illustrated in Fig. 22.2.

Sixteen students (37.21%) stated that their competence in academic writing was much higher in their L1. This was most often linked to greater experience in producing academic texts in the L1, but students also felt "more eloquent in German" (KCT\_FI1) and had the impression that their "German writing sounds more sophisticated" (WLT, MI1). The following response sums up the general tenor underlying students' explanations nicely:

I am very critical about formulations and it is important to me that I express myself as well as I possibly can. I think this might have its origins in my great respect and love for language and all its possibilities. Naturally, as German is my native language, my lexical and grammatical competences are more developed and I find it easier to write in higher registers. (RTE\_FI1)

As mentioned by numerous other students too, she described her lexical repertoire as broader and her grammatical accuracy as much higher in her L1 than in English,





**Fig. 22.2** Perceived competence in L1 and L2 academic writing (reflection 1)

which frequently made students feel more confident in the L1 as they felt they made fewer mistakes. Additionally, they described producing such texts as less time consuming in the L1, especially when paraphrasing. Their comparatively higher L1 competence also allowed them to review literature more effortlessly in the L1 than in the L2: “I can easily find synonyms even for complicated concepts. This makes me quicker in writing texts in my first language. Also, I can read German texts much faster than English ones” (REV\_FI1).

Interestingly, nearly the same number of students (34.88%,  $n = 15$ ) mentioned the opposite, namely feeling more competent in L2 academic writing than when producing academic texts in their L1. They almost exclusively based their answer on “the constant training of writing English texts” (MCK\_FI1), “the amount of input” (HLM\_FI1), the explicit and clear instructions they had received on academic writing in English, and, along with it, the “opportunities to practice ... presentation and writing skills in the L2 at university” (BCY\_FI1). One student also mentioned that socio-cultural differences in approaching academic writing led her to feeling more comfortable when producing such texts in English:

I actually feel more comfortable writing my papers in English. I reckon this is because of the German academic language tradition, which is generally highly nominalised and (in my opinion) overly complicated. In English academia there seems to be a trend of writing more reader oriented. To me, presenting the facts in a readable manner does not make them less scientifically relevant. (AAS\_FI1)

Overall, those students who mentioned feeling more competent in the L2 almost exclusively based their choice on their studying the language, which made them feel “better prepared for writing academic texts in English” (WNM\_FI1).

According to 23.26% of the students ( $n = 10$ ), the question could not be answered in a straightforward manner as it depended entirely on the aspects of academic writing taken into account. While they usually reported feeling more competent in the

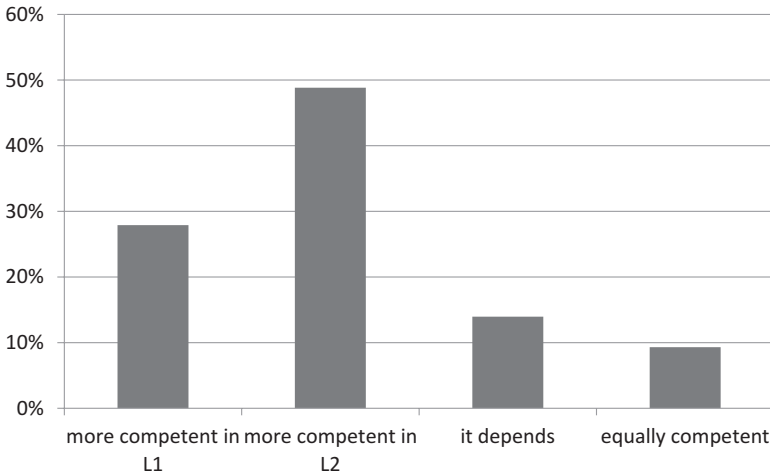
L1 on the level of linguistic mastery (HIA\_FI1), they generally felt much better prepared regarding “genre-specific conventions of academic writing” in the L2 (KNS\_FI1) on both macro- and micro-structural levels; in one student’s words: “I do feel more competent in terms of linguistic competence. However, when it comes to organisation, paragraphing or developing an argument, I feel more confident in English” (HIA\_FI1). Overall, students often linked a higher awareness of and competence in following academic conventions in English to “extensive training at the department,” often making them “feel more at ease when dealing with English [academic] texts” (LUF\_MI1).

### 22.5.2.2 Perceived L1 – L2 Competence after Having Taken EAP

In the follow-up questionnaire, students were again asked to rate their competence in writing academic texts in the L1 and English and the data were coded according to perceived changes over the course of the semester. The vast majority (93.33%,  $n = 14$ ) of those students who observed a change in competence throughout the semester ( $n = 15$ ) now reported feeling more confident in L2 academic writing. This boost in L2 competence was observed on various levels. While students mentioned having “gained deeper insight into the text types” (MCK\_FI2) and “a much clearer view on how to structure a text in terms of cohesion and coherence” (HGB\_FI2), they also reported on having expanded their vocabulary (JND\_FI2) and improved their awareness of specific language choices having certain effects. One of the students, for example, stated that “the phrases and words for taking stance, expressing certainty or presenting points of view” helped him “put the right weight on my thoughts and arguments” (WLT\_MI2). Furthermore, the EAP course made students notice that they had had ample opportunity to practice their L2 academic writing skills, which in the case of three students decreased their confidence in L1 academic writing. One student, for example, writes: “I am a little less confident in German writing now because I realised how much knowledge I lack concerning German academic writing style” (KTC\_FI2). Noticing knowledge gaps in L1 academic writing because of the course not seldom made them draw a conclusion similar to LNM\_FI2’s, who stated that “after this course I think I am more capable in English.”

Figure 22.3 summarises students’ perceived competence after having taken EAP and clearly illustrates the above-mentioned shift.

While 37.21% ( $n = 16$ ) of the 43 students who answered the question initially perceived themselves as being more competent in the L1 when producing academic texts (see Fig. 22.2), only 27.91% ( $n = 12$ ) reported the same after having taken EAP. The number of students perceiving their competence in L2 academic writing as higher than in the L1 increased from 34.88% ( $n = 15$ ) at the beginning to 48.84% ( $n = 21$ ) at the end of the semester. Whereas the number of those students who described their academic writing skills as being the same in both languages doubled from 4.65% ( $n = 2$ ) to 9.30% ( $n = 4$ ), the number of those stating it depends was reduced by almost half from 23.36% ( $n = 10$ ) to 13.95% ( $n = 6$ ). In the case of seven students, it was impossible to determine their overall self-rated competence after the



**Fig. 22.3** Perceived competence in L1 and L2 academic writing after having taken EAP (reflection 2)

course because they either did not provide an answer to the question or provided an answer that illustrated isolated improvements which did not allow any generalised conclusions.

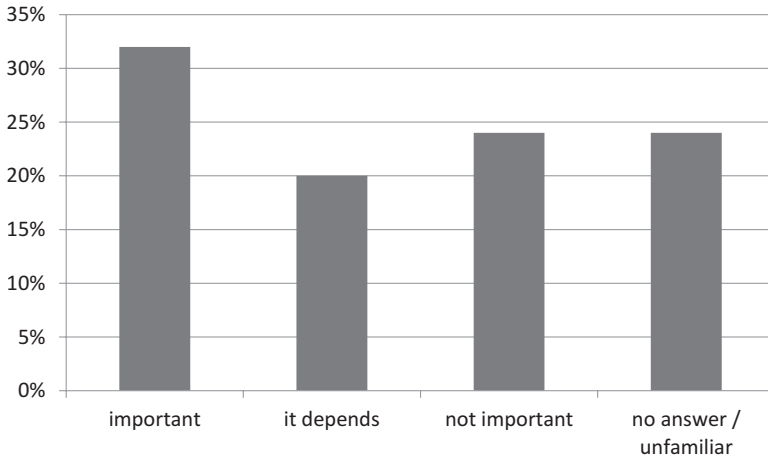
### 22.5.3 *Writer Identity: Conceptions of its Role and Realisation*

#### 22.5.3.1 Initial Conceptions of Writer Identity

As regards familiarity with the notion of writer identity, responses at the beginning of the course showed that roughly half of all students (48.00%,  $n = 24$ ) were either unfamiliar with the concept or considered writer identity unimportant for academic texts (see Fig. 22.4).

Out of the 12 students (24.00%) who were unfamiliar with the concept, several misinterpreted the notion by equating writer identity with biographical information, as illustrated by the following student answer: “I think it is important to outline a writer’s identity (e.g., profession, academic education, publications) to a certain degree in order to establish credibility” (KEC\_FI1). Others openly stated that they were unfamiliar with the concept, as is apparent in the following response: “I don’t think I can answer this question correctly since I am not familiar with the term of writer identity or its meaning” (BAS\_FI1). A third group skipped the question entirely, which was interpreted as indicating that the concept was unclear to them (see also Sect. 22.5.3.2).

Another 24.00% ( $n = 12$ ) of the students stated that in their opinion writer identity was not important in the text, stressing that academic texts should be factual



**Fig. 22.4** Students' perceptions of the importance of writer identity for academic texts before the course (reflection 1)

rather than personal. This is shown by a range of student answers resembling the following: "I do not think that the writer should show his/her identity, as the text is meant to present a contribution to the pertaining field of study, and the identity of the author should not influence or determine this thesis" (LMN\_FI1).

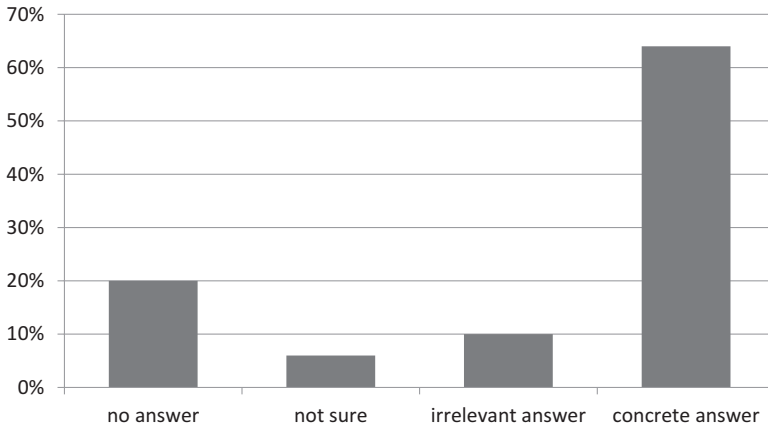
The remaining students (52.00%,  $n = 26$ ) seemed to be more familiar with the notion of writer identity, either stating that it generally fulfilled an important role in academic writing (32.00%,  $n = 16$ ) or specifying that the prominence of a writer's identity varied according to research fields and text types (20.00%,  $n = 10$ ). This is apparent in the following response:

For some academic texts this is very important. Particularly, for texts in the cultural and language corner, as I believe that the cultural background of the writer does influence the text. The more texts move into the natural sciences, I think, the less it is important [sic] is the identity of the writer. Although one can always recognise the writer's identity on how things were analysed or done. (WLT\_MI1)

In a separate question, students were also asked for their views on how writer identity could be realised in a text. Varying responses were given here (see Fig. 22.5), with the majority of students (64.00%,  $n = 32$ ) providing some suggestions, while the remaining respondents either provided no answer (20.00%,  $n = 10$ ), an irrelevant answer (10.00%,  $n = 5$ ), or indicated that they were not sure (6.00%,  $n = 3$ ).

Of those students who listed actual realisations ( $n = 32$ ), the three most frequent responses were: expressing writer identity by including the writer's views, evaluations, or experiences (mentioned by 46.88%,  $n = 15$ ), by means of the individual writing style (34.38%,  $n = 11$ ), or by using personal pronouns (37.50%,  $n = 12$ ).

Interestingly, quite a large percentage (20.00%,  $n = 10$ ) of the students skipped the question on realisations entirely. In contrast, all of these students provided



**Fig. 22.5** Student responses to realisations of writer identity (reflection 1)

answers to this question after the course, which suggests substantial gains in awareness on the part of the students over the semester.

### 22.5.3.2 Writer Identity: Changes in Conceptions after Having Taken EAP

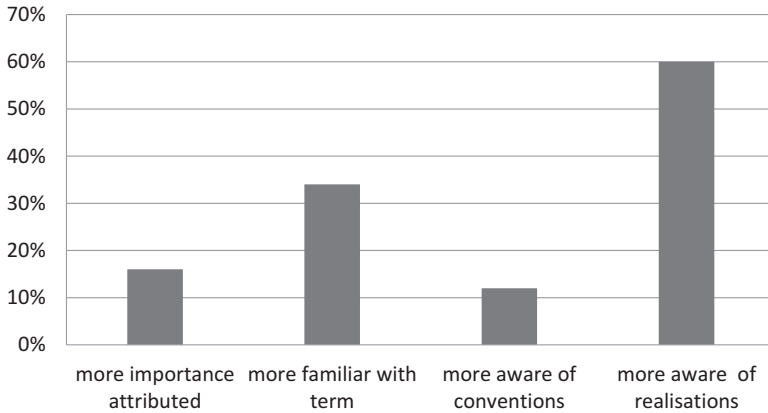
After having taken the EAP class, 80.00% ( $n = 40$ ) of the students replied that their views about writer identity had changed through the course. Within this student group, 42.50% ( $n = 17$ ) indicated that they were more familiar with the concept (see Fig. 22.6), as expressed by one of the students who had provided no answer to the questions on writer identity at the beginning of the course: “Before this semester I didn’t really know what to think about this question. Now I think that the writer’s identity plays an important role” (KSC\_FI2).

Also, 20.00% ( $n = 8$ ) explicitly indicated that they now attributed more importance to writer identity. As one student put it:

My view on writer identity have [sic] shifted towards acknowledging the author’s position and identity more over the course of the class. Now, I think that identity should have its place in academic writing. (LUF\_MI2)

In turn, for the 20.00% ( $n = 10$ ) whose perception of writer identity did not change through the course, it appears that most of them (80.00%,  $n = 8$ ) were well informed about the notion of identity at the beginning of the course already, as is indicated in this initial student answer:

Every academic text ... necessarily conveys the opinion of the author. Thus, the identity (meaning the set of beliefs, the approach to the problem in question, the formulation of the thesis) is intrinsic to the process of academic writing in my opinion. (MLD\_MI1)



**Fig. 22.6** Changes in student conceptions of writer identity after the course (reflection 2)

Only in two cases did the students' misconceptions remain unchanged after the course; that is, the concept was still misunderstood or writer identity was still considered unimportant.

Of the 20.00% ( $n = 10$ ) of students who had not answered the question on realisations of writer identity before the course, all students provided targeted answers on writer identity realisation after the course. Of these answers, 80.00% ( $n = 8$ ) mentioned explicit realisations, and 70.00% ( $n = 7$ ) explicitly indicated that they had become more aware of different realisations.

The fact that the course seems to have achieved substantial gains in student awareness concerning writer identity is also reflected in the overall results. In the second questionnaire, two thirds of all students ( $n = 30$ ) noted that through the EAP course, they had become more aware of different manifestations of writer identity (see Fig. 22.6). As one of the students (HIK\_FI2) noted:

I assume my views have changed because before I have not been aware of the different meanings and implications of these techniques. Now I have developed a sense to recognise a writer's identity in a text and make use of it in my own texts.

## 22.6 Discussion

The findings from the category-based qualitative content analysis of the surveys (Kuckartz, 2014) indicate that even highly advanced EFL students face challenges when writing L2 academic texts and need explicit instruction on how to do so effectively.

Despite students' awareness of the conventions underlying academic writing in English (Swales, 1990), they found it difficult to adhere to the guidelines approved by the academic discourse community (Ferguson et al., 2011), partly because of a perceived lack of experience in academic writing. Finding or selecting relevant

sources and organising them in coherent and cohesive ways were difficulties a majority mentioned at the beginning of the semester. A lack of drafting competence, narrowing down a research topic, and not drifting off topic were also listed among the perceived initial challenges and so was adhering to formal criteria, such as word count and citation rules. A large majority added language-related difficulties to this list, principally academic vocabulary. Some mentioned an overall lack of L2 competence here.

After having taken EAP, the vast majority observed changes in the perceived challenges: they mentioned having improved their writing skills and having gained knowledge of the genre conventions. Moreover, students found it easier to select sources, organise their ideas, and argue for their views. Structuring their papers and drafting seemed less problematic too, and they also noticed improvements on the level of language competence. Thus, it seems the EAP course helped them indeed to overcome many of the initial obstacles.

Overall, students' perceived (initial) challenges illustrate that learning how to interact effectively in the EAP discourse community involves acquiring macro-strategies (e.g., planning and drafting) but also micro-strategies (e.g., academic vocabulary) (Cumming, 2001), and that students need awareness-raising, explicit instruction, and feedback on both to internalise these conventions and develop automaticity in applying them flexibly (Barkaoui, 2007). Grappling with the complexity inherent in academic discourse and grasping the specific ways of meaning making, which "represent particular social relations and ways of seeing the world" (Hyland, 2009, p. 18), require time and practice, and the EAP course seems to offer them a platform to do so extensively.

Another aspect that becomes evident from the perceived difficulties mentioned above is that apart from L2 language competence, which seems to pose unique challenges in the case of our students (see also Chan, 2010), many of the aspects mentioned are not language-specific. This supports Tang's (2012b) claim that academic writing is a variety in its own right and no one's L1. For instance, students need to develop a process-oriented approach to writing and realise that it is a dynamic, social practice and that nobody is born a good academic writer (see, e.g., Clark & Ivanic, 1997). Based on their responses to the second survey, the EAP course seemed to make them realise that EAP-specific expertise needs to be developed (Ferguson et al., 2011). They further noticed "how language is structured to achieve social purposes" in this very specific context of use (Hyland, 2007, p. 148). Still, according to our students, judging the appropriateness of academic vocabulary is easier in the L1 and so is expressing themselves in a nuanced way due to advanced linguistic mastery. As the responses to the second survey revealed, these skills, too, were improved in our learners after having completed the course, and the explicit instruction increased their confidence.

Another frequently mentioned initial challenge was linked to learners' emotions: students reported self-doubt, a lack of self-confidence, anxiety, nervousness, and feeling intimidated as obstacles when having to produce an academic text in the L2. Still, they mentioned several aspects they enjoyed about L2 academic writing as well: they reported taking pleasure in the sense of accomplishment that comes with

finishing a paper and in elements falling into place. Additionally, they enjoyed gaining expertise in a research area and making progress in writing academic texts, including working with sources. This clearly demonstrates the crucial role emotions play in L2 attainment, and it shows that the presence of negative emotions does not necessarily imply a lack of experience of positive ones. While the former usually impede progress, the latter tend to have a broadening function and, thus, usually boost it (Fredrickson, 2003). Students' responses also illustrated that perceived challenges are not necessarily seen as something negative, as they frequently mentioned enjoying them too, which is in line with Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2016) definition of enjoyment. According to them, it is marked by complexity and "interacting components of challenge and perceived ability" (p. 216). Interestingly, negative emotions were no longer mentioned by the students in the second survey; the only emotion that was frequently mentioned was the confidence boost that came with improving their knowledge of genre conventions, for instance. This illustrates the power of positive emotions to undo negative ones (Rahimi & Askari Bigdeli, 2014) and suggests the importance of enhancing positive emotions in students to maximise their benefit from courses.

When asked about their overall self-perceived competence in academic writing in the L1 and L2, the EAP course led approximately one third of the students to observe a change on this level and to feel more confident in the L2 after having taken the course. This is in line with students' detailed responses, according to which they noticed having gained deeper insights into genre conventions, finding it easier to produce coherent and cohesive academic texts, and having expanded their academic vocabulary. The latter led them to state that they felt they were able to make informed choices, for instance, to express stance and interact with the audience (Hyland, 2005). Overall, approximately half of the students mentioned feeling more confident when producing academic texts in English than when doing so in their L1 at the end of the semester, which illustrates a sharp increase in their self-perceived L2 competence. Not only does this confirm that explicit instruction is much needed and useful, but it also illustrates that students developed an awareness and understanding of academic writing being a socio-cultural activity and that the approaches to it differ depending on the specific context (Hyland, 2002a).

As far as the notion of writer identity in general, and its role and realisation in academic writing in particular, is concerned, it seems that initially, the concept was fuzzy or unfamiliar to an astonishingly large number of the participants, with half of the students either deeming writer identity unimportant or presumably being unaware of the concept, and over one third of the students being unable to name linguistic realisations of writer identity. Not only does this point to a general lack of awareness of writer identity; it also speaks for the predominance of a skills-oriented view of academic writing (see Jordan, 1989) that views textual content as something 'objective' which is remote from the writer.

After the course, in contrast, writer identity was seen by almost all students as intricately linked to an academic text, and a more central role was generally attributed to the writer, which denotes a change in perspective, clearly acknowledging the social nature of academic writing (Fairclough, 1992). At the same time, the students



were also aware of the fact that the degrees of author visibility deemed appropriate varied between academic communities, or also between different genres within one community, which shows their familiarity with the notion of academic literacy practices in relation to writer identity (see Ivanic, 1998). On the level of linguistic features representing writer visibility, students were clearly more familiar with a range of possible realisations of writer identity, which is likely to impact on their ability to provide good academic arguments by showing effective authorial identity in their own future academic writing (Hyland, 2002b; Suganthi, 2012). This suggests that the course has succeeded in bringing about a paradigm shift in student conceptions towards a social view of academic writing practices in which students are aware that they have a place in the academic community as contributors to the discourse (Swales, 1990).

## 22.7 Conclusion

Tapping into advanced students' conceptions of L2 academic writing has yielded rich insights into their overall conceptualisation of writing processes, their perceived competences, and the challenges involved, as well as into the development of these conceptions through the EAP instruction received.

Regarding students' pre-instructional perceptions, it became apparent that even though they were at a relatively advanced stage, most students still seemed to have a rather partial, skills-based view of academic writing and to experience substantial and diverse challenges in the process. This is astonishing in view of the fact that students at the department should be familiar with process-oriented and genre-based approaches to (academic) writing, including formal conventions (e.g., referring to/citing sources, register), from their previous language classes (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#); Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#); Bruno-Lindner, "English in a Professional Context," [this volume](#)), and points to a compartmentalisation of knowledge rather than knowledge transfer on the part of the students. Clearly, there seems to be potential for consecutive courses to address and exploit synergies more explicitly. Specifically, at the start of the EAP course, awareness-raising activities that explicitly pick up, combine, and expand on relevant notions from previous classes, as well as acknowledging typical student challenges, would be vital additions. This would also benefit those students who joined the department at MA level in order to identify possible knowledge gaps and offer adequate support. As far as the development of these perceptions throughout the EAP course is concerned, the results of the post-instructional reflections suggest that the course's targeted foci, which were aligned with student needs apparent from their initial perceptions, have both managed to increase students' confidence and perceived competences, and succeeded in inducing a richer, more refined view of academic writing.

Lastly, the results also underscore our conviction that gaining insights into students' beliefs is of major importance not only for the students themselves, because their beliefs are influential for their learning process and, ultimately, achievements,

but also for teachers, in order to enable them to provide targeted and meaningful student support. For instance, this study identified learners' initial misconceptions of the role of writer identity in academic writing; this flawed perception confirms the necessity of the approach towards writer identity taken in the EAP course for achieving a paradigm shift. At the same time, the encouraging results at the end of the course show that the EAP class seems to be successful in doing so.

Overall, the student perceptions confirm that both L2-specific and language-independent challenges are experienced when attempting to master EAP-related challenges, and that the combination of L2-specific input and focused discussions of the socio-cultural and context-specific nature of academic writing evidently lead to an increase in perceived competence; both these levels should thus be foregrounded in EAP-course conceptions. Furthermore, raising awareness of the complexities, conditions, and constraints of (L2) academic discourse, in combination with explicit instruction, opportunities for extensive practice, and feedback targeted to specific student needs, should form cornerstones of EAP classes, as they appear to support students significantly in overcoming their perceived challenges and becoming more confident and competent members of the academic community.

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# Chapter 23

## Analysing Discourse Coherence in Students' L2 Writing: Rhetorical Structure and the Use of Connectives



Barbara Schiftner-Tengg

**Abstract** Studies of coherence and cohesion in learner writing report divergent results regarding the relationship between the two. What seems to be missing is an analytical level that allows for the investigation of the specific role that cohesive elements at the textual surface level play in the coherence structure of learner texts. To address this problem, a corpus of 30 argumentative essays written by first-year students of English at the University of Vienna is subjected to a multi-perspective analysis, including (1) global coherence ratings, (2) the description of the coherence structure, and (3) the analysis of connectives used. This chapter shows that the way coherence relations are signalled differs between coherent and less coherent (or incoherent) texts. It is found that there is a qualitative difference with regard to the types of connectives used, which can be related to their function in the discourse structure. The study also reveals that the amount of signalling varies between different types of relations.

**Keywords** Cohesion · Discourse-sensitive approach · Coherence ratings · Rhetorical structure theory · Argumentative essays

### 23.1 Introduction

Without a doubt, one crucial if not the most central aim of writing instruction, especially at an advanced level, is to help students produce *coherent* texts, that is, texts which are “logical and consistent,” “forming a unified whole” (Stevenson, 2010). But what does it take for a text to be coherent? Does it take a specific structure, a particular choice of words, or background knowledge (on the part of the writer and the reader)? Possibly all of that and more. Coherence is a complex concept and is difficult to grasp. In language teaching, coherence is sometimes associated with the

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B. Schiftner-Tengg (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [barbara.schiftner-tengg@bildung.gv.at](mailto:barbara.schiftner-tengg@bildung.gv.at)

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237

use of connectives or so-called *linking devices*, which overtly indicate the meaning relations in a text. A number of studies have investigated the impact of connectives in particular or cohesion (i.e., aspects of the textual surface level) more generally on (perceived) coherence in learner texts. However, most of these studies are quantitative in nature and their results are divergent (see Sect. 23.2.2). The question whether and how connectives contribute to coherence in learner writing remains. The study presented in this chapter aims to bridge this gap by taking a discourse-sensitive rather than quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between coherence and the use of connectives.

## 23.2 Theoretical Background

### 23.2.1 *Coherence and Cohesion*

The conceptualisation of *coherence* adopted in this study is one of discourse coherence, which is a “‘cognitive achievement’ [...] construed by recipients’ application of background knowledge as well as processing textual and contextual (pragmatic) discourse features” (Gruber, 2014, p. 268). Coherence is thus not seen as an entity of the text itself, but as co-constructed by the writer and the reader, or, to put it in Bublitz’ (1999) words, “as a context-dependent, hearer- (or reader-)oriented and comprehension-based, interpretive notion” (p. 2). Following this conceptualisation of coherence, what our students need to master is to organise their thoughts and put them into words in such a way that others can interpret their texts as coherent discourse.

*Cohesion*, on the other hand, is concerned with the text product, with those textual features that are apparent as surface elements of the text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as “a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other element that is crucial for the interpretation of it” (p. 8), and differentiate different cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, lexical cohesion, and conjunction. While coherence often seems elusive, these cohesive devices can be pinpointed in the text. It is for this reason of tangibility that in the context of English language teaching, discourse coherence is often associated with cohesion. The underlying question of this research project is whether the use of cohesive devices as such really enhances coherence.

The elements of cohesion this study focuses on are so-called *linking devices*, which every student encounters at some point in their language studies (at school or university), for example in the form of lists giving examples of words and phrases that can be used to connect ideas or when the “variety of linking devices used” is one of the criteria assessed in their writing (as for example in the rating scales for the standardised school-leaving exam in Austria, see Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2019). They differ from other cohesive devices in that they are not anaphoric or cataphoric (i.e., referring back to something in the previous text or pointing forward in the text), but rather provide “a

specification of the way in which what is to follow is systematically related to what has gone before" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 227). In Halliday and Hasan's terminology, this aspect of cohesion is labelled *conjunction*. To avoid confusion with the grammatical class of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, the cohesive devices of this category will henceforth be referred to as *connectives*.

Meaning relations between information units in a text can often be recognised without being explicitly marked by connectives (e.g., Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 5; Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 229). However, comprehension studies suggest that explicit signalling eases understanding by minimizing the processing load (e.g., Cain & Nash, 2011; Sanders et al., 2007; Sanders & Noordman, 2000; Soria & Ferrari, 1998). One could thus speculate that facilitating initial understanding by using connectives to signal meaning relations could ultimately have a positive effect on perceived coherence. This would beg the question whether a text that uses more connectives to signal individual relations is perceived as more coherent in its entirety.

Another question is whether the use of connectives is generally optional or whether some connectives are obligatory. Hellmann (1995) suggests an influence of the relation type on the necessity for explicit signalling. She argues that while "continuity does not have to be established explicitly," "discontinuity [...] has to be indicated, and indeed tends to be" (p. 199). This proposition seems to be confirmed in an analysis of Italian written discourse by Soria and Ferrari (1998), whose results suggest that "lexical marking is essential for the inference of the contrastive component of meaning" (p. 39). An analysis of connectives that takes these suggestions into account will necessarily have to consider the underlying meaning relations signalled by the connectives used.

The question whether the overall coherence of learner texts is related to the number of connectives used has been subject to a number of studies. The following section provides a brief overview.

### **23.2.2 Research on Connectives and Coherence in Learner Writing**

There is a relatively large number of studies concerned with various aspects of connective use in learner writing, often in comparison to connective use in first-language (L1) writing (e.g., Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; Chen, 2006; Field & Yip, 1992; Hinkel, 2001; Milton & Tsang, 1993; Tankó, 2004; Tapper, 2005), because corpora of learner texts, like all language corpora, lend themselves to (quantitative) analyses of discrete linguistic items. While these studies reveal interesting aspects such as whether learners use specific features more or less often than native speakers (*overuse* and *underuse*), or whether there are semantic, syntactic, or stylistic specifics to learner language, it is not their aim to establish a link between the use of connectives and the coherence of texts.



Despite the strong focus on frequency analysis in learner corpus research, there are a number of studies that investigate the impact of various cohesive devices on coherence or writing quality more generally. While some of these studies report some correlation between writing quality and the number of cohesive devices used (e.g., Crossley et al., 2016; Jafarpur, 1991; Liu & Braine, 2005; Yang & Sun, 2012), others come to the conclusion that no such direct relation can be found (e.g., Shea, 2009; Tapper, 2005; Zhang, 2000). Even though these diverging results may, in part at least, be related to differences in methodology (diverging procedures of measuring text quality or coherence, analysis of different aspects of cohesion or investigation of different text types, etc.), they clearly show the difficulty in relating quantitative analyses of cohesive devices to evaluations of text coherence. Quantitative analysis by itself does not provide enough information to answer the question whether cohesive devices in general or connectives in particular contribute to perceived coherence. In fact, Zhang (2000, p. 82), who found no relation between the quantity of cohesive devices and coherence, reports qualitative differences in the way cohesive ties are used in highly-rated versus poorly-rated essays, and Shea suggests that a more sophisticated analysis could address *how* connectives are used by the learners (Shea, 2009, p. 8). For a more detailed, critical review of the literature, see Schiffner (2017, pp. 15–25).

### **23.2.3 *Bridging the Gap Between Cohesion and Coherence: Rhetorical Structure***

In order to be able to say more about the way connectives function in discourse, we need to find a way of pinpointing their place and function in the discourse structure. To address this issue, the current study complements global coherence ratings with analyses of relational coherence, providing descriptions of how individual units of meaning are related at different hierarchical levels.

The objective of this study is to investigate the coherence structure of texts produced by learners of English and analyse the use of connectives in the context of this structure. By taking such a meaning-focused approach, it aims to address the question whether connectives, as one aspect of cohesion, contribute to the coherence of learner texts – not only quantitatively, but in a qualitative analysis of how they are used.

## **23.3 Methods and Analysis**

Following the aim of taking a meaning-focussed approach to the analysis of connectives in relation to discourse coherence, a multi-perspective analytical framework was developed for this study. This framework includes not only (1) global



coherence ratings and (2) the analysis of the connectives used, but also (3) the analysis of the coherence structure of each text. The following sections provide a brief description of the data analysed as well as the analytical framework. For a detailed discussion, see Schiffner (2017, pp. 91–128).

### 23.3.1 *Text Corpus*

The corpus of 30 texts analysed in this study has a size of 8022 tokens, the average text length being 267 words. The sample was randomly drawn from a corpus of student writing collected at the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, in the summer semester 2009, as part of the *Database of English Learner Texts* (DELT, Centre for English Language Teaching, 2007-). All texts in the sample were produced by L1 German students of English as part of the Common Final Test (CFT), which concludes two semesters of Integrated Language and Study Skills (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). The texts were taken from the argumentative writing section of the CFT, written in response to the following prompt:

Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no special knowledge of the following topic:

*Some people think that it is important to have a single language as an official international language. In their opinion, such an international language should be taught at school and used at university to ensure effective global communication in business, academic life, and international relations. This idea, however, is strongly opposed by others who argue that such a move will make it difficult in future to identify individual countries and could eventually lead to a loss of national culture and identity.*

Comment on the advantages and disadvantages of having one global language. Do not go into detail which language it should be. (250–300 words).

(CFT 2009 Writing Task 2 – Task description)

In order to enter the English Language Competence programme, the students need to take a test (see Sweeney-Novak, [this volume](#)) and achieve a score equivalent to level B2 according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), so the students who contributed to the corpus can be expected to have at least upper-intermediate English proficiency.

## 23.3.2 Analytical Framework

### 23.3.2.1 Coherence Ratings

As mentioned above, a three-layer analytical framework was developed for this study. In a first step, every text was rated for global coherence on a semantic differential scale ranging from “perfectly coherent” (score 6) to “incoherent” (score 1) by four English lecturers (two native speakers, two non-native speakers). The mean of these four ratings was used to group the corpus into high-rated (Coh-H), higher-medium-rated (Coh-MH), lower-medium-rated (Coh-ML), and low-rated or incoherent essays (Coh-L).

### 23.3.2.2 Coherence Structure Analysis

Secondly, the coherence structure of the texts was analysed using Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST, Mann & Thompson, 1987, 1988). RST provides a means of drawing up tree diagrams of texts which show the meaning relations between individual spans of text. The underlying assumption is that coherent texts can be interpreted as a whole, consisting of elements that can be perceived as hanging together. The minimal unit of analysis in this study is based on the “usual division rule” proposed by Taboada and Mann (2006), where “each independent clause, along with all of its dependencies, constitutes a unit” (p. 429). To reach a more fine-grained analysis, however, finite adverbial clauses are treated as separate units. Figure 23.1 provides an example of the RST analysis of a student text, drawn up using O’Donnell’s (2003) RST Tool.

RST essentially defines two different structural categories of relations: asymmetrical relations, where one span is more central than the other (indicated in the diagram by curved arrows), and symmetrical (multinuclear) relations, which consist of two equally important parts (indicated in the diagram by straight lines). The original RST framework (Mann & Thompson, 1987, 1988) provides detailed definitions for 24 asymmetrical and multinuclear relations, where the asymmetrical relations are divided into “presentational” (essentially interpersonal) and “subject-matter” (essentially ideational and textual) relations. This set of relations is, however, to be understood as “an open set, susceptible to extension and modification for the purposes of particular genres and cultural styles” (Mann & Thompson, 1988, p. 250). For a classification of the RST relation set into ideational, interpersonal, and textual relations, see Abelen et al. (1993).

Crucially for the present study, the RST relation definitions make do without reference to the concrete features of the linguistic surface level. Connectives are not mentioned in the definitions used for identifying the meaning relations, and thus a circularity of analysis is avoided. The RST relation set was adapted to suit the specifics of the current study (see Table 23.1; for details on the process, see Schiftner, 2017, pp. 94–96).

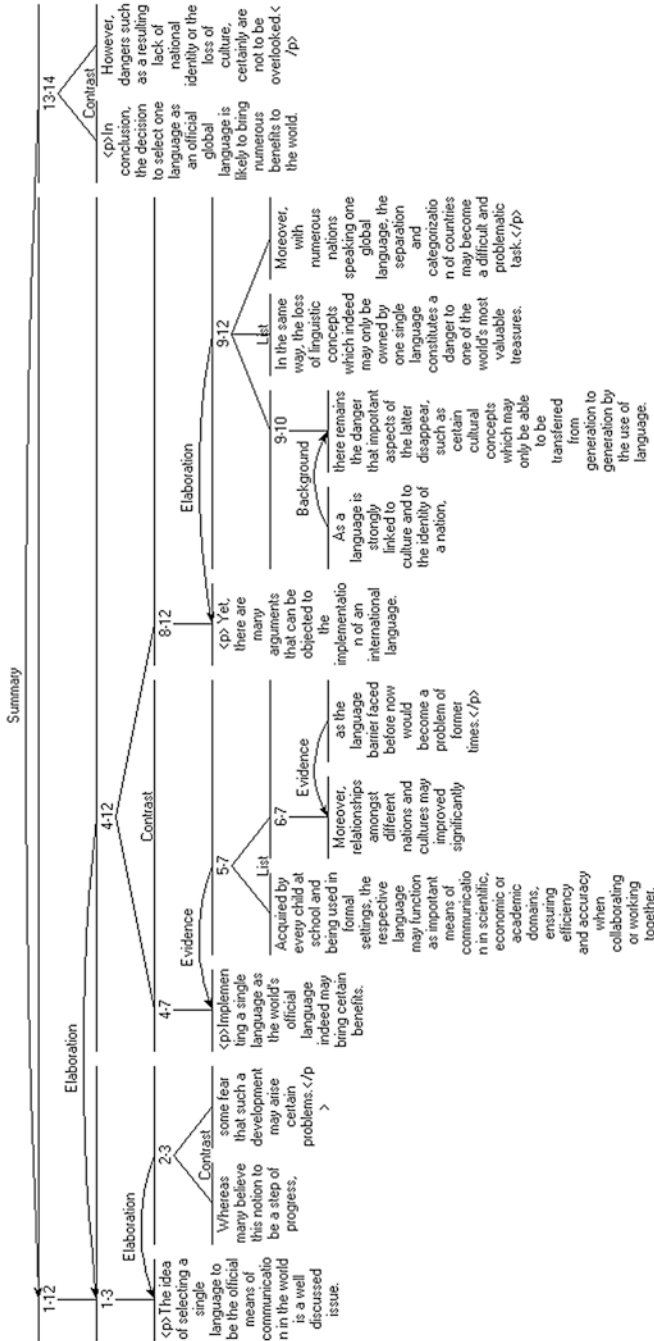


Fig. 23.1 RST analysis of a student text (DELT\_1152, mean coherence rating: 4.25)

**Table 23.1** RST relation set used in the present study (crossed out relations were not found in the texts analysed)

<b>RST relations</b>		
<i>Asymmetrical</i>		<i>Symmetrical</i>
<b>Presentational</b>	<b>Subject matter</b>	<b>Multinuclear</b>
antithesis	cause	contrast
background	<del>circumstance</del>	joint
<del>enablement</del>	condition	list
concession	elaboration	multinuclear restatement
evidence	evaluation	sequence
<del>justify</del>	interpretation	
<del>motivation</del>	<del>means</del>	
<del>preparation</del>	<del>otherwise</del>	
	<del>purpose</del>	
	solutionhood	
	result	
	<del>restatement</del>	
	unconditional	
	<del>unless</del>	
	summary	

### 23.3.2.3 Analysis of Connectives

The coding of connectives is the third and last layer of analysis in the present study. Connectives can now be analysed in the context of the discourse structure, allowing the analyst to investigate how the individual relations are realised and whether they are signalled by a connective or not. In this study, relations are referred to as “signalled relations” if they are marked by a connective.

Connectives are a semantically and grammatically heterogeneous group of items. For the purposes of the present study, they were analysed according to a grammatical categorisation of discourse markers proposed by Fraser (1999), as presented in Table 23.2.

## 23.4 Results and Discussion

As outlined in Sect. 23.3.2.1, all 30 texts were rated by four university lecturers. The mean of these ratings was used to divide the texts into four levels of coherence, as shown in Table 23.3: high coherence (7 texts), medium-high coherence (10 texts), medium-low coherence (7 texts), and low coherence or incoherence (6 texts).

**Table 23.2** Grammatical categorisation of connectives following Fraser (1999)

Type of connective	Examples
coordinate conjunction	and, but, or
subordinate conjunctions	so, since, because, while
adverb	additionally, moreover, however
prepositional phrase	for example, as a result, in conclusion, on the other hand
idioms	still and all, all things considered

**Table 23.3** Number of texts according to coherence rating

Coherence level	Label	Rating	No. of texts
High coherence	<b>Coh-H</b>	5.00–6.00	7
Medium coherence (higher)	<b>Coh-MH</b>	4.00–4.99	10
Medium coherence (lower)	<b>Coh-ML</b>	3.00–3.99	7
Low coherence	<b>Coh-L</b>	2.00–2.99	4
Inhoherent		1.00–1.99	2

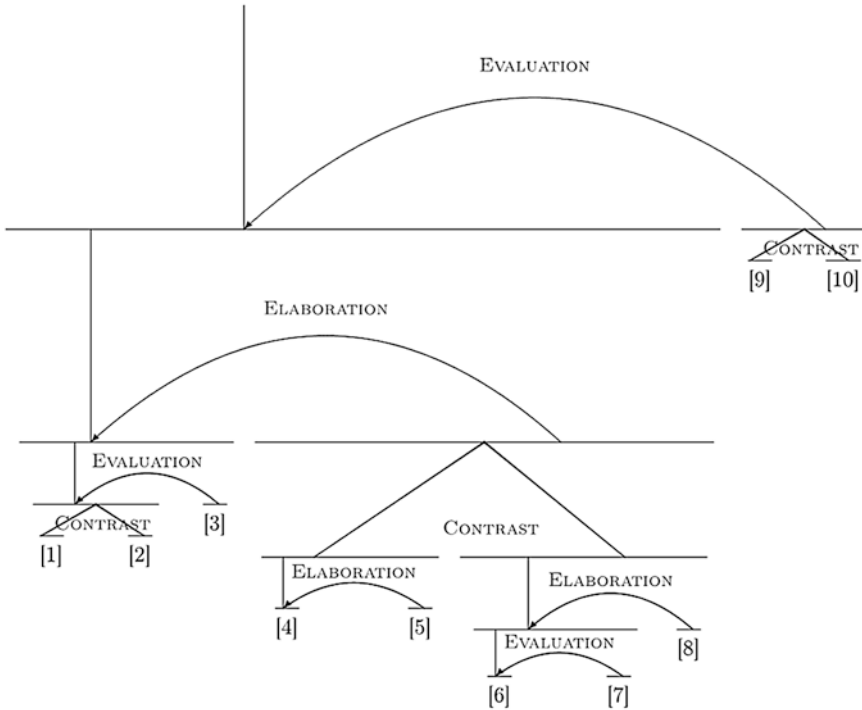
### 23.4.1 Structural Patterns

Of the 30 texts analysed, 24 in some way contrast the advantages and disadvantages of one global language (see the writing prompt cited in Sect. 23.3.1, which asks the students to “present a written argument or case to an educated reader” and to “comment on the advantages and disadvantages of having one global language”). The RST analysis reveals that the relational structures of the learner texts are quite diverse, especially in Coh-L (i.e., the texts rated low in coherence). Nonetheless, two different structural patterns can be discerned. These two patterns are illustrated by the slightly simplified diagrams shown in Figs. 23.2 and 23.3.

The most productive pattern mentions the contrast in the introduction and elaborates on it in the text body. In many texts that follow this basic structure, the contrast is also apparent in the conclusion. An example of this structure is presented in Fig. 23.2 (DELT\_1093), where the CONTRAST relation can be seen in the introduction ([1]–[3]), the text body ([4]–[8]), and in the conclusion ([8]–[9]) (see also DELT\_1152, presented in Fig. 23.1, as an example of this structure).

The second discernible pattern starts by presenting a claim, which is supported by evidence in the text body, as exemplified in Fig. 23.3. The last paragraph then comes back to the claim, in Fig. 23.3 (DELT\_950) supported by a summary of the arguments introduced in the text body.

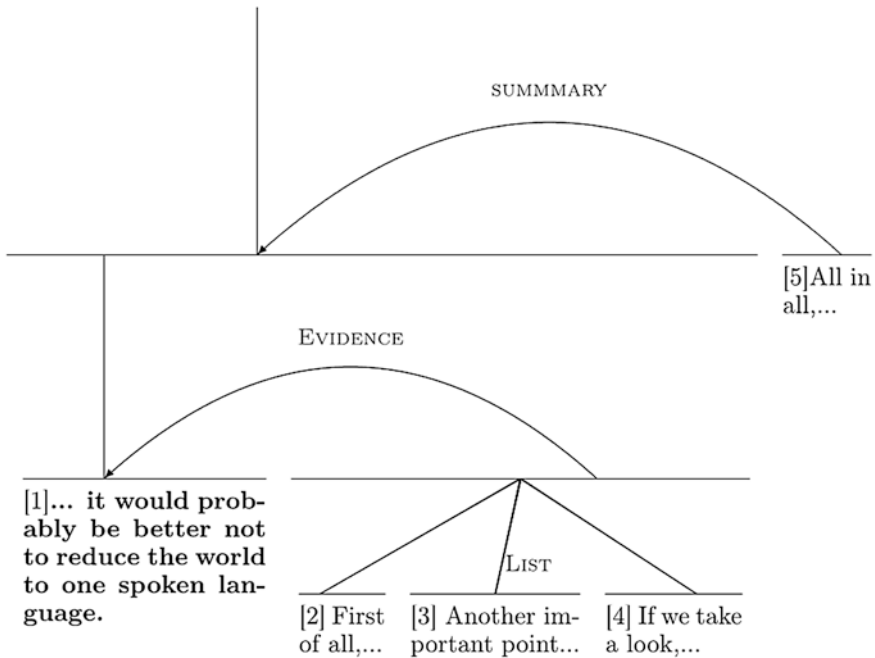
These patterns could be termed successful patterns since most texts rated high in coherence follow one of these two patterns (6 of 7 in Coh-H, 8 of 10 in Coh-MH). The most productive pattern, which introduces the contrast in the introduction and elaborates on it in the text body, appears in a total of 17 texts (5 times in Coh-H, 6



[1]Some people argue that it is important to have one global language, which should be taught as the official international language at schools and universities. [2]Others, however, think that this will lead to various problems in future. [3]As so many things in life, the question of having a global language has numerous advantages and disadvantages. [4]First of all, one important advantage of having one global language would be... [5]...(units 5-7) [6]On the other hand, however, a lot of people argue against having one global language. [7]and indeed, there are various disadvantages. [8]...(units 10-16) [9]In conclusion, one could say that the introduction of a global language would certainly benefit us on many levels. [10]Nevertheless, some severe consequences should be taken into consideration too.

Fig. 23.2 RST structure of DELT\_1093 (mean coherence rating: 5.75)

times in Coh-MH, 4 times in Coh-ML, twice in Coh-L). While this shows that the contrastive structure is in principle also productive in the texts with medium and low coherence ratings, some structural differences can be observed. In both Coh-L texts, for example, there is a marked imbalance in the text body, where one side of the argument is elaborated in much more detail than the other. This is also true for five medium-rated texts. Another apparent structural difference concerns the conclusion: While all but one Coh-H texts show a clear (symmetrical) CONTRAST relation in the conclusion, medium and low rated texts often employ other contrastive



[1]Units 1-3: There are some people who argue that it is important to have a single language as an official international language to provide better conditions for effective global communication in business. | However, even if this argument seems to be very convincing, | **it would probably be better not to reduce the world to one spoken language.** [2]First of all, the individuality between different cultures and identities would vanish sooner or later. [+ units 5-7] [3]Another important point would be that... [units 8-11] [4]If we take a look, for example,... [units 12-16] [5]Units 17-18: All in all, it would be a large loss of identity for the human race to speak one language, | because the most important thing for a person should be his own identity, which is created not only through his character, but also because of the culture and individuality of the language spoken in his home-country.

Fig. 23.3 RST structure of DELT\_950 (mean coherence rating: 5.25)

relations, such as CONCESSION or ANTITHESIS, state personal opinion, or do not mention the contrast at all. Interestingly, one text in Coh-H uses a different kind of contrastive structure. It presents the topic in the introduction without specifically mentioning the contrast and then elaborates on it by listing arguments, where some ideas are contrasted with counterarguments at lower structural levels. These contrastive structures can be compared to the “block pattern” and “point-by-point” pattern of argumentative essays presented in textbooks such as Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 143).

While the contrastive pattern is fairly frequent, the pattern introducing a claim and presenting EVIDENCE in a LIST relation appears in three texts only (once in Coh-H, twice in Coh-MH). In the remaining nine texts, which do not follow either a contrastive structure or present and successfully support a claim (two in Coh-MH, three in Coh-ML, four in Coh-L), no common structural pattern could be discerned. Evident structural discrepancies of low rated texts are imbalances in the text body, or in two cases even missing introductions or conclusions. Clearly, while coherent or fairly coherent texts tend to follow a pattern, the lower rated texts do not.

### 23.4.2 *Explicit Marking of Coherence Relations: The Use of Connectives*

Having established the most successful structural patterns in the texts, let us now turn to the core of this study: the use of connectives to overtly indicate these relational structures. There is considerable variation in the number of signalled relations, ranging from 25 to 80% per text. The mean percentages per coherence level are, however, fairly similar (Coh-H: 56.3%, Coh-MH: 58.6%, Coh-ML: 50.4%, Coh-L: 54.7%). Combined with the high variation between texts, this suggests that there is no direct relation between the amount of signalling and the coherence ratings.

A different picture emerges when we consider the types of signals used according to the categorisation proposed by Fraser (1999) (see Sect. 23.3.2.3). Apart from idioms, all grammatical categories of connectives are used. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 23.4. The data reveals that while the differences in the overall percentage of signalled relations between the four groups are not conclusive, a clear tendency emerges when the type of signal is considered. In fact, the percentage of conjunctions used versus the percentage of adverbs or prepositional phrases used is almost reversed in Coh-H and Coh-L. While in Coh-H, 35% of the relations are signalled with adverbs or prepositional phrases, only 20% of the relations in Coh-L are signalled with these types of connectives. Conversely, in Coh-L texts 35% of the relations are signalled with conjunctions, while these simple connectives are only used in 21% of the relations in

**Table 23.4** Percentage of coherence relations signalled by different types of connectives

Relations signalled by ...		Subordinate/coordinate conjunctions	Adverbs/prepositional phrases
<b>Coh-H</b>	(56.3% signalled)	21%	35%
<b>Coh-MH</b>	(58.5% signalled)	18%	41%
<b>Coh-ML</b>	(50.4% signalled)	22%	28%
<b>Coh-L</b>	(54.7% signalled)	35%	20%



Coh-H. Coh-ML shows a lower overall percentage of signalled relations than the other three groups of texts (50.4%). It is worth noting that the number of relations signalled by conjunctions in Coh-ML (22%) is similar to Coh-H (21%) and Coh-MH (18%) but that the lower overall count of signalled relations in these medium-low rated texts is due to a lower percentage of relations signalled with adverbs and prepositional phrases (28% as opposed to 35% and 41% in Coh-H and Coh-MH, respectively).

The differentiation between those types is crucial since the grammatical status of these connectives also determines the roles they can take in the discourse structure. The high percentage of conjunctions in Coh-L suggests that connectives are frequently used to signal intra-sentential relations in low-rated essays. Van der Vliet and Redeker (2014) report a generally high percentage of explicitly marked intra-sentential relations in their analysis of Dutch texts. They relate this to the fact that “connectives are often syntactically required in clause combining” (p. 35). Assuming the same for the English language, we cannot help but wonder about the low percentage of subordinate or coordinate conjunctions in those texts rated higher in coherence. One explanation could be the tendency of more advanced learners to use embedded clauses rather than complex sentences.

Adverbs and prepositional phrases cannot only be used to signal local inter-sentential relations but also have the potential to signal relations between larger spans of text. The more frequent use of adverbs and prepositional phrases in Coh-MH and Coh-H thus suggests a more frequent use of connectives at higher levels of text organisation. To test this hypothesis, all connectives signalling relations at the top three levels of the RST structure were determined. In order to ascertain a focus on higher levels of the discourse structure, connectives signalling relations between two minimal units (as for example the CONTRAST relation between [13] and [14] in Fig. 23.1 or between [9] and [10] in Fig. 23.2) were disregarded in this analysis. The results presented in Table 23.5 confirm that connectives are more frequently used to signal superordinate discourse structures in texts rated higher in coherence (Coh-H and Coh-MH).

The data presented in Table 23.5 also acknowledges that there is variation between the individual texts. Some Coh-L and Coh-ML texts use just as many top-level signals as higher rated texts. While in some cases, the signals used are not appropriate (e.g., conjunctions used to mark superordinate, multi-sentential structures), the cause for the lower ratings of these texts is more likely to be found

**Table 23.5** Mean number of top-level signals per text

	Mean no. of top-level signals used/text	SD
<b>Coh-H</b>	<b>2.4</b>	1.13
<b>Coh-MH</b>	<b>2.5</b>	0.71
<b>Coh-ML</b>	<b>1.6</b>	0.98
<b>Coh-L</b>	<b>1.7</b>	0.82

in the (flawed) coherence structures (see Sect. 23.4.1) than in the use of connectives.

A closer look at the analysis of all texts at the Coh-H level reveals the reason for the relatively high standard deviation in this group: One of the texts (in fact the one with the second highest coherence rating) uses no top-level connectives at all. This of course calls into question the hypothesis that texts that use more connectives to signal superordinate coherence structures may be perceived as more coherent.

The RST analysis can help interpret this result: The text that makes do without top-level signals elaborates on the topic not by contrasting but by listing arguments (see the results of the RST analysis in Sect. 23.4.1). While connectives are used at lower levels of the discourse structure to mark relations such as antithesis, contrast and evidence, the superordinate structure is not signalled at all. The fact that this does not lead to a decrease in perceived coherence suggests that the type of relation has an influence on the need for signalling.

### 23.4.3 *Considering Relation Types: Contrastive Versus Additive Relations*

Taking up the idea that there are differences in the requirement for signalling in continuous versus discontinuous relations (see Sect. 23.2.1), this section investigates connective use in contrastive versus additive relations. Three of the RST relations applied in this study can be considered contrastive, namely CONTRAST, ANTITHESIS and CONCESSION. Relations which indicate that a unit is amplified or corroborated by new pieces of information added are considered additive relations. Additive RST relations applied in the present study are ELABORATION and EVIDENCE. As a third element, the multinuclear LIST-relation, which links comparable items, is also considered in the analysis.

The results presented in Table 23.6 show that the amount of signalling is considerably higher in contrastive relations than in additive relations. Please note that the relatively high amount of signalling of LIST relations compared to the other two

**Table 23.6** Signalling of different relation types (contrastive and additive relations)

		No. of relations	No. of relations signalled with a connective	% of signalled relations	Mean % of signalled relations
<b>Contrastive relations</b>	Contrast	46	34	<b>74%</b>	<b>79% signalled</b>
	Antithesis	34	28	<b>82%</b>	
	Concession	6	6	<b>100%</b>	
<b>Additive relations</b>	Elaboration	91	25	<b>27%</b>	<b>38% signalled</b>
	Evidence	76	22	<b>29%</b>	
	List	54	38	<b>70%</b>	

additive relation types analysed can be related to the fact that a LIST relation, though often linking three or more spans of text, is considered signalled even if only one of these units is marked by a connective.

The finding that contrastive relations are signalled more frequently than additive relations in the student texts compares to an analysis of German and English editorials by Speyer and Fetzer (2014, p. 107), who also report a preference of CONTRAST relations to be explicitly indicated as opposed to a preference for the implicit representation of CONTINUATION, ELABORATION, COMMENT, and EXPLANATION. These results support other studies which suggest that discontinuous relations need to be marked, while non-signalling of continuous relations does not hinder comprehension (see Hellmann, 1995; Soria & Ferrari, 1998).

#### 23.4.4 *Beyond Connectives: Alternative Ways of Marking Coherence Relations*

As mentioned in Sect. 23.3.2.3, a relation is considered signalled in this study if it is marked by a connective. Thanks to the multi-perspective analytical framework applied in this study, however, it is possible to examine the relations irrespective of the use of connectives and thus detect alternative ways of marking relations (i.e., linguistic signposts other than connectives). There are indeed relations that are not signalled by connectives but indicated by other means that express a connection between two units of meaning. Taboada (2009, p. 128) goes as far as to suggest that all relations may indeed be signalled by some means. Her considerations include “punctuation, layout, syntactic cues, semantic relations, lexical and grammatical cohesion, and genre” (Taboada, 2009, p. 135). In this study, only linguistic indicators that clearly express a connection were considered. Illustrations (1) to (6) show examples which can be attributed to lexical cohesion and reference:

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| (1) CONTRAST    | Having one global language worldwide, communication would no longer be a problem. [...] The other side of having one common world-wide language would be that [...]. (DELT_1177) |
| (2) CONTRAST    | There are many things you could argue in favour of a world language [...]. Problems with the introduction of a lingua franca are [...]. (DELT_1130)                              |
| (3) ELABORATION | This is the case especially [...] (DELT_1199) / Among these [...] (DELT_1093)  |
| (4) ELABORATION | One such example is [...] (DELT_1072)  |
| (5) LIST        | Another important point [...] (DELT_1003, DELT_950)  |
| (6) LIST        | A further problem would arise [...] (DELT_1068)  |

In the present study, these alternative ways of signalling relations appear primarily in high- and medium-rated texts. Clearly, these strategies are also relevant when it comes to the analysis of different relation types. The percentage of signalled

CONTRAST relations, for example, is 89% (rather than 74%) if these alternative strategies are considered.

### **23.4.5 *Desiderata***

The three-layer model developed for this study has only been applied to a small set of learner texts, all written on the same (argumentative) task. While the analysis yielded some interesting insights regarding the function of connectives in the discourse structure of the learner texts under consideration, follow-up studies could test whether the results hold true for (possibly larger) samples of other types of learner texts. Since different text types require different (superordinate) structures, it is to be expected that the amount of signalling required varies with text type.

While the properties of successful learner writing analysed here represent one important area of investigation, analyses of learner texts (which are pedagogical text types written on some task and do not normally occur in the same way in other settings) should be complemented by analyses of expert writing. Research on expert writing could explore how relational structures are signalled in different established text types and test the necessity (or common practice) of signalling different relation types.

## **23.5 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to unravel the question whether perceived coherence in learner texts is related to the use of connectives. It has been found that while the overall numbers of connectives used are not conclusive, the types of connectives used at different coherence levels vary. Texts rated high in coherence tend to use certain types of connectives, namely adverbs and prepositional phrases, more often than low-rated essays.

The analysis of the discourse structure as a third layer of analysis proved successful in that it yielded information which could not be obtained by an analysis of coherence ratings and connective use alone. It appears that whether or not a relation needs to be signalled depends on the relation type. The results suggest that some types of relations need to be signalled while others do not: Contrastive relations are signalled markedly more often than additive relations. While the signalling of superordinate structures with adequate connectives seems to be positively related to coherence ratings (superordinate structures are signalled more often in high-rated than in low-rated texts), whether or not superordinate structures need to be signalled is dependent on the overall text structure, that is, on the types of relations used at the top levels of the coherence structure. In this study, texts rated high in coherence are organised by contrastive or additive structures, where the contrastive structures are

always made explicit while both explicit and implicit representations of additive structures were found.

Interestingly, some texts rated low in coherence use just as many connectives as high-rated essays. While some differences in the type of connectives used and regarding the level of the coherence structure at which these connectives appear were found, the results suggest that the use of connectives is secondary to the underlying meaning relations. Adequately used, connectives support and complement an existing structure by signalling and possibly disambiguating meaning relations, but they cannot “impose a relational meaning” (Degand 1998, p. 32). This can be related to Zhang (2000, p. 82), who found that cohesive devices are used to link “random and sometimes confusing ideas” in low-rated essays. This implies that connectives cannot remedy problems in the coherence structure.

Rather, the coherence structure determines the use of connectives. The adequate use of connectives is thus tied to the underlying rhetorical structure of a text. As the results of this study show, the use of connectives as such – in a quantitative sense – does not necessarily have a positive effect on coherence. In view of these results, the variety of linking devices used also seems a questionable criterion for judging text quality (see Sect. 23.2.1). Evaluating the effective use of connectives to signal (superordinate) coherence relations – where necessary – would seem a more appropriate approach.

With regard to the teaching context, the question remains whether teaching connectives enables students to write more coherently. Considering the study results, which clearly show that the effectiveness of connectives is closely linked to the meaning relations they signal, connectives should ideally be taught with reference to these underlying meaning relations. For example, students should be aware that contrastive relations need to be signalled while additive relations may stay implicit. Under the premise that language may aid thinking, having the linguistic resources to express certain relations may in fact help students create a sensible structure. As this investigation showed, however, the range of linguistic resources to overtly indicate – especially superordinate – relational structures goes beyond the use of connectives.

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## Chapter 24

# Advanced Students' and Lecturers' Views on the Usefulness of Vocabulary Logs for Expanding Vocabulary



Helen Heaney

**Abstract** As both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge are essential to become truly proficient in English, a strong focus on individual vocabulary work is paramount at an advanced level. In the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, vocabulary logs are used in the first two language competence modules as a written record of some of the students' work on planning, discovering, recording, and consolidating their knowledge of new words or new aspects of word meaning. Students' attitudes towards the logs run the gamut from love to hate, however, not just within a particular course but also as they progress through the ELC programme, potentially affecting the utility of the logs as one strategy to improve students' vocabulary. Starting in winter semester 2017, the vocabulary log for the first ELC course was standardized; in March 2018, lecturers and students participated in a voluntary online survey eliciting their views on the log's usefulness for vocabulary learning (strategies) to help ascertain whether further changes were necessary to improve its reception and efficiency. In relation to almost all of the tasks in the first log, the lecturers were more convinced of their usefulness than the students were. As a result of the survey, the log was streamlined, and a greater focus should be laid on increasing students' awareness of the rationale behind individual tasks.

**Keywords** Vocabulary learning · Lexical knowledge · Memory style · Online survey · Likert scale

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H. Heaney (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [helen.heaney@univie.ac.at](mailto:helen.heaney@univie.ac.at)



## 24.1 Introduction

Students attending the first of the two courses in the Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS) module (see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)) in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna have a minimum level of B2+ according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001; see Sweeney-Novak, [this volume](#)). By the time they graduate, they are expected to have reached level C2 (Universität Wien, 2013, p. 1).

One factor influencing their progression to C2 is whether they can increase the amount of vocabulary that they know and use correctly. Early research by Meara and Milton on vocabulary size links level B2 to a score of between 3250 and 3750 out of 5000 on the *Swansea Levels Test* (2003, p. 5). More recently, the *English Vocabulary Profile* (2015) lists some 4700 headwords for levels A1 to B2 (Capel, 2012, p. 3), with just below 2300 more selected for the C levels. Although both lists seem to imply that B2 learners have already completed between 65 and 75% of their ‘vocabulary learning journey’ en route for mastery at C2 level, they are capped for pragmatic reasons; other tools working with frequency lists cover many more lexemes, such as Cobb’s (n.d.) *BNC-COCA-25 VocabProfiler* with 25 1k bands or Davies’ (n.d.) *COCA Count Profiler* with the most frequent 100,000 individual words from the corpus.

A second factor is what strategies students use for learning vocabulary, including whether the habits they developed at secondary school are appropriate when trying to improve their academic and subject-specific English at university. The test specifications for the *Language in Use* paper in the standardized school leaving examination in Austria (Universität Innsbruck, n.d.) list knowledge of sense relations, affixation, and multi-word units in the section on lexical range, suggesting that school books which are used to prepare pupils for the exam should have moved away from the traditional presentation of single words on English-German word lists. Yet the item on the survey asking how participants learnt vocabulary in the last 4 years of school revealed that word lists were still very popular (see Sect. 24.5.1).

Consequently, in ILSS 1, one goal of the vocabulary log is to increase the breadth and depth of students’ vocabulary knowledge. A second aim is to explore the different stages of vocabulary learning, from planning, discovery, and recording to consolidation, and to suggest a range of learning strategies at each stage. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the log was not considered equally useful by all students. One reason could be that it was not identical across all parallel courses so that important background information and useful tasks were missing. Thus, in autumn 2017, the vocabulary log for ILSS 1 was standardized, and in March 2018, lecturers and students participated in a voluntary online survey eliciting their views on the usefulness of vocabulary learning (strategies) in general and of the tasks in the vocabulary log in particular to help ascertain whether further changes were necessary to improve its reception and efficiency. This chapter reports on the findings of that survey. The next section looks at students’ advanced vocabulary needs at the

start of the ELC programme and how the tasks in the vocabulary log have been set up to cover the four clusters of vocabulary learning strategies. The results of the survey are then presented and discussed in four thematic blocks: background information on vocabulary learning, tasks specific to ILSS 1, overlap with the ILSS 2 log, and general feedback.

## **24.2 Rationale Behind the Use of a Vocabulary Log in ILSS 1**

The course profile for the ILSS module states that students should develop an increased awareness of the need to use language appropriately and effectively, particularly in relation to levels of formality, style, and register, but also in accordance with their situational needs. They should also hone the ability to identify deficiencies in their own language competence and to address their language needs independently. This section discusses both the 'what' and the 'how' of achieving those goals in connection with vocabulary in ILSS 1.

### ***24.2.1 Advanced Vocabulary Needs***

Unlike grammar, new vocabulary items continue to be acquired by adults in their first language (L1) if there is a need to do so, for example in their public, personal, educational, or professional lives (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 45). On the assumption that they have completed tertiary-level education, the words such adults are most likely to gain are low frequency or specialist vocabulary. The gaps in the mental lexicon of second language (L2) students in the ILSS module, in contrast, are likely to start in the mid-frequency range, defined by Schmitt and Schmitt as lying between 3000 and 9000 word families (2014, pp. 494–495).

As experienced by adult L1 speakers, incidental learning of vocabulary is affected, amongst other factors, by the frequency effect whereby more common words are more likely to be learned (Milton, 2007). This is also true of technical texts, where specialist vocabulary, by definition, appears at a higher frequency than normal. Vocabulary learning in the context of the ILSS module cannot rely on incidental exposure and must include intentional components to become more efficient. (See Webb, 2019, for research into the effectiveness of incidental and intentional vocabulary learning.)

Three potential lexical gaps can be identified in this specific context: low-frequency specialist vocabulary relating to English and American studies, mostly mid-frequency academic vocabulary, and personal deficiencies, which could be both high and mid frequency. The first category is not dealt with in ILSS 1 but rather left to the courses in linguistics, literature, cultural studies, and subject didactics.

The second category is touched on in ILSS 1 but covered in more depth in ILSS 2 with the help of the *Academic Word List* (Coxhead, 2000). As students' individual language learning biographies affect the scope of the third category, this suggests that gaps cannot be plugged by generalized input but rather by raising awareness of what it means to know a word as well as by a range of strategies for planning, discovering, recording, and consolidating vocabulary knowledge. These topics are dealt with in the following subsection in connection with the ILSS 1 vocabulary log.

### 24.2.2 Vocabulary Log Design

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2020), a log-(book) is “any record in which facts about the progress or performance of something are entered in the order in which they become known.” Thus a vocabulary log is a record of vocabulary to be learnt, ranging from a list of new L2 words with their L1 equivalents, or a list with definitions and personalized examples in the L2, to the type of vocabulary log developed for ILSS 1 which “requires students to take the extra steps to ensure a deeper or more meaningful understanding of [their chosen] words” (Scurletis, 2009). Starting in winter semester 2017, the log was standardized across all parallel courses in ILSS 1 in relation to its instructions on what to record, its illustration of the different stages of vocabulary learning, and the tasks or strategies associated with those stages. The aim was to maximize its usefulness for all students and to ensure that they started ILSS 2 with the same background knowledge on efficient lexical expansion.

The general instructions start off by reminding students that the aim over the semester is to increase both the breadth and depth of their vocabulary knowledge; in other words, items which they know partially can also be recorded, and they can choose what information they want to include in any one entry. The section entitled “What does knowing a (new) word mean?” is inspired by Nation's well-known summary of what is involved in knowing a word (2013, p. 49). In connection with word definition, students are asked “What meaning(s) does the word/phrase have? Are there connotative meanings? Are there differences in meaning between ‘British’ and ‘American’ English? Are there more common/less common uses?” to guide them in their entries; they can also add information about collocational and colligational patterns, register, grammatical features (i.e., irregular forms), pronunciation and spelling, derivational morphology, linguistic use (i.e., synonymy), and examples of the item in context.

The ILSS 1 log also addresses issues in relation to how vocabulary learning takes place, explicitly in the form of various handouts and implicitly in its nine tasks (labelled 1–9). These issues have been divided into four clusters of vocabulary learning strategies, namely planning, discovery, recording, and consolidation (adapted from Schmitt, 2000). Although the clusters are dealt with individually here, they are all intertwined in reality. Table 24.1 illustrates how the handouts and tasks are distributed across the four clusters.

**Table 24.1** Distribution of tasks in the ILSS 1 vocabulary log by cluster

	ILSS 1 tasks (labelled 1–9)
Planning	Vocabulary learning handout (1a), collection sheets (2), published worksheets (3), multi-word units handout (5a), written assignments (6), electronic resources (7)
Discovery	Collection sheets (2), published worksheets (3), visualization / organization techniques (4), multi-word units handout (5a) and vocabulary forum (5b), written assignments (6)
Recording	Check your memory style / improve your memory (1b), visualization / organization techniques (4), vocabulary forum (5b)
Consolidation	All of the above plus revising vocabulary (8), round-up (9)

The planning – or input – stage in the ILSS 1 log explores how students might decide what words and aspects of word knowledge to include as well as what sources they can use. The vocabulary learning handout (1a) provides information on vocabulary size, comparing the number of word families known by native-speaker adults and L2 learners at various levels of proficiency (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 103). The handout also reminds students that breadth, depth, and automaticity of access to the mental lexicon are essential dimensions of vocabulary knowledge (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 104). This is complemented by an extract on multi-word items in English pointing out the slowly growing appreciation of grammaticalized lexis rather than lexicalized grammar as the focus of language learning and teaching with a particular emphasis on prefabricated lexical chunks (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 105). A second handout on chunks of language (5; Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008, pp. 7–15) defines different types of multi-word units, why they are useful to aid targeted, efficient learning, and what strategies are particularly effective for learning them.

In terms of the tasks which fit in this cluster, the collection sheets (2) consist of boxes where students can note down, on a weekly basis, six different categories of words (new items, words which are known but not used, collocations and academic vocabulary for essays as well as “things to remember” or check up on). The entries are most likely to come from other classes or lectures and reading, whether academic or private. A second collection task (7) focuses explicitly on items taken from electronic resources (websites and apps relating to vocabulary learning) which students know and use for expanding their vocabulary knowledge.

Collecting is included in the planning stage because at this point the individual words can be seen as raw material, or data, in Ford’s (2015) model, which has been turned into information (meaningful patterns) but which has not yet been converted into knowledge through learning (Ford, 2015, pp. 11–13). Other, more thematically organized sources of vocabulary in the planning stage are using existing resources, such as published worksheets (3; see McCarthy & O’Dell, 2008; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2005, 2011) and the students’ own written assignments (6). Various tasks throughout the semester focus on multi-word units (5); these are not, however, standardized across the parallel courses.

The discovery phase focuses on the form, meaning, and use of (partially) unknown words. The passage on the vocabulary learning handout (1a) talks about the difficulty of guessing meaning from context (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 106). This point is particularly relevant in connection with the input tasks like the collection sheets (2) and vocabulary forum on multi-word units (5b), where students have to decide whether it is worth looking up a word based on their incomplete knowledge of it so as to include it in the task at hand. Use of reference works also fits in this phase. In keeping with the title of the module, *Integrated Language and Study Skills*, a toolkit of self-study and reference materials is discussed at the start of the first course, familiarizing students with the advantages and disadvantages of monolingual, encyclopaedic English dictionaries for L2 learners versus bilingual dictionaries (i.e., for tasks 4 & 6), self-study vocabulary books (task 3), and collocation dictionaries (for task 5). Consulting a variety of reference works is particularly important when students work with their written assignments which have been corrected using meta-linguistic codes. They are asked to choose a certain number of words or phrases per assignment, research why the original formulation did not work, and suggest a better alternative, including explanations. Finally, collaborative work is encouraged (i.e., for the vocabulary forum [5b]) so that students can share their personal knowledge and expertise (Dobao, 2014, p. 498). Dobao focuses on the “dynamic” nature of this relationship: “Because no two learners share the same weaknesses and strengths; when working together they can act as both novices and experts” (2014, p. 498).

The recording stage involves processing collected vocabulary items in multiple ways because, as Schmitt and McCarthy explain (1997, p. 3), “deeper processing of words enhances their learning.” The vocabulary learning handout (1a) briefly explains what deeper processing involves and also touches on the question as to whether handwritten or typed entries are more conducive to learning vocabulary (Luttels, 2015, p. 2). Background information is provided on how students can check and improve their memory style (1b; Cottrell, 2003, pp. 241–242) as thinking about how they remember things best might help them to select new methods of recording vocabulary which match their memory style(s). A second handout on visualization and organization techniques (4) inspired by McCarthy and O’Dell (2001), Morgan and Rinvulcri (1986), and Nation (2013) covers suggestions from tree diagrams, floor plans, and bubble networks to word families, word class grids, and word forks for collocations, rounded off by associations via images or the key-words technique, and a selection of relevant online resources.

In general terms, the students are reminded that there is no set way to record their chosen items. At the same time, they are asked not to record every entry in the same manner: Depending on what it is about the word or phrase that they are unfamiliar with, one specific technique could work better than another. The associated task involves students choosing a text and trying out different visualization or organization techniques for five useful words in an academic context which they are not using correctly or effectively or only know partially. They then add other words or information to complete the entry. There is also a vocabulary forum task (5b) on the e-learning platform Moodle which involves posting a text, along with work on

multi-word units and a short response to the text, agreeing or disagreeing with or commenting on something the author wrote which the student found, say, interesting, amusing, or disturbing, and then responding to one other post and working with the other student's chosen multi-word units. In this task, the use of different visualization or organization techniques is only implied.

Finally, the consolidation stage refers to the revising, re-using, and re-working of (partially) new vocabulary items in the course of the semester. The vocabulary learning handout (1a) mentions differences between explicit and implicit learning, advocating extensive reading and listening to acquire more complex aspects of vocabulary knowledge such as collocational use and register (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 321). Students are also given a handout (8) with information about the three stages of learning (noticing a word, retrieving a word, and generating vocabulary knowledge) and the learning cycle as well as various revision techniques which are particularly suitable for vocabulary (such as personalization, images, text creation, and post-its). The task which accompanies this handout involves students choosing five lexical items they like, five they dislike, and five they cannot really imagine themselves using. These 15 items should then appear in a poem, story, or text type of their choice. Another aspect of consolidating knowledge is the use of reflection: The final component is a "round-up" (9), a short text reflecting on the student's work over the semester in relation to planning, discovering, recording, and consolidating vocabulary knowledge. Reflective texts are also included as a reaction to the visualization and organization techniques (4) and methods of revising vocabulary (8). In their summary of Sökmen (1997), Schmitt and McCarthy (1997, p. 321) conclude that

her principles ... reflect the notion of learner independence: we should show our students a variety of ways to learn and then let them decide for themselves which is best for them. This independence can also extend to *what* they learn in addition to *how* they learn.

Within the standardized framework of the vocabulary log, the aim is that the students still have enough freedom to enjoy their independence.

### 24.3 Research Questions

As noted in the introduction, anecdotal evidence suggested that the vocabulary log was not equally popular with students although the lecturers were generally convinced of its usefulness. At the end of the semester in which the revised vocabulary log tasks were used in all parallel courses, both lecturers and students completed a survey, the aim being to answer the following questions:

1. How useful do ILSS 1 students and lecturers find the individual components of the vocabulary log?
2. Do the lecturers' and students' responses differ in relation to the perceived usefulness of individual components of the vocabulary log in ILSS 1?

## 24.4 Study Description

### 24.4.1 Participants

Because the survey was not carried out in class but 2 months after the final session, the response rate was not very high, with around 30% of ILSS 1 students participating (54 out of a maximum of 175, i.e., seven groups with 25 participants). All six ILSS 1 lecturers responded, with one teaching two classes.

No data were collected on the students' age, but most of them stated when they took the school leaving examination and how many semesters they had been studying English before they took the class concerned. Just over a third, or 36.7% of those who provided the information, started studying immediately after school (max. 11 semesters, mean 2.8 semesters) and 69.3% took the class in their third semester of English (max. 9 semesters, mean 3.1 semesters), with only 12.2% taking the course in the second semester as envisaged in the curriculum.

Data were also gathered on the use of English in a non-educational context, for example at home, spending time in an English-speaking country, and pursuing various activities "for fun." In ILSS 1, 11.1% used English at home, mostly in combination with German, and almost two thirds had spent some time in an English-speaking country (62.9%). Table 24.2 provides information about extramural activities in English. Watching television, films, and online video content was the most popular activity, followed by reading for fun and listening to radio programmes or online content. More opportunities were taken to speak than to write.

### 24.4.2 Methodology

The link to their version of the anonymous online survey was sent to the lecturers by email and distributed to the students via Moodle after the grades had been entered. Each task in the vocabulary log had its own section in the survey. A screenshot of the top of a handout or the instructions reminded participants what it was about. They should then respond to a statement such as "Finding out their memory styles helped my students' approach to vocabulary learning" (lecturers) or "Finding out my memory style helped my approach to vocabulary learning" (students) on a 4-point Likert scale ("strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," "strongly disagree" plus

**Table 24.2** Extramural activities carried out in English

	Speaking	Reading	Listening	Watching	Writing
Frequently	48.0%	82.0%	56.0%	100.0%	30.0%
Occasionally	38.0%	18.0%	36.0%	0.0%	40.0%
Not at all	14.0%	0.0%	8.0%	0.0%	30.0%

Percentages based on the total number of answers submitted (four data sets missing)



“Did not use/complete this activity”). The tasks themselves generally had the same set of five statements, with the lecturers' version given in square brackets:

1. This activity helped [my students] me incorporate a wider range of vocabulary items in [their] my essays.
2. This activity helped [my students] me expand [their] my active vocabulary.
3. This activity was enjoyable.
4. This activity was useful.
5. The instructions were clear.

Comments could be added in most sections, although the students rarely took the opportunity to do so. The section on the collection sheets (2) asked how regularly they were used or whether students preferred to use other methods to collect vocabulary while the published worksheets (3) covered how much of a particular chapter was completed (“all of it,” “part of it,” “none of it”) in addition to the five statements above. The penultimate section contained overall questions about the vocabulary log, namely whether the activities generally encouraged students to work continuously on their logs, their overall rating of the experience of doing the vocabulary log (students only), and suggestions for improvements. The final section, again for the students only, elicited biographical data as well as methods of learning vocabulary which they had used in the last 4 years of school. Descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative data and open answers which could be easily counted, also for comparing the lecturers' and students' responses.<sup>1</sup> In addition, interesting statements were extracted from responses to the more complex open questions.

## 24.5 Results

The most interesting results are presented in four blocks relating to the background information on vocabulary learning, which is a special focus in the ILSS 1 vocabulary log, those tasks which are specific to ILSS 1, those tasks where there was an overlap with ILSS 2, and some general feedback on the log.

### 24.5.1 *Background Information on Vocabulary in the ILSS 1 Log*

By the time they attend ILSS 1, a typical student already has around 10 years of English language learning behind them. When asked how they learnt vocabulary in the last 4 years of secondary school, 42.2% (19 out of the 45 who provided an answer) mentioned lists, mostly with English-German entries, 11.1% wrote down

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks here are due to Sandra Pelzmann, who collated the students' and lecturers' results.



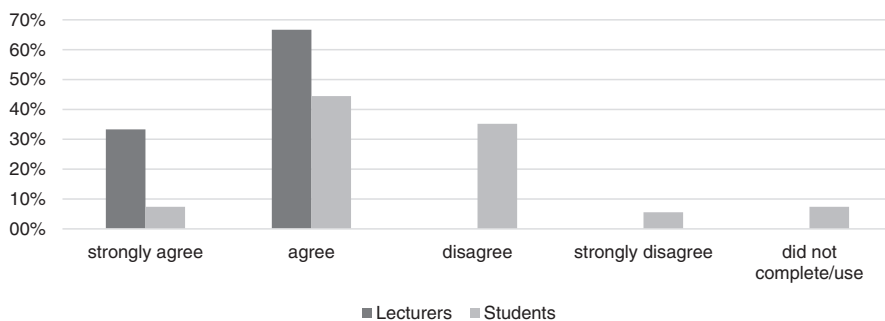
other types of explicit vocabulary work like worksheets, exercises, mind maps, and synonyms, 28.9% focused on extensive input, mostly reading and listening, and 17.8% described both explicit vocabulary work and extensive input.

As one aim of the vocabulary log is to expand students' perspectives on vocabulary, at the very least by moving away from the bilingual lists many of them were used to at school, the handout on memory style (1a; Fig. 24.1) describes a much broader range of general learning strategies. The six lecturers considered this document to be more useful (33.3% chose "strongly agree" and 67.7% "agree") than the students did (7.4% with "strongly agree" and 44.4% "agree").

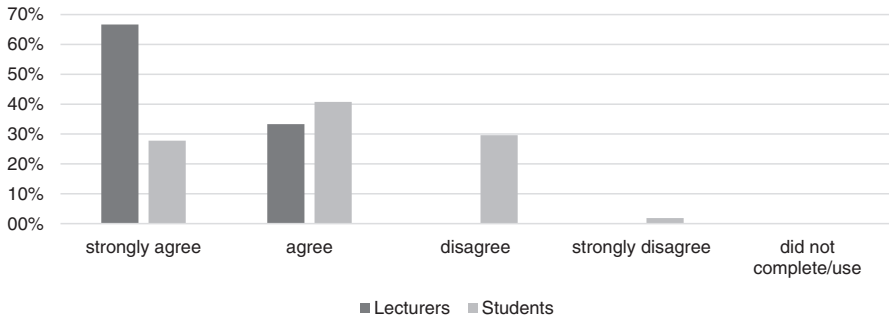
The second handout on theoretical aspects of vocabulary learning (1b) was found to be even more important by the lecturers (67.7% "strongly agree" and 33.3% "agree") and was also appreciated slightly more by the students (13.0% "strongly agree" and 46.3% "agree"). However, one lecturer and one student pointed out that while background information was important and useful, it would not necessarily lead to a more efficient learning process. Two other lecturers suggested that there was a mismatch between the advice given and students' openness to trying out new recording or learning methods in practice.

The opinions of both groups are closer when it comes to the background information on collocations and chunking (5a; Fig. 24.2). Again, all of the lecturers (66.7% "strongly agree" and 33.3% "agree") were positive about the benefits of knowing what research has revealed about multi-word units, from why they are difficult to notice to their role in improving fluency. Here a majority of the students (27.8% "strongly agree" and 40.7% "agree") also conceded that such knowledge should aid them in their vocabulary learning.

Three lecturers observed a greater awareness of collocations by the end of the course. Only one student left a comment, underlining that the activities on multi-word units were amongst the most useful "because learning word chunks and collocations usually gets left out in English learning/teaching, even though it is the most important aspect of the English language."



**Fig. 24.1** "Finding out their / my memory style helped my students' / my approach to vocabulary learning" (1a)



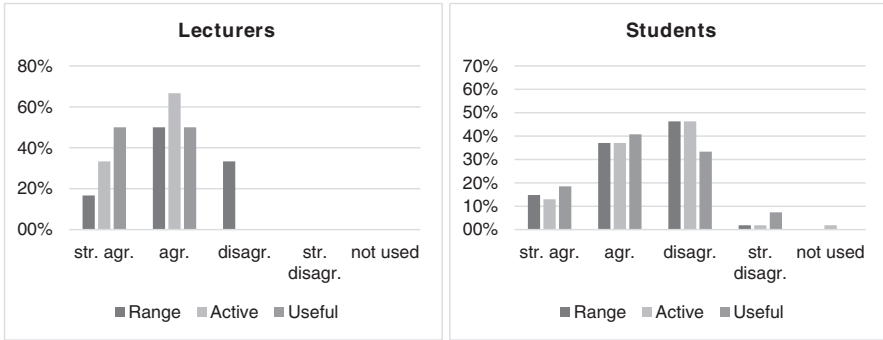
**Fig. 24.2** “Reading about collocations and chunking helped my students’ / my approach to vocabulary learning” (5a)

### 24.5.2 Tasks in the ILSS 1 Vocabulary Log

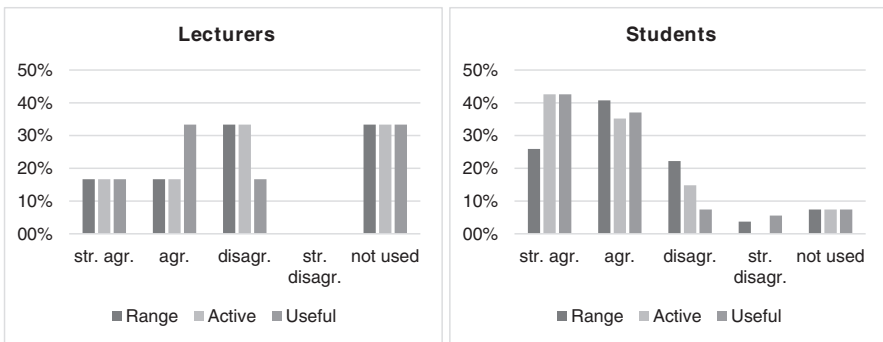
Three task types appeared only in the ILSS 1 vocabulary log: visualization and organization techniques, using electronic resources, and revising vocabulary (as an explicit activity), of which only the first two tasks are covered here. As the second research question focuses on whether lecturers’ and students’ responses differ in relation to the perceived usefulness of individual components of the vocabulary logs, only three of the five statements (see Sect. 24.4.2) were included in the analysis, namely “This activity helped my students / me incorporate a wider range of vocabulary items in their / my essays” (1), “This activity helped my students / me expand their / my active vocabulary” (2), and “This activity was useful” (4). The first is a proxy for the potential lexical gap discussed in Sect. 24.2.1 in relation to academic vocabulary, the second for individual gaps in vocabulary knowledge, and the third is an evaluation of the task as a whole.

Continuing the general pattern seen in Sect. 24.5.1, the lecturers were generally more positive about the value of the visualization and organization techniques than the students (Fig. 24.3), but there was less agreement amongst the lecturers as to how positive. For example, half of them strongly agreed with the statement that the task was useful while only one thought that it would expand the students’ range and two that it would facilitate activation of existing vocabulary. One third (33.3%) did not believe that the task would increase the students’ range of vocabulary. In contrast, the students’ positive opinions of the task were very similar across the three statements (13.0% to 18.5% for “strongly agree” and 37.0% to 40.7% for “agree”), with greater differences in terms of disagreement (46.3% in relation to range and activation of vocabulary and 33.3% disagreeing that it was useful overall).

The lecturers felt that sometimes the visualization or organization techniques were not appropriate for the selected words or the words were not relevant for the academic essay genre focused on in the course. There was also the suspicion that although the methods should force students to look at vocabulary in ways which they would not have done so otherwise, some of them “just didn’t get it,” as one



**Fig. 24.3** Visualization and organization techniques (4): “This activity helped my students / me incorporate a wider range of vocabulary items in their / my essays;” “This activity helped my students / me expand their / my active vocabulary;” and “This activity was useful”



**Fig. 24.4** Electronic resources (7): “This activity helped my students / me incorporate a wider range of vocabulary items in my essays;” “This activity helped my students / me expand my active vocabulary;” and “This activity was useful”

lecturer put it. The main issues addressed in the students’ comments concerned the suitability of the various techniques of visualizing and organizing vocabulary in connection with the words selected for the task. For example, one student pointed out that there are circumstances “where a tree diagram or other visual styles ... work really well, but it wasn’t very effective for my words ... I feel like these diagrams are more helpful when recording lots of vocab about a specific topic area.” Another student was concerned about the creativity they felt that drawing would require, although the instructions explicitly stated that the result did not have to look “nice,” and two students thought that the task was fun but not useful for learning.

What is interesting about the use of electronic resources is that the students had a much more positive attitude towards this task than the lecturers (Fig. 24.4). Two of the lecturers did not include the task (for reasons of time), and those who did use it tended to only agree or even disagree as to its usefulness in the three categories, with only one person strongly agreeing with its utility across the board. A majority

of the students, in contrast, thought that the task improved their range of vocabulary (25.9% “strongly agree” and 40.7% “agree”), helped expand their active vocabulary (42.6% “strongly agree” and 35.2% “agree”), and was useful overall (42.6% “strongly agree” and 37.0% “agree”).

The reasons given by the lecturers (“I got the impression they did this because they had to” or “I had the impression that students found looking for vocabulary items for this task very random”) contrasted starkly with the students’ comments, which were positively formulated in relation to both enjoyment and usefulness.

### ***24.5.3 Features Shared by the Vocabulary Logs for ILSS 1 and ILSS 2***

Overlap in the two vocabulary logs appeared in the guise of the vocabulary collection sheets (2), published worksheets (3), and the use of students’ corrected written assignments (6) as an opportunity for doing further vocabulary work. Both logs also included a forum (5b) for collaborative work on vocabulary. Although reflective passages were part of various tasks and the general round-up (9), they were not covered in the survey. Here only the results from the ILSS 1 survey are presented.

Half (50.0%) of the lecturers in ILSS 1 placed weight on using the collection sheets (2), with the other half potentially interested in using them. Only just under a third of the students used them (11.6% regularly and 20.4% intermittently). The majority (64.8%) had another method of collecting vocabulary, and 3.7% did not use any particular scheme.

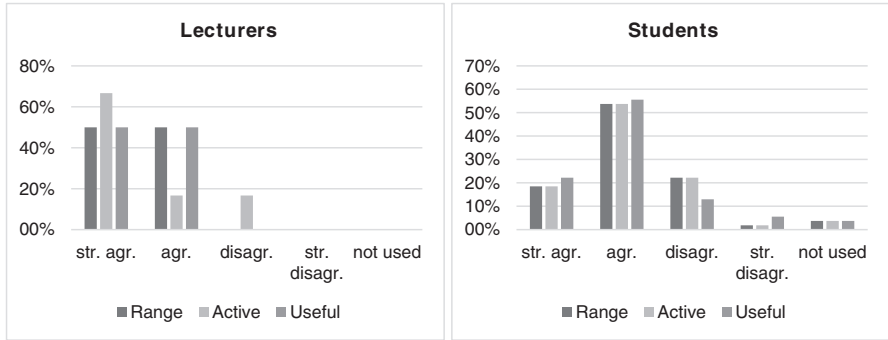
The published worksheets (3) were generally uploaded on Moodle. In the survey, students could indicate whether they had worked through the entire chapter, part of it, or none of it for each of the eight chapters provided. Table 24.3 shows the different degrees of processing. The most popular worksheet was on fixed expressions (63.0% completion) and the least popular, ironically, on academic English (44.4% completion). Other worksheets on language issues (noun and verb collocations, adjective and noun combinations) were marginally more popular than the topic-based chapters.

As Fig. 24.5 shows, in keeping with previous patterns, the lecturers almost unanimously agreed that the worksheets were useful, in relation to the range of vocabulary used in essays (50.0% each for “strongly agree” and “agree”), students’ expanding their active vocabulary (66.7% and 16.7%, respectively), and the task’s overall usefulness (again 50.0% each).

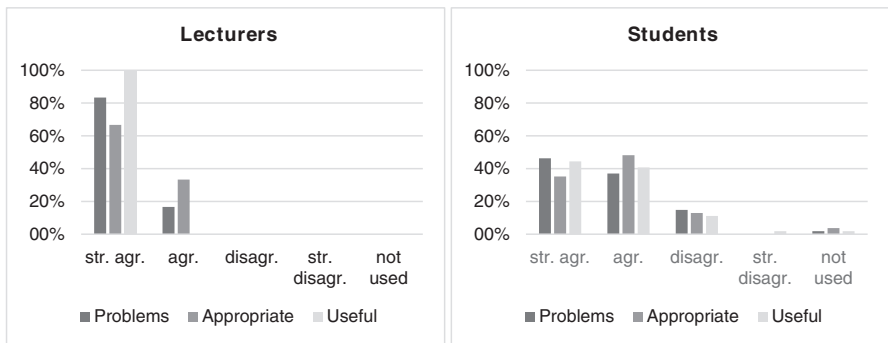
The largest group of students, however, only agreed with the three statements (53.7% for both range and active vocabulary; 55.6% for overall usefulness) but more positive opinions (18.5%, 18.5%, and 22.2% “strongly agree”) were counterbalanced by more negative ones (24.1%, 24.1% and 18.5% “disagree” and “strongly disagree” combined) and 3.7% did not use the worksheets at all. In terms of the comments made by the students, some really appreciated the worksheets, including one who then bought some self-study vocabulary books, whereas others found them

**Table 24.3** Use of published worksheets (3)

	Academic English	Noun collocations	Adjectives & nouns	Verb collocations	Fixed expressions	Technology & society	Social experience	How we see ourselves
Entire chapter	44.4%	59.3%	55.6%	55.6%	63.0%	51.9%	53.7%	55.6%
Part of chapter	38.9%	29.6%	27.8%	31.5%	24.1%	25.9%	20.4%	22.2%
None of chapter	16.7%	11.1%	16.7%	13.0%	13.0%	22.2%	25.9%	22.2%



**Fig. 24.5** Worksheets (3): “This activity helped my students / me incorporate a wider range of vocabulary items in my essays,” “This activity helped my students / me expand my active vocabulary,” and “This activity was useful”



**Fig. 24.6** Using written assignments (6): “... helped my students / me identify their / my problem vocabulary areas to work on,” “This activity helped my students / me use appropriate vocabulary in context,” and “This activity was useful”

confusing, particularly in connection with open-ended tasks, where they would have appreciated more explicit guidance or feedback.

Alongside the question of overall usefulness, the items on students' corrections of their own written assignments (6) addressed whether the task helped them to identify problem vocabulary areas to work on and to use appropriate vocabulary in context (Fig. 24.6).

The lecturers clearly believed that re-working essays on the basis of coded meta-linguistic feedback was useful on all three counts: 83.3%, 66.7%, and 100.0% chose “strongly agree”, respectively. The students largely had a positive opinion of the activity as well with 46.3%, 35.2%, and 44.4% choosing “strongly agree” and 37.0%, 48.1%, and 40.7% “agree”. Out of all of the tasks analysed in this section, this was the one with the least disagreement at 14.8%, 13.0% and 11.1%, respectively. Although one lecturer underlined the importance of the task, as “looking at where they have gone wrong and how to rectify it is the whole point of our classes,” they also conceded that it can be difficult, particularly when students do not put

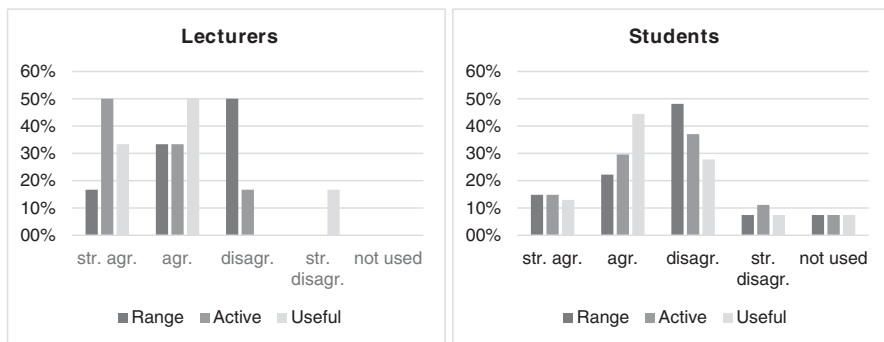
enough effort into finding out why a word was wrong and what would be better instead. Individual students confirmed both perspectives, writing “otherwise I wouldn’t have dealt with the mistakes I made and thus it wouldn’t have been possible to improve” in favour of the task, and admitting that they would have preferred “feedback on what vocabs to use instead” or information on “why my choice of vocabulary was wrong.” Understandably, two of them mentioned that a second round of feedback on the corrections would have been very helpful.

The multi-phased collaborative task (5b; see Sect. 24.2.2 for details) revealed greater disagreement on the part of the lecturers as to its utility (Fig. 24.7); the students’ bar chart, in contrast, reflected a more familiar pattern of responses.

Looking at the comments, however, it becomes clear that individuals were reacting to different parts of the task. On the plus side, one lecturer wrote that “the method of giving and receiving ‘peer feedback’ is a very appropriate method to raise awareness”; another pointed out that the multi-word units students worked on were not always immediately relevant for use in academic essays, although most of the texts they selected were academic in nature or from quality newspapers, or that the task “could not be expected to expand their active vocabulary since it did not involve productive use.” From the students’ perspective, being able to choose their own text and improve their vocabulary skills in a specific field was mentioned as being positive by several.

### 24.5.4 General Feedback

The survey was rounded off with general questions on whether the fixed tasks generally encouraged students to work on their logs regularly, how they rated the experience of doing the vocabulary log overall, and whether they had suggestions on how to improve it.



**Fig. 24.7** Responding to other people’s texts (5b): “This activity helped my students / me incorporate a wider range of vocabulary items in their / my essays,” “This activity helped my students / me expand their / my active vocabulary,” and “This activity was useful”

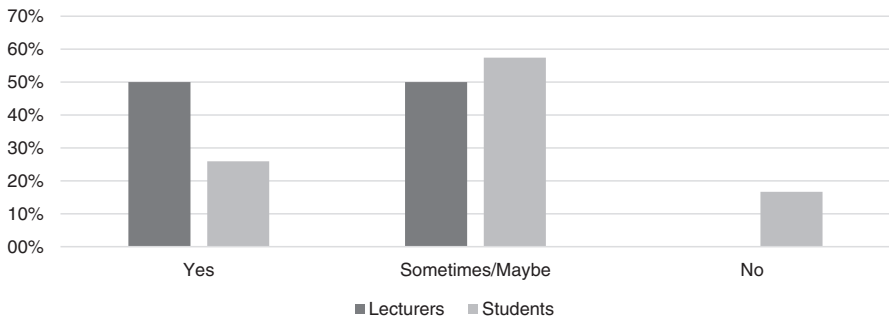
One of the more common complaints by lecturers and students alike about the pre-standardized vocabulary logs concerned too much work on them occurring just before the final deadline, which defeats the object of their being a tool for learning vocabulary. As a result, the standardized logs involved setting deadlines for the different tasks and phases of individual tasks which were meant to counteract the tendency for last-minute work.

As Fig. 24.8 shows, the lecturers were more optimistic than the students, with 50% believing that a range of activities with deadlines throughout the semester would facilitate continuous work. The students were probably more realistic, in contrast, as, apart from the collaborative task and one mid-semester discussion of the 'vocab log so far,' the deadlines were for completing tasks which were not handed in until the end of the semester.

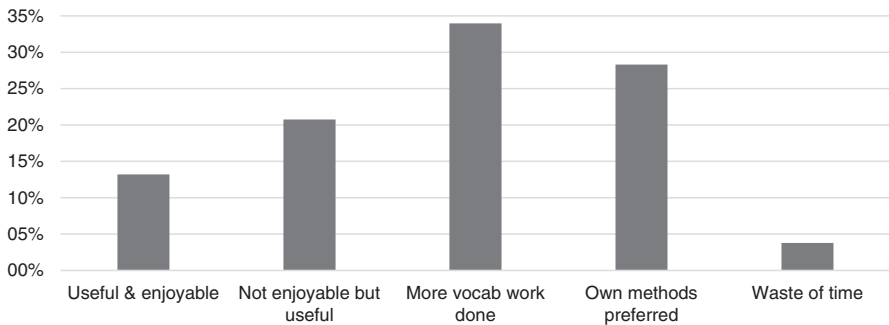
Finally, the students gave an overall rating for the vocabulary log (Fig. 24.9) and were invited to give suggestions for improvement.

The given options are somewhat loaded, but the lecturers are aware that the vocabulary logs are time intensive for the students:

- It was a lot of work, but I found it useful and enjoyed doing it.
- It was a lot of work, and I didn't really enjoy doing it, but it was useful.



**Fig. 24.8** "Did the activities generally encourage the students / you to work continuously on their / your vocabulary log?"



**Fig. 24.9** "How would you rate the experience of doing the vocabulary log overall?"



**Table 24.4** Students' suggestions for improving the ILSS 1 vocabulary log

No suggestions made	33.3%
More freedom, i.e., choice of tasks and/or methods	20.4%
Clearer instructions	9.3%
One-off suggestions	9.3%
More inclusion of vocabulary in productive tasks	5.6%
Fewer tasks	5.6%
More time spent on the vocabulary log in class	5.6%
More input from lecturer	5.6%
No vocab log	3.7%
More weight for final grade	1.9%
Total	100.0%

- It made me do more vocabulary work; I wouldn't have done as much otherwise.
- I didn't really find it useful; I prefer to do vocabulary work in my own way.
- It was a waste of time; I only did it for the lecturer.

Around two thirds, or 67.9%, chose one of the three more positive formulations. As the responses in themselves are not particularly informative in relation to future changes to the vocabulary logs, the open-ended suggestions were grouped into the categories listed in Table 24.4.

One third of the participants (33.3%) did not make any suggestions for improvement, possibly indicating that they were content with the current set-up. Various proposals were made in connection with letting students choose their own methods of working with vocabulary (20.4%). Clearer instructions were requested by 9.3% of the respondents. Finally, suggestions which were only made once (9.3%) mostly gave the impression that instructions were not being given or followed accurately in line with the standardized vocabulary log for the course.

## 24.6 Discussion

The results of the survey reveal a general gap between the lecturers' expectations of and the students' views on how to increase their breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge with the help of the ILSS 1 vocabulary log.

The strategies students employed for learning vocabulary in upper secondary mostly focused on increasing vocabulary size with the help of English-German vocabulary lists and on expanding their receptive vocabulary through extensive exposure outside the classroom. The survey did not elicit whether lists were still the most common way of recording new vocabulary in the first one or two semesters of studying English, but the lectures attended before ILSS 1, with their selected-response examinations, are predominantly input oriented and, thus, more likely to

encourage an increase in receptive rather than productive vocabulary. Potentially, then, students who were successful in English at school might continue to use the same vocabulary learning strategies at university as they see no reason to change them. This could help explain the lukewarm reaction to the two handouts on memory (1a), although they were taken from Cottrell's (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook* aimed at (L1) undergraduates at British universities. While the input on theoretical aspects of vocabulary learning (1b) and multi-word units (5a) was better received, it was maybe not informative enough, in itself, to open some students' eyes to new dimensions of vocabulary learning. Gu (2019, p. 277) suggests that as long as a learner's goal is only to increase their breadth of knowledge, they are most likely to view learning as a mere feat of memory. He continues: "Accordingly, [his /] her attention would probably be allocated to the addition of form-meaning pairs without due consideration for the depth of knowledge, the automaticity of use, and the appropriateness of using each word" (2019, p. 277). The vocabulary collection sheets (2), for example, are intended to remind students to think about multiple aspects of vocabulary knowledge going beyond lists of unknown words: A class discussion on how the theoretical input in handouts 1a, 1b, and 5a is reflected in specific tasks could be a useful awareness-raising exercise.

The first task which is unique to the ILSS 1 vocabulary log, namely making use of visualization and organization techniques (4), builds on the idea of the vocabulary construct in the ELC programme concentrating on more than just vocabulary breadth. The comments from lecturers and students alike suggested, however, that there was a misconception of the function of the task, which is to exploit what is known about how the mental lexicon works, for example in connection with derivational morphology, semantic relations, or associations. Collocational and colligational patterns, in particular, are essential for fluent (and accurate) use of language (Nation, 2013, pp. 479–485). Furthermore, as Schmitt (1997, p. 201) explains, "activities requiring a deeper, more involved manipulation of information promote more effective learning," although simple, mechanical strategies are often more popular than complex ones (1997, p. 201). At the same time Nation emphasizes that vocabulary activities should ideally match an individual's learning style (2013, p. 143), arguing in favour of a range of options being provided, as was the case here. The question is whether a broader discussion in class of the rationale behind the task would change the students' opinions on it, which were fairly evenly balanced between positive and negative views.

The students found electronic resources (7) to be more useful than the lecturers did; this could be due to their digital nativeness, but the more important open question would be what type of resources both groups had in mind. Many online language (learning) resources are not necessarily of high quality. While online dictionaries often provide a wealth of translations for a particular word, most of the other categories in Nation's (2013, p. 49) definition of what it means to know a word (see Sect. 24.2.2) are incomplete or missing entirely, necessitating the use of more than one source. Some learning apps, in contrast, take account of the learning cycle and could be very efficient if fed with the students' own data as well as motivating if they make use of a gaming element (see also Nation, 2013, pp. 145–151).

The task which encouraged collaboration between students on vocabulary learning (5b) only seemed to do so minimally. Nation underlines that noticing is an essential cognitive process in vocabulary learning (2013, p. 103). However, the words selected for the forum task were often not immediately relevant for academic essays. A follow-up discussion in class on the choice and usefulness of the multi-word units could increase the utility of the lexical part of the task. The topic-based approach was repeated in the published worksheets (3), where the take-up varied considerably as well, partly due to the choice of themes. An alternative to taking multiple chapters out of one book would be to use a range of sources so that students could benefit from different task types and approaches to learning vocabulary and might be encouraged to work through other chapters in a book.

When it comes to students correcting their own work as a contribution to expanding their accuracy and range of vocabulary, it was considered a good idea in principle but not always that easy to implement in practice. Firstly, the system of coded meta-linguistic feedback does not work as well with lexical issues as with grammatical ones as there are fewer abbreviations (for example, collocation, complementation patterns, register, non-/countable nouns, spelling) as opposed to around 15 for grammar. Secondly, even when a lexical issue has been identified as, say, a collocational one, there are many more options to explore while identifying the correction in contrast to most grammatical corrections (i.e., if subject-verb agreement is identified as the mistake, only one correction is possible). Furthermore, identifying a correct alternative could involve multiple reference works, including monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, a thesaurus, and a style guide, with multiple rounds of research. The students are, therefore, justified in requesting a second round of feedback on their new lexical choices. Research has shown that explicit corrective feedback aids L2 learning (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 45).

Overall, the vocabulary logs appear to be more of a burden than a joy for a good number of students. Some had issues with completing the tasks in a manner which would facilitate learning, also time-wise. While the general tenor was that it was useful in the end, there were also plenty of suggestions for improvement, from giving students more freedom, to spending more time on it in class, including input from the lecturer. These contradictory views are also found in the literature. Nation points out that vocabulary notebooks, as he calls them (2013, p. 140), have been shown to facilitate learning due to “sustained deliberate attention” while Rowland (2011, cited in Nation, 2013, p. 140) reveals that the advanced learners in his study preferred “a reduced rather than an elaborate form.”

The results of the survey influenced a revision of the ILSS 1 vocabulary log for winter semester 2018. One way of reducing the workload was to remove elements of overlap: for example, the collaborative forum (5b) was eliminated so that it only appeared in ILSS 2. The scope of some of the tasks was limited, and instructions were rewritten to improve clarity. Whether the different handouts, tasks, and task products were given more space in class is not known, although this would be essential to help reduce the gap between lecturers’ expectations and students’ views.

## 24.7 Conclusion

Even though the programmes in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna are taught exclusively in English, meaning that there is a very strong focus on extensive input and regular output in the L2, the time scale of 3 (BA) to 4 (BEd) years for students to improve their proficiency level from B2+ to C2 is very short. The vocabulary logs in the first two language competence modules are one strategy to support students on their journey to mastery of academic and general English. Knowledge of specialist vocabulary in the field is vital but not primarily the responsibility of the ELC programme. Academic vocabulary is another important component but is not the main focus of ILSS 1. Thus, the third type of lexical gap – students' personal deficits – is the main challenge for lecturers and students alike. In terms of what to teach or learn, generalized input is, of course, provided, but it is even more important for students to identify their own lexical issues and to work on them independently.

This leads to the question as to how to improve their vocabulary knowledge most effectively from the very start of the language competence programme. A broad range of strategies are integrated in teaching units and also in the vocabulary logs in ILSS 1 in four clusters – planning, discovery, recording, and consolidation – with the aim of improving individual students' breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in addition to automaticity and appropriateness of use, as their previous history of vocabulary learning seems to have focused on bilingual lists and extensive extramural input. Despite background information and research findings being provided on some of the issues involved in more efficient vocabulary learning, in almost all of the tasks, the lecturers were more convinced of the value of the vocabulary log than the students. Exceptions were the electronic resources (7), which were appreciated more by the students, and the collaborative task (5b), which both lecturers and students found to be useful only to a limited extent. A more concerted effort to raise students' awareness of the relevance of individual tasks, not only by linking them to research on vocabulary learning in the handouts but also by bringing more vocabulary learning into the ILSS 1 classroom, could help improve students' motivation to invest time and effort into their vocabulary logs outside class so as to increase their efficacy. This should then form a more solid basis for continued work on vocabulary with a different set of tasks in ILSS 2 as well as in the Language in Use module (see Schwarz-Peaker, [this volume](#)).

Existing online diagnostic tools relating to the use of mid-frequency vocabulary in the students' own work could be employed more efficiently, as could the growing battery of online tests to analyse not only an individual's breadth of vocabulary knowledge but also its depth. Making the size of lexical gaps more explicit to lecturers and students alike could be an important addition to the vocabulary learning toolkit which is already implemented in the ILSS module.

As students who graduate from the BA and BEd programmes in the Department of English and American Studies generally do increase the breadth and depth of their lexical knowledge (see Ghamarian, [this volume](#)), a longitudinal study exploring the reception and efficiency of all four logs could help ascertain their

contribution to this process, as could a retrospective study on the personal strategies used by students to expand their vocabulary above and beyond the suggestions made in the standardized vocabulary logs.

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## Chapter 25

# Weaving Academic Texts: An Observation of Students' Quest for the Magic of Words in the English Language Competence Programme



**Katharina Ghamarian**

**Abstract** This longitudinal study is specifically concerned with the development of English students' use of different vocabulary types throughout the English Language Competence programme. Thirty-six English major students provided three texts written in three courses of the programme, namely Integrated Language and Study Skills 1, Integrated Language and Study Skills 2, and English for Academic Purposes. With the help of the corpus analysis program AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014) these texts were analysed regarding the proportion of vocabulary types used. Results show that participants display a significant growth of academic and technical/low-frequency vocabulary over the whole study programme, while the use of high-frequency vocabulary decreases significantly. However, closer descriptive examination of all cases indicates that despite significant trends learners demonstrate different patterns of vocabulary development. These results suggest that students become more successful in their use of academic and technical/low-frequency language but that individual differences in the patterns of development are caused by undefined factors, which need to be investigated in further research.

**Keywords** Vocabulary development · Longitudinal study · Diachronic perspective · Corpus analytic methods · Vocabulary log

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K. Ghamarian (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [katharina.ghamarian@univie.ac.at](mailto:katharina.ghamarian@univie.ac.at)



## 25.1 Introduction

To put it in the words of J. K. Rowling (2007, p. 209): “Words are our most inexhaustible source of magic.” This power of vocabulary has been recognised and looked at from different angles in several academic fields, such as sociolinguistics and, more specifically, also in second language acquisition studies. Numerous scholars (Laufer, 1998; Milton & Fitzpatrick, 2014; Nation, 2013; Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997) have dedicated their work to answering questions about second language vocabulary acquisition. However, several research gaps remain to be addressed.

This chapter contributes to this area of research by focusing on an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context by investigating the vocabulary development of students of English at the University of Vienna. English has extended its scope and impact in the last 15 to 20 years (Brosch, 2015) and has finally conquered academia, becoming the dominant language in academic discourse (Seidlhofer et al., 2006). As a result, the university system is facing a need to educate their students in the adequate use of academic English. Since the level of vocabulary knowledge is directly related to academic literacy in the sense of reading and writing academic texts (Nation, 2013, p. 262), a thorough investigation in the area of vocabulary acquisition at an advanced level is necessary.

While the connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading ability has been researched quite extensively (Hu & Nation, 2000; Laufer, 1992; Qian & Schedl, 2004), the relationship between vocabulary mastery and writing ability remains a rather neglected concern (Nation, 2013, p. 262). This accounts even more for the area of EAP. A recent study by Ariyanti and Qomar (2017, pp. 26–29) on the vocabulary mastery and writing ability of 38 third-semester English students suggests that these two areas appear to be positively related. Amongst the few longitudinal studies on the development of vocabulary use in students’ academic writing, Laufer (1994, p. 25) has found that academic writing progress is shown through the increase of academic vocabulary in the texts. As a consequence, Nation (2013, p. 265) argues that this change in the use of vocabulary types indicates whether a student has managed to become a part of the academic discourse community. As a result, written student compositions have been analysed for their lexical profile. However, longitudinal investigations of the development of such lexical profiles have been rare. This study, which was part of a diploma thesis, attempts to fill this gap by examining the development of different vocabulary types displayed in students’ texts throughout the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. Three academic texts from three courses of the ELC programme were examined. For this analysis, the study is going to distinguish between high-frequency words, low-frequency words, technical words, and academic words (Bruce, 2011, pp. 96–97), which will be explained in the literature review below.



## 25.2 Theoretical Background

Concerning high-frequency vocabulary, Chung and Nation (2003, p. 104) state that high-frequency words are mostly defined as the 2000 most frequent words in a language. However, other researchers, such as Schmitt and Schmitt (2011), have extended their scope to 3000 or even more words. Regardless of the exact number of high-frequency words, all of them share the property of being found across a wide range of written or spoken contexts and are hence extremely useful for beginning language learners.

By contrast, low frequency vocabulary is said to comprise words beyond the 9000 most frequent words of English (Nation, 2013). Bruce (2011, p. 96) makes an attempt at explaining this limited spectrum of occurrence by arguing that low-frequency words are said to have very specialised meanings. Therefore, at first sight low-frequency words do not seem to be of immediate relevance to learners. However, one person's low frequency vocabulary can be another person's technical vocabulary. As Nation (2013, p. 303) argues, "people's vocabulary grows partly as a result of their jobs, interests and specialisations". Hence, specific low-frequency words might be highly relevant technical vocabulary used regularly by professionals of a specific area. Nation (2013, p. 303) elaborates further on this by stating that technical words "are closely related to the content of ... particular [disciplines]". Hence, technical terms are content-specific but they do not have to be restricted to one content area.

Exactly this property of being subject-specific is what distinguishes technical vocabulary from academic vocabulary. Paquot (2010, p. 9) and Townsend and Kiernan (2015, p. 113) report that "academic words ... are words that appear with much greater frequency in academic texts than in other types of texts." However, in contrast to technical words, "academic words are not highly salient in academic texts, as they are supportive of but not central to the topics of the texts in which they occur" (Coxhead, 2000, p. 214). Hence, it is the disciplinarily neutral nature of academic vocabulary that distinguishes it from technical vocabulary (Chung & Nation, 2003; De Chazal, 2014; Paquot, 2010).

One of the earliest studies that applied research on different vocabulary types in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting was a study by Laufer and Nation (1995). Based on the hypothesis that participants with different proficiency levels will display divergent use of different vocabulary types in written compositions, they investigated 65 texts of EFL learners, who were divided into three groups according to their language proficiency. Results showed that the lexical profiles of these three groups were significantly different from each other. Generally, low proficiency learners appeared to use more high-frequency words and less academic words than more advanced EFL learners (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

In 2004, Morris and Cobb investigated 112 second language (L2) teacher trainees to examine whether lexical profiles are related to general academic performance. They found that lexical profiles were significantly correlated with scores on two trainee courses. Daller and Phelan (2007) have looked into a similar topic by

analysing the lexical profiles of 34 essays and comparing them to teachers' assessment of these texts. Convergent to the findings of Laufer and Nation's (1995) and Morris and Cobb's (2004) studies, they found a positive correlation between advanced types of words and overall grades.

Bardacki's (2016) study contributes to previous findings by searching for a relationship between lexical profiles and general vocabulary proficiency. He analysed texts of 84 Turkish L2 learners and asked them to fill in the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990) and the Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge Test (Qian & Schedl, 2004). Results showed that participants with a large percentage of high-frequency words were less successful in both vocabulary tests than students with a lower percentage of high-frequency words (Bardacki, 2016).

While there are more studies on lexical frequency profiles in general (Aluthman, 2017; Catalán & Llach, 2017; Higginbotham & Reid, 2019; Lin & Morrison, 2010), few studies have examined the longitudinal development of lexical profiles. Horst and Collins (2006) investigated whether the lexical profiles of 210 EFL beginners would change after 400 hours of language instruction. No significant difference between lexical profiles before and after teaching input could be detected. Similar to Horst and Collin's (2006) study, this research investigates the change of lexical profiles over time.

### 25.3 Research Questions

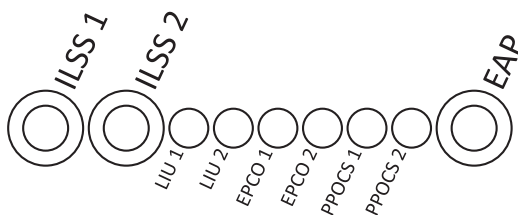
The present paper investigates the following research questions:

1. How does the percentage of academic vocabulary develop from the first ELC course (ILSS 1) to the last ELC course (EAP)?
2. How does the percentage of high-frequency vocabulary develop from the first ELC course (ILSS 1) to the last ELC course (EAP)?
3. How does the percentage of technical/low-frequency vocabulary develop from the first ELC course (ILSS 1) to the last ELC course (EAP)?

### 25.4 Methods and Participants

The study was set up as a longitudinal study, meaning that "successive measures [were] taken at different points in time from the same respondents" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 82). The first course of the ELC programme investigated was Integrated Language and Study Skills 1 (ILSS 1), scheduled for the second semester of studies. The second, subsequent to ILSS 1, was Integrated Language and Study Skills 2 (ILSS 2), followed by English for Academic Purposes (EAP), being the last course in the ELC programme considered (see Fig. 25.1). Detailed information on these courses can be found in the course descriptions in Part I of this volume.

**Fig. 25.1** Progression of courses in the ELC programme (investigated courses in bold)



Thirty-six English major students of the University of Vienna were examined concerning their vocabulary development throughout the ELC programme at the department. All participants were asked to provide one uncorrected text per course for the three different courses of the ELC programme, resulting in a corpus of 108 texts in total. To avoid the risk of attrition, which is mentioned by Dörnyei (2007, p. 53) as a potential weakness of longitudinal studies, only students who had completed all courses of the programme were included. Each student provided one opinion essay written in the second semester of studies in ILSS 1, another opinion essay composed only one semester later in ILSS 2 and a book review from the last language competence course EAP. The text types were chosen due to their comparability in length, which is crucial for this type of research.

The texts from each course were then examined in a corpus analysis with the corpus analysis program AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014), revealing the percentages of different vocabulary types at each stage. Corpus analysis programs such as AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014) tend to work with reference lists. This means that they compare the words in a text corpus to the words on specific vocabulary lists, which were developed based on the theory explained above, such as the General Service List (West, 1953) for high-frequency words or the Academic Vocabulary List (Gardner & Davis, 2014) for academic words.

To provide a basis for the analysis, existing vocabulary lists were checked for their suitability. Instead of using the General Service List (GSL, West, 1953) and the Academic Word List (AWL, Coxhead, 2000) as reference corpora for investigation, as common with AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014), the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL, Gardner & Davies, 2014) and a revised version of the GSL were employed. The GSL is one of the most frequently used high-frequency word lists (Nation & Kyongho, 1995, p. 35). However, since it was developed by West in 1953, the list has received some criticism concerning its age (Gardner & Davies, 2014). At the same time, it still seems to be a solid basis for further research due to its discipline-unspecific vocabulary and its wide use in the past, granting a high level of comparability with other studies (Durrant, 2016, p. 60), which is a reason why it has been used for this study but had to be updated. One weakness of the GSL is that it contains highly frequent academic words, such as *company*, *interest* or *business*, which are therefore counted as high-frequency words instead of academic words (Gardner & Davies, 2014, pp. 308–309). Moreover, the reverse phenomenon is found in the AWL (Coxhead, 2000), which is built on the GSL. Considering these issues, the GSL and AWL do not account for reliable percentages of high-frequency and academic words in texts (Gardner & Davies, 2014).

To solve this problem, the AVL, developed by Gardner and Davies (2014), was used for the academic vocabulary count, which is a recent list and is not based on the GSL. To measure high-frequency vocabulary, a revised version of the GSL was developed for the purpose of this study by deleting all words in the GSL which could be found in the AVL as well. Although this might only be a preliminary solution, these lists ensure a more reliable separation of academic and high-frequency words. To investigate the issue more closely, this study includes two bands of high-frequency words, namely the most frequent 2000 words mentioned above, and the 2000–4000 most frequent words. Regarding technical and low-frequency words, these two types of vocabulary were treated as one category for pragmatic reasons of analysis, which needs to be considered as one of the limitations of this study. To arrive at a percentage for these two types of vocabulary, high-frequency vocabulary and academic vocabulary have been subtracted from the total number of types in a text.

Finally, all results gathered with AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014) were entered into SPSS (2016) to investigate the statistical significance of students' lexical developments. A single factor variance analysis with repeated measurement was carried out for all vocabulary types. The significance level chosen was 5%, since it is a common boundary in significance tests (Bortz & Schuster, 2010; Field, 2018; Meyerhoff et al., 2015).

## 25.5 Results

Table 25.1 presents the mean percentage and the standard deviation of vocabulary types used in the texts analysed. As explained above, high-frequency vocabulary was divided into two separate bands. The first group encompasses the 2000 most frequent words, while the second group includes the 2000–4000 most frequent words.

Examining the table in more detail reveals clear trends in the development of the different vocabulary types. While both high-frequency groups decreased from the first language competence course (ILSS 1) to the last (EAP), academic vocabulary use, as well as low-frequency and technical vocabulary use, increased.

**Table 25.1** Mean distribution of vocabulary types

	Measurement 1 (ILSS 1)		Measurement 2 (ILSS 2)		Measurement 3 (EAP)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic	33.12	4.94	33.46	4.43	39.86	4.42
High-frequency (1–2000)	46.69	7.05	42.78	4.47	30.99	4.41
High-frequency (2000–4000)	4.31	2.26	4.11	2.00	2.69	1.38
Technical and low-frequency	16.19	3.52	19.65	3.39	26.24	3.96

*Note.* *M* mean; *SD* standard deviation

A variance analysis with repeated measurements showed a significant difference between the different points of measurement [ $F(2, 70) = 27.239, p < .001$ ] for academic words. Normal distribution (all  $ps > .05$ ) and sphericity of data measured with Mauchly's test of sphericity [ $\chi^2(2) = 1.110, p = .574$ ] were given. However, pair-wise comparison showed that only the development between the second (ILSS 2) and the third course (EAP) was significant ( $p < .001$ ), while the difference between the first (ILSS 1) and the second course (ILSS 2) was not statistically relevant for academic vocabulary ( $p = 1.00$ ).

For the first band of high-frequency words (1–2000) normal distribution is given (all  $ps > .05$ ) and Mauchly's estimate of the departure from sphericity was  $\chi^2(2) = 6.284, p = .043$ . The decrease foreshadowed in the descriptive statistics above was significant [ $F(1.796, 64.639) = 107.154, p < .001$ ] between all three courses (all  $ps < .004$ ).

Similarly, the second group of high-frequency words (2000–4000) displayed a significant [ $F(1.725, 62.084) = 9.133, p = .001$ ] decrease. Normal distribution (all  $ps > .05$ ) and sphericity were given [ $\chi^2(2) = 8.187, p = .017$ ]. Pair-wise comparison shows that despite being significant for the whole period of measurement ( $ps < .003$ ), the development between the first (ILSS 1) and the second course (ILSS 2) of the ELC programme was insignificant ( $p = 1.00$ ).

Regarding technical and low-frequency vocabulary, normal distribution is given (all  $ps > .05$ ) and the Huynh-Feldt estimate of departure from sphericity was  $\chi^2(2) = 1.604, p = .449$ . The variance analysis with repeated measurements revealed that the increase was relevant [ $F(2.00, 70.00) = 67.368, p < .001$ ] between all points of measurement (all  $ps < .05$ ). Table 25.2 summarises all results of the variance analysis for the whole measurement period.

In addition to the statistical significance of the developments, also the practical significance (partial  $\eta^2$ ) of the changes was considered (Field, 2018, p. 1016). Examining the partial  $\eta^2$  of the developments of the different vocabulary types revealed interesting results. The largest practical effect size was found for the first group of high-frequency words (1–2000) with  $\eta^2 = .749$ . Additionally, technical and low-frequency words showed a high practical relevance with  $\eta^2 = .658$ . This percentage is followed by academic vocabulary with  $\eta^2 = .438$  and the second high-frequency group (2000–4000) with  $\eta^2 = .202$ .

After this general analysis of the data gathered, a closer look was taken at varying types of student development, generating a detailed descriptive picture of vocabulary acquisition patterns of the participants. Seven possible patterns were detected

**Table 25.2** Results of variance analysis with repeated measurements

	Sig. ( $p$ )	$F$
High-frequency (1–2000)	<.001*	107.154
High-frequency (2000–4000)	.001*	9.133
Academic	<.001*	27.239
Technical and low-frequency	<.001*	67.368

Note. \* significant

**Table 25.3** Patterns of student development

		Development of the percentages of a specific vocabulary type used in courses I (ILSS 1), II (ILSS 2) and III (EAP)
	<b>Symbolic representation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Pattern A	$ILSS\ 1 < ILSS\ 2 < EAP$	Participants displayed a continuous increase of the vocabulary type in question.
Pattern B	$ILSS\ 1 > ILSS\ 2 < EAP$ & $ILSS\ 1 < EAP$	Participants displayed an overall increase of the vocabulary type in question from ILSS 1 to EAP but they had the lowest percentage of usage in ILSS 2.
Pattern C	$ILSS\ 1 < ILSS\ 2 > EAP$ & $ILSS\ 1 < EAP$	Participants displayed an overall increase of the vocabulary type in question from ILSS 1 to EAP but they had the peak of usage in ILSS 2.
Pattern D	$ILSS\ 1 > ILSS\ 2 > EAP$	Participants displayed a continuous decrease of the vocabulary type in question.
Pattern E	$ILSS\ 1 > ILSS\ 2 < EAP$ & $ILSS\ 1 > EAP$	Participants displayed an overall decrease of the vocabulary type in question from ILSS 1 to EAP but they had the lowest percentage of usage in ILSS 2.
Pattern F	$ILSS\ 1 < ILSS\ 2 > EAP$ & $ILSS\ 1 > EAP$	Participants displayed an overall decrease of the vocabulary type in question from ILSS 1 to EAP but they had the peak of usage in ILSS 2.
Pattern G	$ILSS\ 1 < ILSS\ 2 = EAP$	The participants displayed an increase from ILSS 1 to ILSS 2 but fossilised from ILSS 2 to the course EAP.

amongst all participants for all vocabulary types investigated. Table 25.3 lists these seven patterns. Additionally, the table offers mathematical representations of vocabulary development between the three courses as well as a formulated explanation of the pattern.

As illustrated in Fig. 25.2 for academic vocabulary, 47.22% of all participants demonstrated pattern A and 27.78% belonged to pattern B. Only 2.78% had their highest performance of academic vocabulary in the second course (ILSS 2) but increased their academic vocabulary overall. The same percentage could be assigned to pattern G. This means that in total 80.56% of all students managed to make an overall improvement in academic vocabulary. As regards the remaining 19.45%, who did not manage to improve their academic vocabulary percentage from ILSS 1 to ILSS 2, 13.89% demonstrated pattern E and 2.78% could be attributed to patterns D and F.

Regarding the 2000 most frequent high-frequency words a reverse picture emerges. As shown in Fig. 25.3., 78.78% of the participants displayed pattern D, meaning that they showed a continuous decrease of high-frequency vocabulary (1–2000). All other participants belonged to pattern F, having a peak in ILSS 2 but also showing an overall decrease.

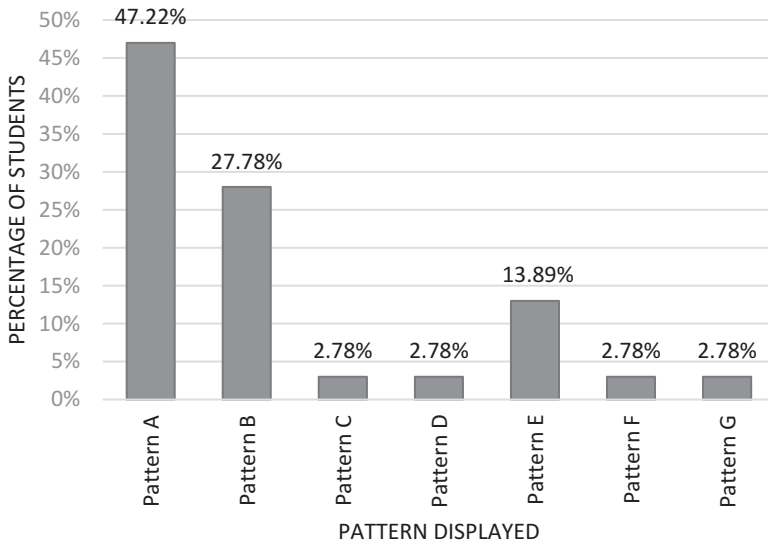


Fig. 25.2 Academic vocabulary development patterns

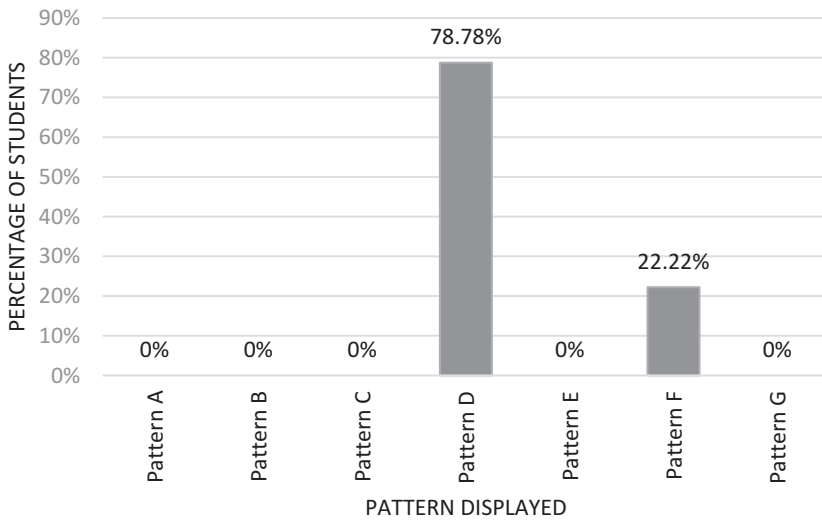
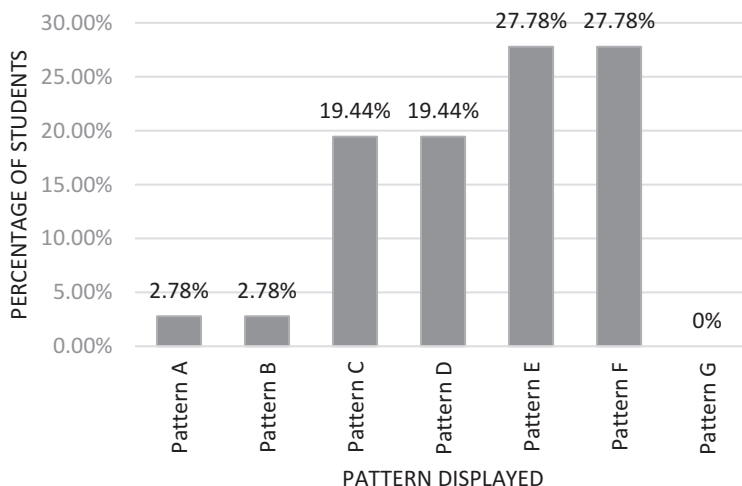


Fig. 25.3 High-frequency vocabulary (1–2000) development patterns

Interestingly, the patterns for the second group of high-frequency words (2000–4000) are much more varied, as can be seen in Fig. 25.4. While only 19.44% of the students displayed a continuous decrease of this vocabulary type from ILSS 1 to EAP, 27.78% demonstrated an overall decrease but a peak in ILSS 2, therefore belonging to pattern F. Another 27.78% belonged to pattern E, showing their lowest



**Fig. 25.4** High-frequency vocabulary (2000–4000) development patterns

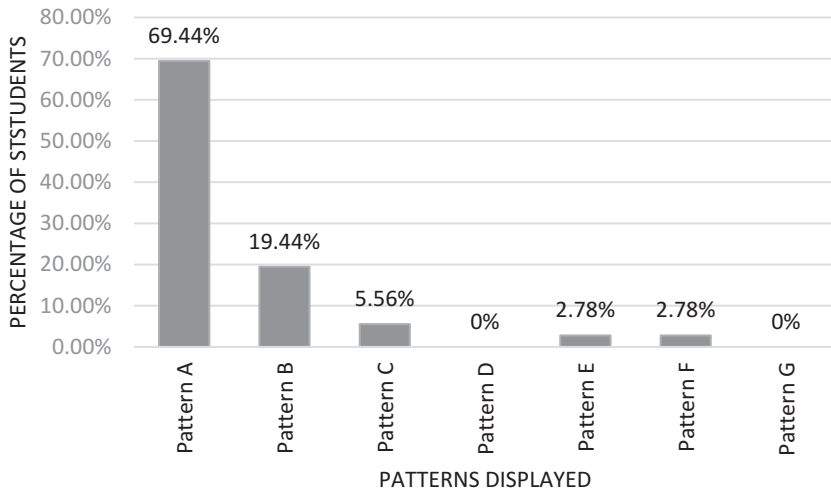
percentage of high-frequency (2000–4000) usage in ILSS 2 rather than EAP. A surprisingly high number of students (19.44%) exhibited an overall increase of high-frequency (2000–4000) words with a peak in ILSS 2. The rest is equally distributed between pattern A and pattern B. Overall, 75% of all participants reduced their use of high frequency words (2000–4000) over the period of measurement. However, a relatively large number of 25% of all participants intensified the use of these words in EAP.

Concerning their use of technical and low-frequency words 69.44% of the participants demonstrated a continuous increase, 19.44% showed a short drop in the second course (ILSS 2), and 5.56% had their highest percentage of usage in ILSS 2 (see Fig. 25.5). This adds up to 94.44% of all participants managing to increase their technical and low-frequency vocabulary over the ELC programme. Only 5.56% demonstrated an overall decrease or fossilisation, belonging to patterns E and F.

## 25.6 Discussion

Relating the results presented to the research questions listed above reveals that academic vocabulary increased significantly over the whole ELC programme, indicating that the overall goal of enhancing academic literacy was met by the programme. Comparing the growth of academic vocabulary in this study to the work of Ozturk (2015, p. 96), who traced the development of productive academic vocabulary of 55 first-year and 45 fourth-year English major students, certain parallels are revealed. Using the Productive Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 2001), Ozturk (2015, p. 106) reports a growth of productive academic vocabulary knowledge of





**Fig. 25.5** Technical and Low-frequency vocabulary development patterns

13% in three years. The development of the mean scores of academic vocabulary used in the texts investigated in this study reveals that the growth of productive vocabulary use was, on average, 16.91% in approximately the same time span. Hence, the students outperformed Ozturk's participants by 3.91%.

Conversely, the analysis of high-frequency vocabulary revealed a significant decrease of frequency band 1 (1–2000) and frequency band 2 (2000–4000). Hence, in contrast to Horst and Collin's (2006) study, a change in lexical profiles over time could be observed. A possible explanation for these divergent observations could be that Horst and Collin (2006) investigated a much shorter time span than this study did and that the students in this study received specific input on vocabulary and were not solely working on their general language skills.

Comparing the mean percentages of all vocabulary types at the three testing points to Nation's (2013, p. 20) analysis of an authentic academic text reveals clear differences. Academic words occupy a much smaller proportion of Nation's text, namely only 6.9% in comparison to the smallest percentage of 33.12% in ILSS 1 and 39.86% in EAP. Simultaneously, high-frequency words are represented much more strongly in Nation's text than in the corpus of this study. While the first texts written in ILSS 1 are closest to Nation's 68.5% with 51.00% of high-frequency words, the last texts composed in EAP displayed only 33.68% of high-frequency words. However, these large differences can be explained by several possible reasons. Firstly, Nation analyses just one text, while this study examined a whole corpus of 108 texts. Secondly, Nation's text was written by a L1 user of English, while all texts in the present corpus were student texts produced by learners of English as a foreign language. Lastly, Nation used the GSL and the AVL for his analysis of the text, while this study has based calculations on an adapted version of the GSL and on the AVL. Hence, the divergence between academic and high-frequency

vocabulary coverage could be explained by the number and type of texts analysed and by the methodology used. This goes in line with the observation that the only overlap found between the two studies is the coverage regarding technical and low-frequency words, which were calculated in a similar manner. Technical and low-frequency words made up 24.6% in Nation's (2013, p. 20) text and 26.46% in the students' texts in EAP.

Another interesting point to mention is that the development of academic vocabulary and high-frequency band 2 (2000–4000) was only significant over the whole programme and not between the first and the second course, while high-frequency vocabulary (1–2000) and technical and low-frequency vocabulary development was significant between all points of measurement. Considering the short time span of only one semester between the first and the second course investigated, it is surprising that there was a significant development of two vocabulary types. One possible reason for the seemingly different speed of development between academic vocabulary, on the one hand, and technical and low-frequency vocabulary, on the other hand, might be divergent student approaches to vocabulary learning for the vocabulary types investigated. Since ILSS 1 and ILSS 2 are taken rather at the beginning of the whole study programme, students might focus more on content-related issues outside of the ELC programme, such as the understanding of linguistic or literary concepts, which they might need for an exam. This may imply that technical and low-frequency terms receive more conscious attention through explicit studying than general academic words at this stage. As a consequence, technical and low-frequency words might show a significant development at an earlier stage, while academic vocabulary is explicitly focused on later in their studies or acquired implicitly, therefore needing more time to result in a significant change. However, active involvement in and improvement of academic literacy is crucial at all stages of the study program, which suggests that maybe more explicit guidance especially in the area of academic vocabulary would be beneficial for the students. Further investigation into this phenomenon is necessary to clarify the reasons for the difference. Future studies could therefore focus on explicit and implicit vocabulary learning of the students between ILSS 1 and ILSS 2 and possible influences of these study behaviours on vocabulary development.

In general, closer investigation confirmed that students displayed various patterns of vocabulary development regarding different vocabulary types. Particularly interesting in this respect is the huge difference between high-frequency band one (1–2000) and high-frequency band two (2000–4000). While the first group of high-frequency vocabulary (1–2000) developed only in two different patterns, both showing an overall decrease, high-frequency words belonging to the second group (2000–4000) depicted six patterns of development. This equates to 100% of all participants showing an overall decrease of high-frequency band one (1–2000), but only 72% of students exhibiting a lower percentage of high-frequency band two (2000–4000) in EAP than in the courses before. Based on this observation the question arises whether high-frequency vocabulary might not behave homogeneously in individual learner development and whether regularities could be detected

regarding the development of different levels of high-frequency words. Hence, this result might raise inspiring questions for further investigation.

## 25.7 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the development of different vocabulary types throughout the ELC programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. The results suggest that university students become more successful in their use of academic and technical language, hence becoming more competent members of the academic discourse community (Laufer, 1994, p. 25). However, while a development in technical vocabulary was already visible after one semester, academic vocabulary only increased significantly after a longer period. This could indicate that students at early stages of their studies need more explicit vocabulary teaching methods, which is already attempted by the Vocabulary Log (see Heaney, [this volume](#)) by offering guided access to the AWL and by working with lexical profiling tools, which direct the attention towards academic jargon more quickly.

Moreover, participants showed various patterns of vocabulary development, highlighting the individuality of language learning processes. Hence, the vocabulary learning methods applied should additionally cater for the individual learning styles and paths of students, which would again speak in favour of vocabulary learning tools, such as the Vocabulary Log, being a structured but very flexible vocabulary learning method. Since the degree of learner autonomy varies also at tertiary level, it is crucial to offer students guidance in their vocabulary learning process, which is done by offering very specific vocabulary learning tasks in the Vocabulary Log. However, students have freedom in choosing the words they want to deal with according to their needs. Nevertheless, the focus of the Vocabulary Log could be geared even more towards academic vocabulary to allow students more rapid progress in the field. For instance, this could be achieved by giving students more guidelines regarding vocabulary choice, such as providing students with a reliable source of valuable academic words, such as the New Academic Word List (Browne et al., 2013) or the Academic Vocabulary List (Gardner & Davies, 2014). For instance, the homepage of the New Academic Word List (Browne et al., 2013) offers several methodologically prepared learning opportunities geared towards academic words. Moreover, students could be offered even more guidance in deciding from which texts they should choose the words they want to learn. As genre analysis shows (Bruce, 2008), some text types, such as academic papers or reviews published in academic journals, offer more potential to encounter academic vocabulary than others (i.e., popular newspapers, video transcripts, or interviews). However, students might be tempted to decide on the easily available and more familiar text types.

Despite the specific focus on one contextual setting, the study also raises questions for a larger context. Few longitudinal corpus studies on vocabulary development have been carried out, which calls for more research in this area. More

information on longitudinal vocabulary development might not only help to locate areas of insecurity in students' language use, such as reluctance or difficulties in incorporating more low-frequency and academic vocabulary in their repertoire, but will also contribute to the development and improvement of vocabulary support at advanced levels. Hence, longitudinal studies on vocabulary learning help to discover unseen trends in students' needs, which should to be catered for in a next step. This could be done by the development of specific tasks and tools which aim to help students overcome their problem areas. However, again thorough research needs to be conducted on the potential effect of such tasks and tools on students' vocabulary development.

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## Chapter 26

# Assessing Oral Presentations and Interactions: From a Systematic to a Salient-Feature Approach



Armin Berger

**Abstract** Most rating scales for performance assessment distinguish between different levels by systematically replacing abstract qualifiers such as *some*, *many*, or *most* at each band (the *systematic approach*). Less frequently, distinctions are based on concrete aspects of performance characteristic of the band concerned (the *salient-feature approach*). This chapter presents a study which compares and contrasts the two approaches. The main aim was to evaluate whether rating scales featuring salient aspects of performance are more reliable for the purpose of assessing academic presentation and interaction skills in the context of an undergraduate speaking course than rating scales which distinguish between the levels systematically. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the scales. In phase one, the scores of 60 live-exam performances rated on the basis of systematic scales were compared to the scores of 84 mock-exam performances based on salient-feature scales. The latter had two formats, first as six-point scales with every band (except for the lowest) being defined by descriptors and then as ten-point scales with unworded bands in between. Many-facet Rasch analysis showed that the salient-feature scales are generally superior in terms of rater reliability and criteria separation. However, raters were unable to distinguish as many as ten bands reliably, although, according to interview data, raters find undefined intermediate levels very useful. The results have implications for scale revision, rater training, and future scale development.

**Keywords** Performance assessment · Rating scale development and validation · Descriptor formulation · Many-facet Rasch analysis · Group interviews

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A. Berger (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [armin.berger@univie.ac.at](mailto:armin.berger@univie.ac.at)

## 26.1 Introduction

In any assessment situation, it is crucial to be able to place trust in the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the information contained in test scores, without which any conclusion drawn from or decision based on the scores would be invalid (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 21). This is particularly relevant in those speaking assessments which rely on subjective scoring of an extended complex performance, where the room for rater disagreement and inconsistency is considerable. If raters interpret assessment criteria differently or display idiosyncratic rater behaviour, then the ratings will not be consistent, and any consequences based on the scores cannot be considered to be meaningful. The term *scoring validity* adopted by Weir (2005) denotes all aspects of the testing process that can potentially impact on the dependability and consistency of test scores. According to Weir's socio-cognitive validation framework, scoring validity is a key element that language testers need to address to ensure fairness, along with context validity, theory-based validity, consequential validity, and criterion-related validity. As Shaw and Weir (2007) explain, scoring validity

accounts for the extent to which test scores are based upon appropriate criteria, exhibit consensual agreement in marking, are as free as possible from measurement error, stable over time, consistent in terms of content sampling and engender confidence as reliable decision-making indicators. (p. 143)

One important aspect of scoring validity in speaking assessment is the rating scale. Together with the associated assessment criteria, it is perhaps the most obvious parameter that defines and determines scoring validity (Taylor & Galaczi, 2011, p. 174), alongside the raters, the rating procedures (i.e., rater training, standardisation, rating conditions, the actual rating, moderation of scores, and statistical analyses), and grading (Weir, 2005, p. 46). While any validation argument in support of claims about the usefulness of test scores must address every one of these areas, the present study isolates the rating scale component as the main focus of attention because, as Weir (2005, p. 196) points out, investigating rating scales and their application in operational settings plays a central role in establishing scoring validity. There is an extensive body of literature on rating scale development and validation, including comparative studies into the scoring method, the approach to scale development, or the criteria and levels, usually in the context of writing assessment, but far too little attention has been paid to descriptor styles (i.e., the way in which the statements describing the expected level of performance at each point on a proficiency scale are formulated), especially in the context of speaking assessment.

This chapter compares two sets of rating scales representing different descriptor styles, used for speaking assessment in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, with a view to deciding which one of the two is superior for the given purpose. Students' performances in the final oral exam of the Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 2 (PPOCS 2) course (see Richter, "Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills," [this volume](#)) are assessed on



the basis of two analytic rating scales, one for presentations and one for spontaneous interactions. Until recently, the scales reflected a *systematic approach* to descriptor formulation. That is, each performance feature was mentioned systematically at the levels, differentiated by abstract qualifiers such as *some*, *many*, and *most*. Since such wording is open to interpretation and meaningful only in relation to an expected standard, the team decided to adopt a *salient-feature approach*. Instead of describing relevant aspects of performance systematically, the new descriptors focus mainly on concrete salient features appearing only at the level of which they are typical and characteristic. The specific purpose of the study was to analyse the two types of scales both quantitatively and qualitatively and to evaluate their effectiveness. The chapter begins by reviewing relevant literature on rating scales, including comparative studies relating to scoring methods, approaches to scale construction, criteria, and levels. After outlining the two descriptor styles, the chapter proceeds to describe the specific context and methodology of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the main findings. The chapter concludes by considering practical recommendations for scale construction and rater training as well as possible implications for similar contexts.

## 26.2 Theoretical Background

### 26.2.1 Investigating Rating Scales

A great deal of research into rating scales is concerned with a comparison of different types of scales which differ along one or several dimensions, usually in terms of the scoring method, the approach to scale development, or the number and nature of the criteria and levels. The aim of such studies is typically to establish which type of scale results in more reliable and valid ratings in a given assessment context. With regard to scoring methods, a holistic approach invites comparison with an analytic approach. The former involves the awarding of a single overall score to a performance on the basis of a global impression; the latter requires a separate score for each of several assessment criteria, such as content, accuracy, range, or pronunciation (Davies et al., 1999). While the use of holistic scales tends to be more practical (Weigle, 2002) and triggers more authentic reading/listening and judging processes than their analytic counterparts (White, 1995), there is no consensus on which approach results in higher scoring reliability and validity (Harsch & Martin, 2013). Comparative studies report mixed results. For example, to determine the effects of the scoring method and rater experience, Barkaoui (2011) compared the ratings of novice and experienced raters using both holistic and analytic scales in the context of writing assessment. Holistic scoring resulted in a higher degree of inter-rater agreement, whereas analytic scoring led to higher intra-rater reliability, especially when the performances were scored by novice raters. Other studies have



found that analytic scales decrease rater variability as they focus the raters' attention on construct-relevant criteria, obviate the need to weigh criteria subjectively, and provide explicit guidance (e.g., Ahmed & Pollitt, 2011; East, 2009; Eckes, 2005; Knoch, 2009; Weigle, 2002). Harsch and Martin (2013) compared a holistic approach with a combined procedure where analytic scores for individual descriptors were collected together with holistic judgements. Their results show that the holistic approach is sufficiently reliable but masks disagreement on how the scale descriptors are interpreted.

In terms of scale development, rating scales generally fall into two broad categories: intuitively and empirically developed scales (Fulcher, 2003). Intuitive methods require the principled application of expertise and experience; empirical approaches involve the systematic collection and analysis of empirical data, both qualitative and quantitative. From the point of view of scoring reliability and validity, empirically derived scales tend to be superior to their intuitively developed counterparts (Fulcher, 2003). In the context of diagnostic writing assessment, for example, Knoch (2009) compared an empirically developed rating scale, whose band descriptors are based on discourse analytic measures, with a less detailed a priori rating scale typically used in proficiency testing. The results showed that the empirically developed scale with more detailed level descriptors generated higher rater reliability and that the raters preferred using the more detailed scale. While intuitive approaches are generally more practical, empirical methods are considered to result in richer and more meaningful scale descriptors (Fulcher, 1996; North, 2000; Turner & Upshur, 2002). The most effective rating scales, however, are produced by combining intuitive, qualitative, and quantitative scale development methods (Berger, 2015; Galaczi et al., 2011).

Other comparative studies have investigated the effects of the number and nature of the rating criteria or levels. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, Deygers et al. (2011) compared a dichotomous analytic rating scale eliciting a series of pass-fail decisions with a multi-level analytic rating scale which combines *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001) with input from subject specialists. Whereas the results of the quantitative analysis indicated that the dichotomous scale was more reliable, the qualitative data showed a preference for the multi-level scale with criteria enriched by domain experts. In the context of Finnish school education, Huhta et al. (2014) compared a six-point rating scale for writing consisting of unmodified CEFR descriptors with the Finnish National Core Curriculum scale for writing in a second language, a CEFR-based ten-band scale containing additional references to errors and limitations in learners' performance. Even though neither scale had been specifically designed as a *rating* scale, both were found to function adequately for rating purposes across different writing tasks and languages, although interview results showed a slightly more ambiguous picture as to whether adding more descriptive detail and more bands is preferable. Whereas a large number of studies have focused on the approach to scoring, the scale construction methods, the criteria, or scale steps, there have been few empirical investigations into descriptor styles.

### 26.2.2 *Descriptor Styles*

North (2003, 2014) distinguishes between two basic ways of formulating descriptors. In an “abstract formulation” or “systematic approach,” descriptors indicate the presence or absence of a performance feature at each band by systematically replacing abstract qualifiers or quantifiers, such as *fully*, *generally*, *somewhat*, or *always*, *sometimes*, *never*. In a “concrete formulation” or “salient-feature approach,” in contrast, descriptors contain salient aspects of performance which are characteristic, typical, and indicative of the band. Thus, unlike abstract formulations, salient features are specific to a particular band and are defined in concrete terms, not just in relation to some other descriptor (North, 2003, p. 48; 2014, p. 26). Salient features may either be construct-related, as in “can use less common vocabulary idiomatically and appropriately,” or task-related, as in “can give a clear, well-structured presentation of a complex subject.”

Both approaches to formulating descriptors have advantages and disadvantages. Developing systematic scales is considerably easier, more practical, and less time-consuming than creating salient-feature scales. The former are usually designed using intuitive methods, which require the expertise and experience of raters, along with several rounds of modification in the light of rating practice, but no systematic data collection or analysis. This practical advantage makes such scales very attractive in contexts where technical expertise and resources allocated to language testing are usually extremely limited. Capturing variation by means of qualifiers also has the face validity of being complete because, as pointed out by Davidson (1992, p. 161), the relevant aspects of performance are described continuously across the scale levels, forming a seemingly seamless continuum of ability. On the downside, such qualifiers are relational concepts which display a high degree of conceptual dependence. They are not objective; on the contrary, they have been criticised for being open to different interpretations and for depending on an in-house agreement as to their exact meaning (e.g., Alderson, 1991; Brindley, 1991). Indeed, such descriptors are meaningful only in relation to the given assessment context, the formulation of other descriptors on the scale, and some internalised understanding of expected standards. North (2014, p. 26) warns us of the paradoxical situation where identical formulations could be applied to completely different levels of proficiency if descriptors have to be interpreted in relation to some shared understanding of the standards.

The alternative salient-feature approach, in contrast, specifies real and concrete aspects of performance, thereby providing raters with more precise guidance during the rating process. Descriptors are independent, meaningful in and of themselves, and cumulative, as learners assigned to higher bands are expected to have the abilities described in the lower bands as well. As such, the descriptors can be more easily interpreted by raters, candidates, and other stakeholders (North, 2003, p. 53). From a teaching perspective, salient-feature descriptors can be more readily converted into learning objectives, lesson aims, or self-assessment checklists. One of the main difficulties with the salient-feature approach is to decide which performance feature

should be assigned to which band. While in most cases these decisions are based on expert intuition and experience, fewer scales are developed empirically by analysing either samples of performance or respondents' interpretations of individual descriptors. For example, scales produced in the tradition of empirical scaling, commonly associated with the work that resulted in the CEFR (North, 1996, 2000; North & Schneider, 1998), are based on performance data and measurement theory. The main disadvantage of salient-feature scales is that gaps may appear along the proficiency continuum (North, 2014, p. 27); in particular, criteria and bands may be somewhat underdefined if descriptors have to be rejected in the validation phase on the grounds of poor quality. From a practical point of view, an empirical approach to developing and validating such scales is quite complex and laborious.

The descriptor style is the centre of interest in this chapter, which compares two sets of rating scales used in the context of assessing academic speaking. Although the scales are very similar with regard to the underlying construct, they differ fundamentally in terms of descriptor style and the way descriptors have been assigned to particular levels. Therefore, the specific objective of this investigation is to determine which one of the two types is more effective. The chapter cannot provide a universal answer to the question as to which descriptor style is preferable, mainly because there is no single direct relationship between isolated characteristics of the rating scale and scoring reliability or validity. Rather, reliability and validity are a function of a host of factors, including the nature of the rating process and the way raters use the scale in operational settings. Rater training and experience, in particular, can have the potential to enhance the reliability of judgements, especially in terms of intra-rater reliability (e.g., Davis, 2016; Lumley, 2002; Weigle, 1998). What the chapter can do, however, is to determine which set of scales is more effective in the given assessment context and discuss possible implications for similar settings.

### 26.3 Context of the Study

The ELC programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna offers a two-semester speaking module titled Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills (PPOCS). While the first semester (PPOCS 1) focuses on applied phonetics and phonology along with accent training, the second semester (PPOCS 2) aims at developing academic presentation and interaction skills. Assessment in PPOCS 2 is largely based on a final oral exam consisting of two parts: an individual formal presentation on an academic topic of the student's choice and an outcome-based role-play discussion in groups of four. The performances are scored independently and in real time by two examiners on the basis of two analytic rating scales, one for the presentation and one for the interaction. The criteria of the presentation scale comprise lexico-grammatical resources and fluency, pronunciation and vocal impact, structure and content, and genre-specific presentation skills; the criteria of the interaction scale are

lexico-grammatical resources and fluency, pronunciation and vocal impact, content and relevance, and interaction skills (for further information on the PPOCS 2 examination, see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)).

Until recently, these criteria were divided into five bands in accordance with the Austrian five-band grading system, where 1 represents the top mark and 5 a fail. The rating process was loosely guided, with only bands 1 and 4 being defined by intuitively selected or created descriptors. Whereas band 1 was composed of extended and adapted C2 descriptors according to the CEFR, band 4 contained extended and adapted statements from level C1 (Council of Europe, 2001). Bands 2, 3, and 5, in contrast, were left unworded. Raters were instructed to use the undefined bands when they found that a performance was slightly poorer than band 1, slightly better than band 4, or below C1, respectively. The descriptor style can be described as ‘abstract’ and ‘systematic’ in that the same categories were mentioned in the same order in the two defined bands, and distinctions relied mainly on modification by adverbs of degree, intensifiers, or other qualifying words. For example, candidates assigned to band 1 in the lexico-grammatical resources and fluency category were expected to have “an *excellent* command of a *very broad* range of language,” whereas candidates in band 4 were considered to have “a *good* command of a *broad* range of language.” As the distinction between the bands was dependent on replacing *excellent* and *very broad* with *good* and *broad*, as well as conceptualising unwritten gradations in between, descriptors had meaning only relative to other descriptors.

In 2018, the PPOCS team decided to implement a new rating scheme. The new scales are also analytic in orientation, comprising the same assessment criteria as the old set. The main difference is that the descriptors are statistically calibrated into five bands, where band 1 represents the top level. Tables 26.1 and 26.2 illustrate the two schemes as exemplified by the scale used for assessing presentations.

For the new scheme, a statistical calibration using many-facet Rasch measurement resulted in an empirical description of increasing speaking proficiency across five consecutive bands (for further details on the scale development and validation process, see Berger, 2015, 2018; Berger & Heaney, 2018). By way of illustration, Table 26.3 shows how the calibrated descriptors of the new scheme define progression in pronunciation and vocal impact.

**Table 26.1** The PPOCS 2 rating scale for presentations prior to 2018 (*systematic approach*)

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
CEFR level	C2	C2–	C1+	C1	Below C1
Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Descriptor			Descriptor	
Pronunciation and vocal impact	Descriptor			Descriptor	
Structure and content (what)	Descriptor			Descriptor	
Genre-specific presentation skills (how)	Descriptor			Descriptor	

**Table 26.2** The new PPOCS 2 rating scale for presentations (*salient-feature approach*)

CEFR level	Band	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Structure and content (what)	Genre-specific presentation skills (how)
C2 ↓ C1	1	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
	2	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
	3	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
	4	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
	5	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
Below C1	6				

**Table 26.3** Progression in pronunciation and vocal impact in the new rating scales

Pronunciation and vocal impact	
Bands	Descriptors
1	Maintains consistent control of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely (e.g., deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)
2	Can make deliberate use of intonation and stress
3	Can make appropriate use of intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses
4	Generally maintains control of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English Can make appropriate use of volume
5	Pronunciation is clear although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may occasionally put strain on the listener

Progression up the scale is characterised by a shift of focus from the production of clear segmental and suprasegmental features at the lower levels to the use of prosodic and vocal features for particular communicative effects at the higher levels. The highest band is characterised by the candidates' ability to systematically manipulate those aspects of voice and pronunciation that are more sensitive to the context and speakers' intent, for example to express meaning in a more nuanced way. Table 26.4 summarises the main similarities and differences between the two types of scales.

## 26.4 Research Aims and Methods

The main question was whether the switch over to the salient-feature scales can be empirically justified. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study was to examine whether the new scales are more reliable and valid in the given context than the old scales. A secondary purpose was to determine whether the salient-feature scales would also work adequately as ten-point scales with every other band being left

**Table 26.4** Similarities and differences between the systematic and the salient-feature scales

	Systematic scales	Salient-feature scales
Purpose	Assessing speaking proficiency in academic presentations and interactions in the context of PPOCS 2 in the ELC programme at the University of Vienna	
Scoring method	Analytic scoring	
Level	C1 and C2 according to the CEFR	
Orientation	Assessor oriented	
Criteria	Presentations: Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency, pronunciation and vocal impact, structure and content, genre-specific presentation skills Interactions: Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency, pronunciation and vocal impact, content and relevance, interaction skills	
Descriptor style	Systematic approach with abstract formulations	Salient-feature approach with concrete formulations (with some elements of the systematic approach)
Development	Intuitive scale development	Data-driven scale development
Validation	Experiential through constant rater feedback	Empirical through multi-method validation study (Berger, 2015)
Number of bands	5 (2 defined, 3 undefined)	6 (5 defined, the lowest one undefined)
Advantages	High face validity; relatively easy scale development; raters' familiarity with descriptors	Descriptors are independent and meaningful in and of themselves; they provide clearer guidance to raters; they define progression; they can be converted into learning objectives, lesson aims, or self-assessment checklists
Disadvantages	Descriptors are repetitive, relying on qualifiers which are open to different interpretations; descriptors are meaningful only in relation to each other; interpretation relies on internalised understanding of level standards	Impression of fragmentary descriptions at some points; complex and time-consuming scale development and validation

unworded. Such undefined bands are common in many assessment contexts, allowing for the fact that performances cannot always be unequivocally assigned to one band but may share features of several adjacent bands (e.g., Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2019; Tankó, 2005; University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2016). The problem is that the more bands there are, the more difficult it is to distinguish them consistently. Three research questions guided this investigation:

1. Are the salient-feature scales superior to the systematic scales in terms of (a) discrimination between candidates, (b) rater reliability, (c) scale criteria, and (d) scale step functionality?
2. Do the salient-feature scales work adequately as ten-point rating scales with only every other band being defined by descriptors?

### 3. How do raters perceive the salient-feature scales?

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Whereas research questions one and two were addressed using many-facet Rasch analysis, the third one involved retrospective group interviews with raters. To compare the ratings produced by the different types of scales, two sets of data were analysed. The first one contained data from the PPOCS 2 exam administration in the summer semester 2017. A total of 87 undergraduate students took the exam at the end of that semester. All of them were non-native speakers of English, mostly with a German-speaking background. Overall, the exam administration yielded 174 student performances (presentations and interactions).

Each performance was rated by two experienced PPOCS 2 lecturers in real time and in relation to all relevant criteria of the systematic scales. Altogether, four raters in different pairings were involved in this administration, marking both their own and a colleague's students. They were all qualified teachers of English as a second language, each with more than 20 years of experience in teaching and assessing students at tertiary level; two of them were native speakers of English. This rating process yielded 1376 rating decisions in all.

The second dataset consisted of ratings produced in the course of a larger validation study (Berger, 2018). Eight members of the ELC team, including the four raters mentioned above, assessed a total of 55 video-recorded student performances on all relevant dimensions of the salient-feature scales. The scales were first used as six-point scales with every band (except for the lowest) being defined by descriptors. Then the performances were assessed again by the same raters, this time using undefined bands in between (i.e., ten-point scales). A rating plan linked the parameters through selected anchor performances rated by every rater as well as random performances rated by pairs of raters, yielding a total of 428 data points.

Both data sets were submitted to many-facet Rasch analysis using the software FACETS (Linacre, 2017). This is a type of Rasch measurement which is particularly suited to the analysis of rating judgements in performance assessment as it enables rater characteristics to be investigated, such as rater severity or consistency, or other facets of the test situation, such as tasks, scale criteria, or interlocutors, along with their impact on estimates of candidate ability (Bond & Fox, 2007; McNamara, 1996). All facets are placed on a so-called logit scale, a common interval scale, which allows for a direct comparison between the facets (for more information on many-facet Rasch measurement, see Eckes, 2015). Many-facet Rasch measurement has proved useful for the diagnosis of rating scale issues even when the number of raters involved is limited (Myford & Wolfe, 2003, 2004). The focus in this study was on the following aspects:

- (a) Candidates: A large spread of test takers on the logit scale and a high separation ratio would mean that the scales can discriminate effectively between candidates at different levels.
- (b) Raters: Firstly, if the differences in rater leniency or harshness are small (as indicated by the rater separation strata and the spread of raters on the logit scale), this would offer evidence that the scales function adequately. Secondly,



if the number of raters exhibiting inconsistency or central tendency effects is low (as indicated by the outfit and infit mean square values), this would provide evidence for the satisfactory functioning of the scales.

- (c) Scale criteria: If the logit measures for the criteria are similar (as indicated by the spread of the criteria on the logit scale), this would mean that each criterion contributes to the assessment adequately.
- (d) Scale steps: If the average measures advance monotonically with every scale category, if the mean square outfit statistic does not exceed 2.0, and if the category thresholds advance monotonically by more than 1.0 (Linacre, 2004), this would mean that the scale steps function effectively.

To answer the third research question, the transcripts of two retrospective group interviews produced for the above-mentioned validation study (Berger, 2018) were re-examined. In these interviews, the raters were asked to express their views on how the salient-feature scales function under realistic rating conditions. As Knoch (2014) points out, this format has the advantage of being practical yet able to generate rich responses, integrating the benefits derived from retrospection with the dynamics of focus group interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by questions about the quality of the scales, descriptor effectiveness, problems, and possible modifications. The passages of the interview transcripts that referred directly or indirectly to the descriptor style were isolated for a more detailed content analysis.

## 26.5 Results and Discussion

### 26.5.1 *Rating Scale Properties*

Table 26.5 provides an overview of the key findings regarding research question one, showing that the salient-feature scales are equal to or more effective than the systematic scales.

With regard to candidates, both scales separate them into different ability levels, as indicated by the candidate separation statistics. The values of the candidate separation (strata) index are 4.46 and 4.17, which suggest that both scales separate the candidates into approximately four statistically distinct groups of candidate proficiency.

As far as raters are concerned, rater separation and rater severity are of interest. In terms of rater separation, the salient-feature scales seem to be more effective. The closer the rater separation ratio is to zero, the more similar the judges are in severity. The value of 2.88 for the salient-feature scales means that the variability of the severity measures was less than three times larger than their precision, which compares to four and a half times for the systematic scales. The new scales also produce fewer levels of severity: The rater separation (strata) index of 4.17 suggests that there are about four statistically distinct groups of rater severity among the eight



**Table 26.5** Rating scale statistics

	Systematic scales	Salient-feature scales
<b>Candidates</b>		
Number of candidates	87	84
Candidate spread (logits)	-2.57 to 4.19	-4.19 to 4.60
Candidate separation ratio	3.09	2.88
Candidate separation (strata) index	4.46	4.17
<b>Raters</b>		
Number of raters	4	8
Rater spread (logits)	-0.63 to 0.39	-1.37 to 0.59
Rater separation ratio	4.49	2.88
Rater separation (strata) index	6.31	4.17
Raters with infit msq > Mean + SD	1 (marginally)	1 (marginally)
Raters with infit msq < Mean - SD	0	2 (marginally)
<b>Scale criteria</b>		
Criteria spread (logits)	-0.49 to 0.42	-0.59 to 0.29
Criteria separation ratio	2.35	1.29
Criteria separation (strata) index	3.46	2.05
Criteria with infit msq > Mean + SD	1 (marginally)	0
Criteria with infit msq < Mean - SD	0	1 (marginally)
<b>Scale steps</b>		
Average measures advance monotonically	Yes	Yes
Mean square outfit exceeds 2.0	No	No
Category thresholds advance monotonically	Yes	Yes
Category thresholds advance by <1.0	0	0
Conspicuous scale categories (partial credit model)	2	2

raters. This contrasts with about six groups in connection with the old scales. The spread, however, is larger with the new scales. The severity measures range from 0.59 logits for the harshest rater to -1.37 for the most lenient one, a range of almost two logits. With the systematic scales, the severity measures range from -0.63 to 0.39, a difference of one logit. An explanation for this seemingly inconsistent finding is that the most lenient rater using the salient-feature scales was considerably more lenient than all the other raters. With less than -1.00 logits, a cut-off standard suggested by Van Moere (2006, p. 425), and a difference of 1.08 logits to the second most lenient judge, this rater can be considered to be excessively lenient. Without this outlier, the measures cover a range of only 0.88 logits, which is quite remarkable given that the salient-feature scales had only been recently introduced, in contrast to the systematic scales, which raters had been using for years.

In terms of infit, no rater shows overly high mean square values, which would indicate a high degree of inconsistency in the ratings, or overly low mean square values, which would indicate a central tendency effect or less variation than the Rasch model expected. In both data sets, all raters are within the minimally acceptable range of 0.5-1.5 for infit mean square values (Linacre, 2002). Only when more

stringent parameters are applied (i.e., average infit mean square  $\pm$  standard deviation, as suggested by O’Sullivan, 2005, cited in Galaczi et al., 2011, p. 232) do some raters exceed the limits. One rater using the systematic scales shows a value higher than average infit mean square + standard deviation ( $>1.15$ ), and three raters using the salient-feature approach are outside the average infit mean square  $\pm$  standard deviation range (0.78–1.30), with two of them showing slightly lower and one slightly higher infit mean squares relative to the other raters. None of these raters shows critical values, however. Whereas low infit mean squares are actually typical where agreement is encouraged (Galaczi et al., 2011, p. 232), underfit is so marginal that it does not point towards a serious problem with the scales but rather seems to reflect the raters’ limited familiarity with the new scales.

As regards the scale criteria, the spread is virtually equal for both scales. In both scales, most criteria cluster around the zero logit point. The separation statistics show that the criteria in the salient-feature approach are more similar to each other in terms of difficulty than the criteria in the systematic approach. There are two different interpretations of this observation: It could mean that the criteria are closely comparable to each other in terms of difficulty, but it could also mean that the raters have difficulty distinguishing between the different criteria or that the criteria are related to or dependent on each other. Either way, this observation is not undesirable in a criterion-referenced assessment context (Knoch, 2009).

Another important aspect to consider is the functionality of the scale steps as shown by the average measure of the rating scale categories (i.e., scale steps), the mean square outfit statistics, and the ordering of the category thresholds. As explained above, the scale steps function adequately if the average measures advance monotonically with every category, if the mean square outfit statistic does not exceed 2.0, and if the category thresholds advance monotonically with every category by at least 1.0 but by less than 5.0 logits (see Eckes, 2015). Both types of scales meet all these criteria.

In addition to the results presented above, the FACETS analysis was rerun, using a criterion-related four-facet partial credit model in order to investigate the extent to which the category thresholds differ for each scale criterion. The advantage of a partial credit model is that the rating scale for each criterion can be modelled to have its own category structure. This analysis shows the scale structure of each individual criterion scale, thus providing insights into how the raters use each band for each criterion. Tables 26.6 and 26.7 summarise the rating scale category calibrations for each criterion.

**Table 26.6** Rating scale category calibrations for each criterion of the systematic scales

Category	Lexico-grammar and fluency (presentations and interactions)		Pronunciation and vocal impact (presentations and interactions)		Structure and content (presentations)		Presentation skills (presentations)		Content and relevance (interactions)		Interaction skills (interactions)	
	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE
2	-3.48	0.22	-3.73	0.20	-4.20	0.29	-3.91	0.38	-3.72	0.37	-3.56	0.35
3	-0.88	0.13	-1.39	0.13	-0.80	0.19	-1.28	0.19	-0.36	0.19	-1.15	0.19
4	1.47	0.18	1.40	0.21	1.99	0.41	2.18	0.29	2.09	0.27	1.61	0.25
5	2.89	0.40	3.73	0.75	3.01	1.08	3.01	0.66	2.00	0.41	3.09	0.57

**Table 26.7** Rating scale category calibrations for each criterion of the salient-feature scales

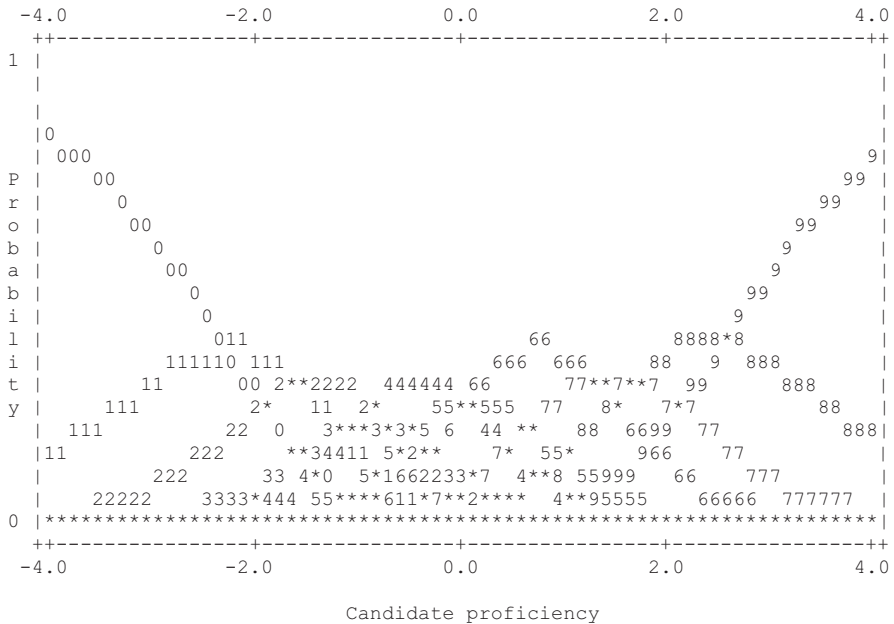
Category	<i>Lexico-grammar and fluency</i> (presentations and interactions)		<i>Pronunciation and vocal impact</i> (presentations and interactions)		<i>Structure and content</i> (presentations)		<i>Presentation skills</i> (presentations)		<i>Content and relevance</i> (interactions)		<i>Interaction skills</i> (interactions)	
	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE	Threshold	SE
2	-4.69	0.75	-4.14	0.64	-4.21	0.78	-3.66	1.08	-4.90	1.06	-4.84	1.06
3	-1.85	0.33	-2.41	0.35	-0.88	0.45	-2.19	0.54	-1.73	0.45	-1.64	0.46
4	0.65	0.28	0.22	0.29	0.08	0.42	-0.32	0.43	1.27	0.42	1.32	0.42
5	2.30	0.32	1.97	0.31	2.06	0.40	1.72	0.37	3.80	0.76	2.55	0.60
6	3.59	0.47	4.36	0.56	3.00	0.49	4.44	0.53	1.56	0.92	2.60	0.87

In the systematic scales, two scale steps turned out to be conspicuous because the thresholds did not advance monotonically or by more than 1.0 logit (highlighted in Table 26.6). For example, the fourth threshold in *content and relevance* (2.00) is lower than the third one (2.09), which implies that band four is too narrowly defined and may not be observed as candidates advance along the latent variable. Similarly, in the salient-feature scales two steps did not advance monotonically or by more than 1.0 logit either (highlighted in Table 26.7). It is very likely that these problems have to do with the fact that some categories, especially the most extreme ones, were underused, either because the descriptors of the bands concerned were not sufficiently clear to the raters or because there were not enough student performances at those levels. Indeed, the number of observations at the endpoints of the scales were extremely limited (< 10%), especially for the salient-feature scales, which must have had a noticeable effect on the scale structure. As Linacre (2004, p. 6) warns, the step calibration is imprecisely estimated and potentially unstable when category frequency is low. More observations in these categories are needed to obtain a more stable picture.

## 26.5.2 Number of Bands

With regard to research question two as to whether the salient-feature scales would also work adequately with ten bands, the answer is clearly negative. The category statistics for the ten-band scales, represented visually in Fig. 26.1, show that the thresholds do not invariably increase in a linear fashion, nor are they wide enough to argue that raters can distinguish all the levels of the scale.

The horizontal axis represents candidate proficiency; the vertical axis is the probability of being rated in each category. As can be seen, not every category has a distinct curve, which means that not every category is the most likely one as proficiency measures increase. This finding is not entirely surprising considering the relatively narrow proficiency range the scales cover. It seems perfectly plausible that the proficiency range represented by the C levels in the CEFR cannot be subdivided into as many as ten bands. This finding is also in line with evidence from previous observations. Pollitt (1991), for example, concludes that it is overly optimistic to expect that more than five bands can be distinguished reliably.

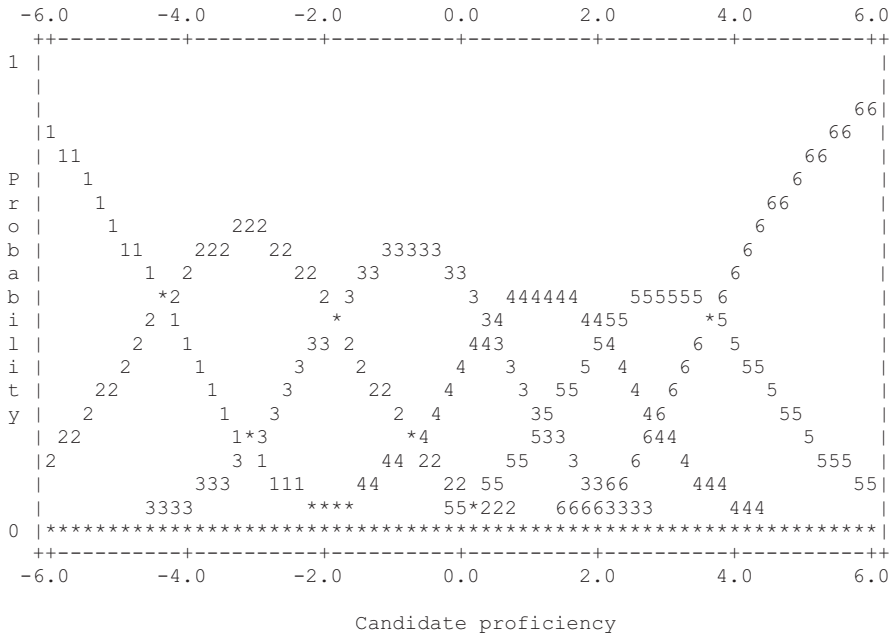


**Fig. 26.1** Category probability curves for the salient-feature scales with ten bands

In contrast, Fig. 26.2 illustrates the threshold ordering of the six-band scales. This time, the category thresholds are nicely ordered from left to right, and there is one clear curve with a separate peak for every category. This means that each scale step is the most probable category along the proficiency continuum.

### 26.5.3 Rater Perceptions

Regarding research question three, the results of the retrospective group interviews with raters revealed a clear preference for the salient-feature scales over the systematic scales. From the content analysis of the passages related to the two approaches, five key themes emerged: the rating process, rater reliability, the number of levels, descriptor formulation, and the test construct. In relation to the rating process, raters pointed out that the salient-feature scales facilitated more guided and structured rating. The bottom descriptors served as the starting point for the comparison between performance and descriptors, and raters arrived at the final decision by constantly adjusting their preliminary judgement in a stepwise fashion as new evidence emerged in the course of the performance. Raters appreciated the concreteness of the descriptors. Whereas the purely semantic variation in the systematic scales relies on some internalised in-house understanding of an expected standard for a particular level, the concepts in the salient-feature scales were felt to be more tangible:



**Fig. 26.2** Category probability curves for the salient-feature scales with six bands

“Yeah, I feel you have got a minimum here [new scales], whereas here [old scales] we just have a sort of ideal, a vague kind of ideal, and that’s not particularly helpful” (Rater E).

Raters also pointed out that the meaningful, concrete performance features mentioned in the scales enabled them to assess the candidates more accurately and reliably. While the systematic scales combine different performance features indiscriminately in the same category, the salient-feature scales isolate aspects of behaviour which are characteristic and indicative of a particular level. In rater E’s words:

With our PPOCS 2 scales [old scales] I felt that it said for a positive mark you needed pacing, pauses, volume, intonation, stress, and some [students] didn’t have all that, but we wouldn’t fail them on that, but here [new scales] it says yeah pronunciation is clear, but that alone is not enough ... so that’s much better.

Many raters also referred to the number of levels. Contrary to the quantitative results presented above, raters were virtually unanimous in the view that the undefined bands were useful in the rating process. For example, rater F pointed out that the additional bands helped her to reach a decision in borderline cases where no one descriptor captured the performance adequately in all respects: “Because sometimes we tick two boxes in the rating sheet we’re using now. That would be right there on the border anyway so that [undefined band] is the border.” In Rater D’s words: “I was happy to have the numbers from zero to nine so I could go in between.”

Some of the comments focused on the problem of using qualifiers. The adjective *clear* in connection with a take-home message in presentations, for example, was felt to be inadequate as it lacks discriminating power: “Some adverbs [*sic*] just don’t work because this is what we expect at all the levels anyway. It [the take-home message] should be clear at all the levels, so the question is what’s the *minimum* level for this clarity” (Rater A). Rater C made the following comment: “A clear take-home message for band one – I think it would need to be effective as well. I mean it can be clear but if it doesn’t fit?”

The disadvantages that the raters mentioned did not concern the salient-feature approach as such but rather individual aspects of its concrete realisation in the given context. Raters criticised some construct underrepresentation in relation to academic content and academic speaking skills, the heterogeneous mix of performance features under *genre-specific presentation skills*, and some superfluous repetition in the descriptor formulations. Overall, however, the raters unanimously agreed to adopt the new scales in the context of PPOCS 2 assessment.

## 26.6 Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to compare two types of rating scales for the assessment of academic presentation and interaction skills in the context of an undergraduate speaking course in the ELC programme at the University of Vienna. While one type of scale distinguishes performance features at different bands by means of qualifying adverbs and adjectives (the systematic approach), the other one distinguishes the bands by means of calibrated performance features characteristic of a particular band (the salient-feature approach). A number of many-facet Rasch analyses revealed that, on the whole, the two types of scales are essentially equivalent in terms of candidate separation and scale step functionality, but the salient-feature scales are superior in terms of rater separation and consistency as well as criterion separation and consistency. The salient-feature scales function adequately as six-point scales but not so if the number of levels is increased by inserting undefined bands. Retrospective group interviews with the participating raters showed a clear preference for the salient-feature scales over the other type.

The results need to be interpreted with caution, however. With a limited number of raters involved in the study and a relatively small number of ratings, particularly in one of the two datasets, some of the findings might not be very stable. Especially when each scale criterion was modelled to have its own category structure and a partial-credit model was used, the number of observations was extremely limited for some categories. Therefore, further investigations with a larger sample and a sufficiently high category frequency should be undertaken to obtain a more robust picture of how the scales function. Furthermore, owing to the different nature of the two datasets used in the FACETS analyses, a direct comparison is not as straightforward as it may seem. Whereas one set of data was derived from live exams, the other one was produced during staff meetings organised specifically for validation

purposes. As a consequence, the data sets differ in terms of the number of raters involved, raters' familiarity with the scales, the format of the student performances, the rating conditions, and the number of data points. Further research using ratings from live operational settings, thereby improving the comparability of the datasets, is clearly desirable.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings have had a number of practical implications for scale revision, rater training, and other scale development projects. In order to improve the category calibrations, some of the salient-feature bands were specified more precisely. For example, to alleviate the problem of construct underrepresentation at the bottom end of the interaction scale, the scale developers formulated additional descriptors for *content and relevance* as well as *interaction skills*. The revised versions of the scales, which do not contain an undefined band 6 any more, can be found in Appendices 1 and 2 at the end of this chapter.

In terms of rater training, the findings underscore the need to address the potential issues of central tendency and halo effects. The number of ratings assigned in each scale category seems to indicate an inclination to avoid extreme positive or extreme negative ratings. Although other indicators such as the separation index, separation reliability index, or fit statistics do not confirm this suspicion at group level, there are some signs of central tendency effects at the level of individual raters. Focused rater feedback and training should therefore aim to increase the scorers' awareness of potential rater errors.

Taken together, the findings of this study support the change from the systematic to the salient-feature approach in the context of assessing academic presentations and interactions in the ELC programme. Future scale development projects at the department may follow suit. Furthermore, this study has confirmed that rating scales with a smaller number of clearly defined bands tend to function more effectively than their multi-level counterparts with undefined intermediate bands. Other scale development projects may also aim to create descriptors for all the bands the scale is intended to distinguish.

Appendices

Appendix I

Salient-Feature Scale for Presentations

<p><b>Full Academic</b></p>	<p>Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Excellent</b> command of a very <b>broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> formulating ideas to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b></li> </ul>	<p>Pronunciation and vocal impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent control</b> of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• <b>Ability to convey finer shades of meaning precisely</b> (e.g., deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)</li> </ul>	<p>Content and structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Great breadth and depth of content;</b></li> <li>• <b>Full and appropriate use of a wide range of cohesive devices</b></li> </ul>	<p>Genre-specific presentation skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and effective use of all</b> of the following:  <b>opening hook,</b>  <b>rhetorical features</b> (e.g., metaphor, tripling, repetition, inclusive language, rhetorical questions, analogy),  <b>paralinguistic features</b> (gesture, posture/poise, facial expression, eye contact, use of space),  <b>audience rapport,</b>  <b>visuals,</b>  <b>take-home message,</b>  <b>time-keeping</b></li> </ul>

(continued)



	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Content and structure	Genre-specific presentation skills
<b>Advanced Academic</b>	<p><b>4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Consistent</b> lexical and grammatical <b>control</b> of [complex] language as appropriate for the genre, even while attention is otherwise engaged;</li> <li>• Expresses him/herself <b>at length with a natural flow</b>, almost effortlessly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberate</b> use of <b>intonation</b> and <b>stress</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student's <b>own contribution of ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Critical</b> engagement with sources (e.g., evaluation, comparison, contextualisation, implications, limitations);</li> <li>• <b>Effective</b> signposting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective audience rapport</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Confident performance</b></li> </ul>
<b>General Academic</b>	<p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reformulations</b> occur mainly for reasons of <b>expressing ideas fully</b>;</li> <li>• Free speech <b>without rote memorization</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of relevant evidence-based ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Awareness of audience and task constraints</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Clear and logically developed 3-part</b> structure;</li> <li>• <b>Controlled use of cohesive devices</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>rhetorical features</b> (e.g., metaphor, tripling, repetition, inclusive language, rhetorical questions, analogy);</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of visuals</b>: visual appeal, formal features, references to sources</li> </ul>

<p><b>Full Operational</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good command of a broad range of language;</li> <li>• Errors are rare and mostly insignificant;</li> <li>• Rare pauses for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally maintains control of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• Appropriate use of volume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of relevant ideas;</li> <li>• Adequately structured speech;</li> <li>• Appropriate signposting;</li> <li>• Appropriate research question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of most of the following: opening hook, rhetorical features, paralinguistic features, audience rapport, visuals, take-home message;</li> <li>• Appropriate use of paralinguistic features (gesture, posture/poise, facial expression, eye contact, use of space);</li> <li>• Appropriate audience rapport;</li> <li>• Precise time-keeping</li> </ul>
<p><b>Effective Operational</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and appropriate expression with possible limitations when communicating complex ideas;</li> <li>• Occasional pauses for reasons of grammar or word choice;</li> <li>• Reformulations do not strain the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear pronunciation although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may occasionally put strain on the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May include some ideas of doubtful relevance;</li> <li>• 3-part structure just discernible;</li> <li>• Only occasional use of signposting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate use of visuals: relevance;</li> <li>• Insufficient use of the following: rhetorical features, paralinguistic features, audience rapport, take-home message, time-keeping</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

## Salient-Feature Scale for Interactions

	Lexico-grammatical resources and fluency	Pronunciation and vocal impact	Content and relevance	Interaction skills
<b>Full Academic</b>	<p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Excellent</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> formulating ideas to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistent control</b> of the salient segmental, suprasegmental, and other prosodic features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• Ability to convey <b>finer shades of meaning precisely</b> (e.g., deliberate use of voice quality, pacing, pauses, volume, articulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Great flexibility</b> in responding to others;</li> <li>• <b>Easily contributes at length</b> to complex interactions even on abstract, complex, unfamiliar topics;</li> <li>• <b>Spontaneous answers</b> to complex lines of counter-argument</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relates own contribution skilfully</b> to those of other speakers;</li> <li>• <b>Effective use of floor management skills, non-verbal cues, posture/poise</b></li> </ul>
<b>Advanced Academic</b>	<p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>very broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Consistent</b> lexical and grammatical <b>control</b> of [complex] language as appropriate for the genre, even while attention is otherwise engaged;</li> <li>• Expresses him/herself <b>at length with a natural flow</b>, almost effortlessly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberate</b> use of <b>intonation</b> and <b>stress</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Flexibility</b> in responding to others;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>hold his/her own</b> in formal discussion of complex issues;</li> <li>• <b>Articulate, convincing, and persuasive</b> argument;</li> <li>• <b>Original proposals</b> that advance the discussion;</li> <li>• <b>Ability to frame the issue;</b></li> <li>• <b>Complete task awareness</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective</b> use of the following collaboration strategies: <b>taking the initiative, getting/keeping/giving the floor, back-channelling, gesture, eye contact, facial expression</b></li> </ul>

General Academic	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reformulations</b> occur mainly for reasons of <b>expressing ideas fully</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>intonation, pacing, voice quality, and pauses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Easily keeps up</b> with the discussion and <b>argues a formal position</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Contributes ideas</b> of relevance to the joint discourse and <b>adapts his/her contributions</b> to those of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adjusts</b> his/her way of expressing him/herself to the interlocutor;</li> <li>• Ability to <b>clarify/recap</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate posture/ poise</b></li> </ul>
Full Operational	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Good</b> command of a <b>broad</b> range of language;</li> <li>• <b>Errors</b> are rare and mostly insignificant;</li> <li>• <b>Rare pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generally maintains control</b> of the salient segmental and suprasegmental features of a particular variety of English;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of <b>volume</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relates own contribution</b> to those of other speakers;</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate</b> use of the following collaboration strategies: <b>getting/keeping/giving the floor, back-channelling, paralinguistic features, facial expression</b></li> </ul>	
Effective Operational	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear and appropriate</b> expression with possible <b>limitations</b> when communicating <b>complex ideas</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Occasional pauses</b> for reasons of grammar or word choice;</li> <li>• Reformulations <b>do not strain</b> the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear</b> pronunciation although the realisation of salient segmental or suprasegmental features may <b>occasionally put strain</b> on the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Limited responses</b> to complex questions and comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to <b>give emphasis</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Limited eye contact</b> and <b>gesture</b>;</li> <li>• <b>Insufficient interaction</b></li> </ul>

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# Chapter 27

## Foreign Accent and the Role of Identity in the Adult English as a Foreign Language Pronunciation Classroom



**Karin Richter**

**Abstract** Many theorists have proposed a link between second language (L2) learners' attitudes towards their own foreign accent and their perception of identity. The field of adult L2 pronunciation learning and teaching is particularly susceptible to struggles arising from this predicament since acquiring an L2 accent often entails re-negotiating one's already established identity. This chapter investigates university students' attitudes towards their foreign accent in English and the relationship between identity perceptions and achievement in adult pronunciation learning. A purposefully designed questionnaire was given to two groups of English language students enrolled in a university pronunciation course taking either what is commonly referred to as 'British English' (BE) or 'General American English' (AE) as their model. The qualitative and quantitative data collected in this project were then matched with the grade the students received at the end of the pronunciation class to reveal any potential relationships. Overall, the findings showed that the students in this course are not afflicted by a fear of loss of identity. Their main objective is to speak with the best possible approximation of the chosen model and those who set higher goals in this regard also tend to receive better grades.

**Keywords** Pronunciation learning · Learner attitudes · Student achievement · Foreign accentedness · Perceptions of identity

### 27.1 Introduction

The fact that some language learners are more successful than others has often been attributed to a number of individual differences (ID), which are assumed to shape the overall trajectory of the language learning process (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009). In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the study of these variables, a highly

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K. Richter (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [karin.richter@univie.ac.at](mailto:karin.richter@univie.ac.at)

active and vibrant research area, has generated many heated debates among researchers regarding the question which of a myriad of psychological, cognitive, neurobiological, educational, or socio-cultural qualities is the key to success. Although this “quest for the Holy Grail” (Dewaele, 2009, p. 624) so far has failed to solve the puzzle, recent research (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Richter, 2019) stresses the highly complex and dynamic nature of the variables suggesting that there is a constant interplay of these learner propensities, which contribute to the development of an individual’s L2 competence (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2001).

Among these variables, the concept of identity has been named as an influential driver in L2 achievement (e.g., Marx, 2002). In fact, the inextricable link between language and identity has long been acknowledged by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and linguists alike. There seems to be little doubt that the concept of self plays multiple roles in society and that these roles are largely manifested through language. Lightbown and Spada (2013), for instance, have pointed out that learning to speak a foreign language is very similar to learning to take on a new identity. More than any other language skill, pronunciation seems to be prone to conflicts arising from this predicament. In this respect, adults are often particularly sensitive to their own ego boundaries, whereas children tend to mimic new sounds without inhibition or reflection on wider implications (Moyer, 2013). As a consequence, adult learners who find it difficult to identify with a certain foreign language and culture are generally more inclined to, consciously or unconsciously, retain a foreign accent as a marker of group affiliation (e.g., Jones, 1997). This has far-reaching implications for L2 pronunciation learning and teaching. Daniels (1995), for example, has surmised that some students are in fact afraid of acquiring a certain accent since this would mean losing part of their own identity. He goes on to question if L2 accent training is in fact ethical (Daniels, 1995). This idea was originally introduced by Porter and Gavin (1989), who claimed that trying to change someone’s accent, no matter whether in the first (L1) or the second language, is “to temper with their self-image, and is thus unethical – morally wrong” (Porter & Gavin, 1989, p. 8). For L2 phonology teaching, this could mean that the teacher who promotes a particular accent might at the same time promote an unwanted identity change in the student. As a consequence, the artificially imposed goals in many pronunciation courses may then negatively impact on the achievement of learners who feel that their own foreign accent as a marker of identity is stripped away or mocked. From this it could be inferred that those who do not probe their own identity may eventually have a greater chance of receiving better grades.

Another highly controversial issue related to these artificially imposed pronunciation learning goals centres around the problematic use of the term *nativeness*, which Moyer calls a “sociocultural hot potato” (Moyer, 2013, p. 2) marking the hegemonic remnants of the monolingual speaker ideal. Without doubt, there is a genuine desire these days to progress beyond the colonial implications of the native/non-native distinction. While some rightfully ask whether this dichotomy still serves any purpose, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers surely need a standard for pedagogical consistency (e.g., Scales et al., 2006). This is in line with research conducted by Young and Walsh (2010). According to their study on English



language teaching models, the majority of the EFL teachers who participated in their investigation agreed that a standard model was crucial for consistency and clarity.

The learner's attitude towards dealing with arising identity concerns can also have direct methodological implications for the L2 pronunciation classroom. In more practical terms, this could mean that EFL teachers might want to forge new paths in the way they teach pronunciation. For instance, rather than mimicking or imitating a range of different models of L1 speakers as commonly recorded for coursebooks, some students may find it more beneficial to adhere to the accent of one single real-life role model (e.g., an actor, a politician, a youtuber) to assist them in their attempts to improve their accent in English. This may be particularly useful if the learners connect with the speaker of the respective target language in more than just the accent (e.g., image, age, achievements, appearance). As a consequence, some pronunciation self-help or accent-reduction websites (e.g., Mojsin, 2011) recommend finding a role model who the learners can imitate. This, however, could also be relevant for pronunciation teaching (e.g., Sewell, 2016) as it might help students work on the approximation of a certain speaker's accent outside class, thereby giving them the opportunity to define their own personal goals. Nevertheless, it could be hypothesised that only learners who embrace their own identity welcome this teaching approach and eventually attain better grades.

## 27.2 Theoretical Background

A considerable amount of research on identity in SLA has focused on the context of immersion environments (e.g., Gathbonton & Trofimovich, 2008; Marx, 2002; McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Noels, 2009; Piller, 1999). For instance, Piller (1999) in her investigation of the threshold of passing for an L1 speaker of the target language found that most of the participants in her study felt challenged in their perceptions of self after a longer absence from their own L1 communities. Marx (2002) explored the changes in her own identity when she moved from Canada to Germany. She claimed that after a few years, when her sense of identity had shifted towards a more German perspective, this also meant that she had moved more closely towards a 'native' German accent. For Marx, this development illustrates the link between perceptions of identity and L2 pronunciation achievement. In their study on L2 speaking proficiency and social identity among Canadian Francophones in Quebec, Gathbonton and Trofimovich (2008) identified a range of different dimensions of group affiliation. Among these, only two, namely political beliefs (related to the political situation in Quebec) and the belief that accent is in fact an indicator of identity, negatively affected L2 oral language competence. More recently, McCrocklin and Link (2016) examined potential links between the learners' foreign accent in English, their identities, and their language learning goals at a university in an English-speaking country. Their findings showed that instead of fearing a loss of identity, the majority of their participants welcomed the positive effects of

developing what they themselves considered to be a “native-like accent” (McCrocklin & Link, 2016, p. 139). Even Jenkins, one of the most prominent scholars in the field of English as a lingua franca (ELF), concedes that although the learners in her study were initially in favour of the idea of a modified English for global communication, they nevertheless expressed a strong desire to acquire a certain L1 accent, which they considered as superior to their own foreign accent: “they still wanted a native version, perceived this as ‘best,’ saw their own English as ‘bad’” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 200).

These studies suggest that identity and concepts of self are indeed connected to L2 phonological attainment, especially for those learners who live in the target-language country. However, the question whether this link is equally strong in an EFL context has largely been neglected in the literature so far. Clearly, more research is needed to uncover the ethical ramifications and pedagogical implications of adult L2 pronunciation training. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by shedding light on the relationship between identity perceptions and attainment in L2 phonology in adult Austrian learners of English.

The original inspiration for this research is rooted in more than 15 years of personal experience teaching Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 1 (PPOCS 1), an explicit pronunciation course offered to all undergraduate students at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna. What particularly spurred my interest in this project was the question if adult learners’ self-defined pronunciation learning goals, on the one hand, and their ability to identify with a particular L2 language and culture, on the other hand, could be related to the grade they received at the end of the course.

### 27.3 Methodology

In order to explore the relationship between the PPOCS 1 students’ self-defined learning objectives, their identity perceptions and their achievement at the final oral exam in more detail, three main research questions were formulated:

1. How do PPOCS 1 students feel about their foreign accent in English shortly before the oral exam?
2. What is the relationship between the PPOCS 1 students’ learning goals in terms of their foreign accent and their final grade?
3. What is the relationship between the PPOCS 1 students’ perceived concepts of identity and their final grade?

Two groups of students participated in this project: one group taking what is commonly referred to as ‘British English’ (BE) and one group taking ‘General American English’ (AE) (see Lindsey, 2019, p. 4) as their model. Among all the possible models educators and students can choose from these days, “British English and American English top the list” (Moyer, 2013, p. 92). These two model accents are generally associated with different cultural connotations and

perceptions which may leave an imprint on the learner's concept of identity. For instance, Mompean (2008) argues that the students' choice of accent can, to a certain extent, be related to their cultural and political affinity with the country where the accent is spoken. This is also in line with Müller's (2012) findings dating back to the summer term 2012, when he observed an increased demand for 'American English' among PPOCS 1 students. He associated this trend with the "Obama-effect" (Müller, 2012, p. 62). Therefore, it was deemed noteworthy to investigate the research questions in the light of these two distinct learner groups.

To address the questions posed, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, where quantitative data was complemented by the qualitative analysis of a selected number of open questions in the survey. Data were collected in the form of a purposefully designed questionnaire which was given to two groups of English language students ( $n = 69$ ) taking PPOCS 1 as part of their Bachelor degree in English and American Studies or in the teacher education programme. To a large extent, the items in this questionnaire were based on the survey used by McCrocklin and Link (2016). The questionnaire was handed to the students by the respective lecturers in the last class before the exam. In the accompanying consent form, the participants were informed about the project and explicitly agreed to take part in the research. Participation was encouraged but voluntary. For reasons of confidentiality and anonymity, the names of the respondents are not given in this paper. At the time of the data collection, the learners had not had their final exam yet. This is important as the grade may have influenced the responses given by the participants. The results of the final exam were submitted by the lecturers after the end of the course.

### 27.3.1 Participants

Since the aim of this project was to explore views of adult learners of English, the participants in this project were all undergraduate students enrolled in one of the two Bachelor programmes (BA and BEd) at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. The level of English language competence expected from students embarking on a degree programme in Austria is B2 according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020). At the time of data collection, they were all enrolled in PPOCS 1. The aim of this course is to equip the students with advanced knowledge of English pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental level (see Richter, "Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills," [this volume](#)). PPOCS 1 courses adopt either 'British English' or 'General American English' as their teaching models. Students are generally advised to choose the accent that they feel corresponds more closely to their English or the accent with which they can identify most. Table 27.1 gives an overview of the demographic composition of the participants.

**Table 27.1** Study participants

	British English (BE)	American English (AE)
<b>Respondents</b>	34	35
<b>English language competence</b>	C1/C2	
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	30	26
Male	3	7
n/a	1	2
<b>Age</b>		
20–30	31	30
>30	2	2
n/a	1	3
<b>L1 background</b>		
German	29	28
Other	4	5
n/a	1	2
<b>Type of bachelor programme</b>		
BEd (teacher education)	25	26
BA	7	9
n/a	2	0

Table 27.1 shows that 69 subjects completed and returned the questionnaire. The numbers of students taking BE ( $n = 34$ ) and those taking AE ( $n = 35$ ) are roughly the same. The overwhelming majority of the participants were females enrolled in the teacher education programme who had a German L1 background and were between 20 and 30 years old. This largely reflects the average student population of a regular PPOCS 1 class.

### 27.3.2 *Materials and Procedure*

Towards the end of the course, a paper-and-pen questionnaire was administered to elicit students' biographical data, their attitudes and feelings towards their foreign accent and their perceptions of identity. More precisely, this questionnaire consisted of four main parts. Part 1 included 11 Likert-scale items to capture the students' attitudes, perceptions and language learning aims with regard to approximating a certain L1 accent. In this section, the answers were to be marked on a six-point scale ranging from (1) strongly agree to (6) strongly disagree. Part 2 intended to gauge the learners' reactions to a number of statements about their foreign accent. In this section, five emoticons were used as scale anchors with an answer of (1) corresponding to a very happy smiley face and (5) to an extremely unhappy one. This type of scale is not only a welcome change from traditional number scales (e.g., Toepoel et al., 2019) but also tends to speed up the response time (e.g., Stange et al., 2018). The

statements in this part were complemented with open questions asking the students to give reasons for their choices. Here it is important to note that not all the respondents took the opportunity to add verbal comments in the given spaces. The last part of the survey focused on personal data (age, gender, L1, degree programme), and the participants were also requested to write down the grade they think they will receive at the end of the course.

It has to be noted here that despite the above-mentioned controversy regarding the notion of nativeness, it was decided to include the terms “native” and “native-like” in the survey since the students were familiar with this terminology.

### 27.3.3 Analysis

To explore potential relationships between the learners’ attitudes towards their own foreign accent in English, their perceptions of identity, and their achievement in PPOCS 1, the answers provided in the survey were matched with the grades the students received at the end of the semester. Data corresponding to the three research questions were analysed using SPSS Statistics 25. For the qualitative part, the open questions in the questionnaires were subject to closer scrutiny. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis of the obtained quantitative data. As the data showed no normal distribution (all  $ps < .05$ ), non-parametric tests, namely Mann Whitney U tests, were run instead of t-tests for capturing potential inter-group differences (i.e., BE and AE) and Spearman’s Rank Order Correlation was used instead of Pearson’s correlation when investigating links between variables. For comparing categorical data, the Chi-square test for independence was carried out.

## 27.4 Results

### 27.4.1 Feelings About Their Foreign Accent

The first research question aimed at investigating students’ feelings towards their foreign accent after a semester of explicit pronunciation instruction and shortly before the final exam. To answer this question, three items from the questionnaire were analysed in more detail. More precisely, the participants were asked to react to the given statements by selecting one of six options: strongly agree (1), agree (2), slightly agree (3), slightly disagree (4), disagree (5), strongly disagree (6). These items were.

- (1) I feel that I have a noticeable foreign accent when I speak English.
- (3) I like it when people recognise my foreign accent when I speak English.
- (11) I don’t mind having a foreign accent in English. After all I am not a native speaker.

**Table 27.2** Feelings about foreign accent

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1)	4%	38%	33%	4%	19%	2%	3.00	1.23
(3)	1%	3%	12%	19%	45%	20%	5.00	1.11
(11)	4%	9%	30%	22%	28%	7%	4.00	1.26

**Table 27.3** Reactions to comments on foreign accent






Item						<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>
(12)	–	16%	55%	26%	3%	3.00	0.72
(13)	62%	32%	6%	–	–	1.00	0.61
(14)	72%	22%	4%	–	2%	1.00	0.71

Table 27.2 summarises the responses to each of these statements.

From the data obtained it can be seen that the vast majority of the participants agreed (38%) or slightly agreed (33%) with item (1), “I feel that I have a noticeable foreign accent when I speak English” (median 3.00), whereas most PPOCS 1 students disagreed with items (3), “I like it when people recognise my foreign accent when I speak English,” and (11), “I don’t mind having a foreign accent in English. After all I am not a native speaker” (median 5.00 and 4.00 respectively). To gain further insights into the learners’ stance towards their own L2 pronunciation skills, a number of given statements on a 5-point emoticon scale with smiley faces were provided. Here the following three statements were chosen to elicit the emotions of the students regarding their pronunciation:

How would you feel if ...

(12) ... someone recognised your foreign accent in English?

(13) ... someone complimented you on your native-like accent in English?

(14) ... you woke up tomorrow with a native-speaker accent of English?

As can be seen in Table 27.3, more than half of the participants felt indifferent if identified as a speaker with a foreign accent (median 3.00). Nevertheless, an impressive two thirds were very happy if they received a compliment on their native-like accent (median 1.00). Not a single student remarked that they would be unhappy or rather unhappy about it. Similarly, 72% of the students would be very happy if they woke up tomorrow with a native-like accent (median 1.00).

In order to identify potential group differences (between the AE and the BE students) regarding these three items, Mann Whitney U tests were conducted to shed light on the question if the discrepancy between the groups is in fact significant. The results indicate that this not the case, as Table 27.4 shows.

To explore these findings in more detail and gain further insight into the data, the verbal comments some of the students provided were examined. As far as question (12), “How would you feel if someone recognised your foreign accent in English?”, is concerned, most student comments fall into three main categories, namely lack of

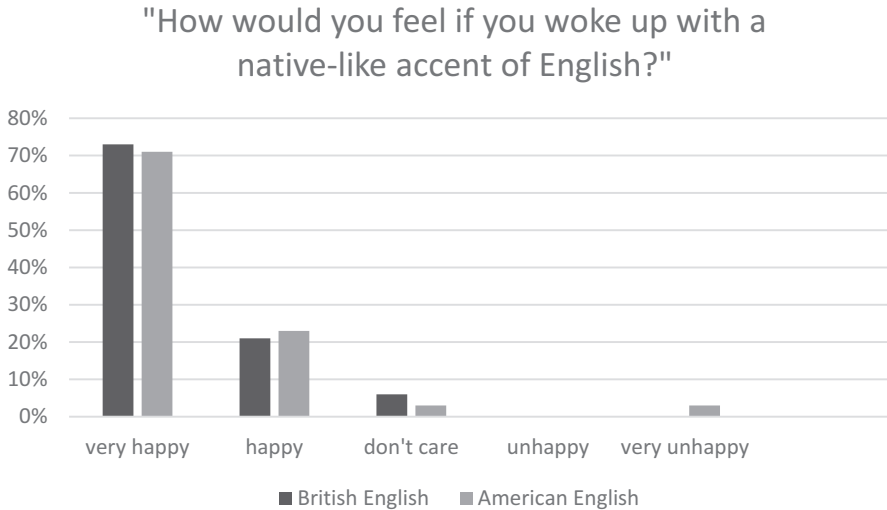
**Table 27.4** Mann-Whitney U Test results for feelings about foreign accent

Item	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
(12)	615.000	.267	.790
(13)	577.500	.000	1.000
(14)	585.000	.117	.907

phonological competence, missing one's goals, and fruitless efforts in PPOCS 1. Examples of student responses for the first line of argument, namely lack of phonological competence, would be "Because this says that I am not really good at pronunciation" (student 2) or "Because it's obvious that I have a foreign accent" (student 37). Almost one third of all the students ( $n = 20$ ) noted that they would not be pleased about such a comment since their goal was to achieve a 'native-like' accent: "My goal is to sound native-like" (student 63) or "Because I'd like to be perceived as a native speaker and I am working hard to get rid of my Austrian accent" (student 5). Several answers explicitly refer to the effort put into the PPOCS 1 course: "It feels like a failure to me since I'm taking PPOCS and I'm working on my accent on a daily basis" (student 16) or "I would be unhappy because I practised hard to get rid of it" (student 24). Interestingly, one student referred specifically to the negative cultural implications of an Austrian (German) accent, mentioning "the associations that follow (Nazis, Schwarzenegger, Oktoberfest)" (student 26). The two students who ticked "very unhappy" commented that they would find it "embarrassing because I would like to sound like a native speaker" (student 49) and "I am aiming for a native-like accent" (student 39). On the other hand, among those very few students who felt indifferent or even slightly happy about the comment on their foreign accent, remarks such as "It's not a bad thing that someone recognises that I'm not a native speaker" (student 6) or "It shows the person is interested in where I come from" (student 8) can be found.

In terms of reasons why the respondents felt happy about a compliment on their English accent (item 13), the answers given show a very clear picture. In fact, almost half of the students ( $n = 32$ ) emphasise that this reflects the reward for the tremendous amount of work they dedicated to PPOCS 1. Accordingly, statements such as "This shows the effort I put into this class" (student 16), "I have worked hard to improve my accent" (student 35) or "Practice was worth it" (student 24) were expressed across both groups. The second most frequent reason is related to their personal aims: "Because that's my goal and that's what I am working on" (student 61) or "Because I want to sound native-like" (student 12). One student commented on the particular importance of a convincing L2 accent for teachers: "It's very important for teachers of English to have native speaker qualities. Students will speak better as well" (student 33).

The results for item (14), "How would you feel if you woke up tomorrow with a native-speaker accent," confirm a similar tendency. Only one participant asserted that they would not be happy. As illustrated in Fig. 27.1, in both groups, more than two thirds would be very happy to be bestowed with a native-like accent overnight.



**Fig. 27.1** Group comparison of waking up with a native-like accent

A more detailed analysis of the comments regarding question (14) reveals that the main reason why the learners would be happy about such a suddenly awarded native-like accent is related to the specific requirements of the PPOCS 1 course and its heavy workload. In this respect, ten students emphasised that this would mean a considerable reduction in the work to be done for PPOCS 1. Hence, comments such as “I wouldn’t have to practice any more” (students 29, 4) or “No more hard work with this” (student 28) or “PPOCS 1 would be so much easier” (student 7) or “The stress of the exam would go away” (student 39) or “No more struggling! No more having to watch my voicing, to put my tongue between my teeth, to drop my jaw” (student 36) clearly underline this argument. In addition to course-related comments, some respondents maintained that a native-like accent would be beneficial for their future career “because it would sound really professional” (student 43) and it would also have a positive impact on their personality: “I just feel that with a native-like pronunciation native-speakers would take me more seriously and that I would feel a lot more confident” (student 50).

### **27.4.2 Learning Goals and Achievement**

To address the second research question relating to the students’ learning goals in PPOCS 1, it was deemed crucial to investigate the relationship between the students’ self-formulated pronunciation learning goals and the final grade. The items by which the learners’ aims in terms of their pronunciation skills were measured are the following:



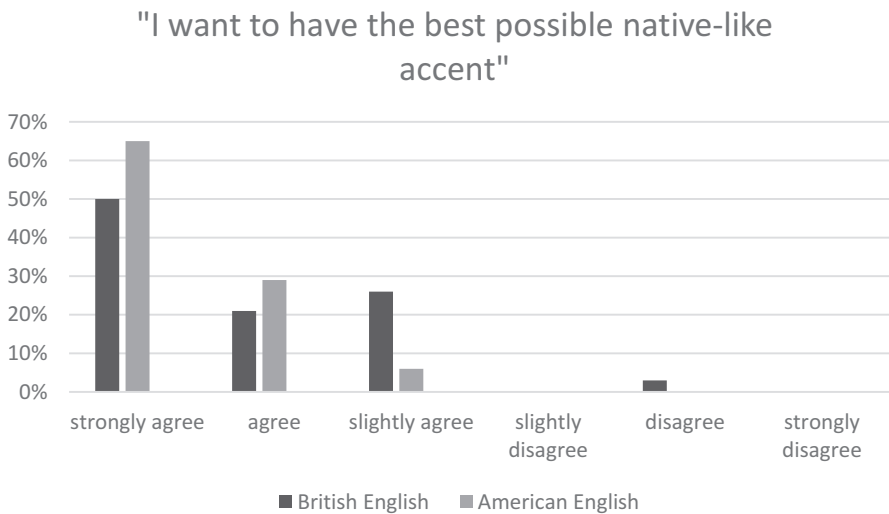
- (4) I am happy with my current pronunciation abilities.
- (8) I want to have the best possible native-like accent.

As can be seen in Table 27.5, most of the learners tend to agree that they are, at the end of PPOCS 1, generally happy with their pronunciation skills (median = 3.00). However, only one person strongly agreed to be very happy and one person asserted to be very unhappy. The student who claimed to be very happy was enrolled in the AE course, expected to get a 2 (i.e., the second highest grade) on the final test and eventually received a 1 (i.e., the best grade). The person who claimed to be very unhappy was also in the AE group, expected to get a 4 (i.e., the second lowest grade) and received a 4. In terms of their aims, almost 60% of the students expressed the strong wish to have the best possible native-like accent, and all – except for one female participant in the BE group – agreed (median 1.00). This one student claimed that she wanted to be “recognised as an English language learner” (student 23). It is interesting to note that this particular student did not pass the PPOCS 1 course, as her final grade shows.

Figure 27.2 displays the comparison between the two groups. A Mann-Whitney U test further confirms that there are no significant differences to be observed between the AE and BE students as far as their learning goals are concerned

**Table 27.5** Learning goals

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>
(4)	1%	29%	39%	20%	10%	1%	3.00	1.04
(8)	57%	25%	16%	–	2%	–	1.00	1.10



**Fig. 27.2** Group comparison of best possible native-like accent

( $U = 449.000$ ,  $Z = -1.778$ ,  $p = .075$ ). The only student who disagreed that they wanted to have the best possible native-like accent was enrolled in the BE group.

Regarding the potential link between the desire to attain the best possible native-like accent and the final grade received, the Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient showed a statistically significant positive moderate correlation between statement (8) and the final grade ( $r_s = .341$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), which is significant at the level of 0.01. This means that those students who aim at the best possible native-like accent also appear to receive higher grades.

In addition, there is a negative correlation between the statement “I like my foreign accent in English” ( $r_s = -0.316$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and the course grade, indicating that those learners who are content with their accent tend to achieve lower grades than those who are not. Here the correlation is significant at the level of 0.01.

### 27.4.3 Identity and Achievement

The third and final ID factor which was analysed in this study concerns the learners’ concept of identity and its relation to achievement in PPOCS 1. The items related to this construct were the following:

- (2) I find that I am taking on a different identity when I speak English.
- (5) I like my foreign accent because it shows who I am and where I am from.
- (6) I am afraid of losing my identity as a non-native speaker in this course.
- (9) I feel close to the L2 culture and the L2 accent is part of it.
- (10) Speaking with a native-speaker accent threatens my identity as a non-native speaker.

Table 27.6 illustrates that although most students agree (17%) or slightly agree (44%) that they take on a different identity when they speak English (median 3.00), they are clearly not afraid of losing their non-native speaker identity in PPOCS 1 (median 6.00). In addition, a total of two thirds of the participants slightly disagree (26%), disagree (33%), or strongly disagree (16%) with the statement that they like their foreign accent since it shows who they are (median 4.00). As many as 90% of the students agreed that they feel close to the L2 culture and they see the accent as part of it (median 2.00).

**Table 27.6** Concept of identity

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>
(2)	7%	17%	44%	13%	17%	2%	3.00	1.18
(5)	1%	4%	20%	26%	33%	16%	4.00	1.16
(6)	–	–	–	2%	10%	88%	6.00	0.39
(9)	19%	44%	27%	6%	1%	3%	2.00	1.08
(10)	2%	2%	7%	7%	24%	58%	6.00	1.13

To shed light on the question if the differences between the groups regarding the five items in this construct are statistically significant, a series of Mann-Whitney U tests were run. The results revealed that this not the case, as Table 27.7 shows.

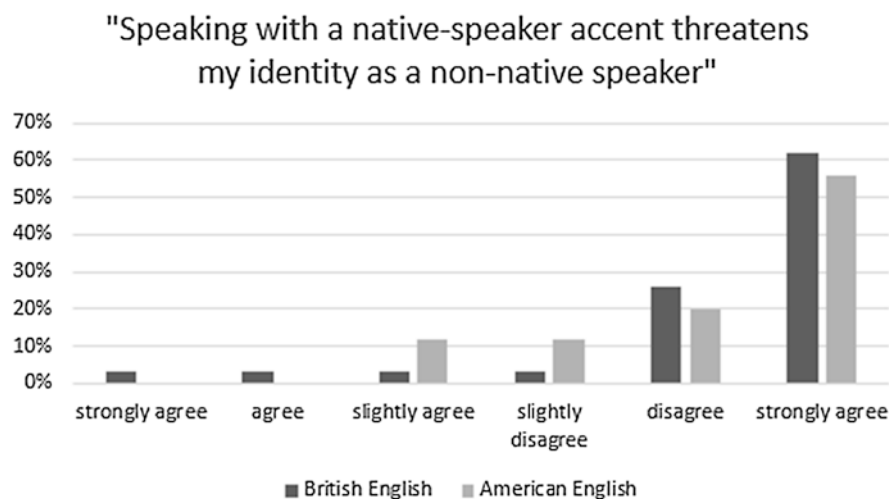
Figure 27.3 compares the results for the item “Speaking with a native-speaker accent threatens my identity as a non-native speaker” in both groups. Evidently, the overwhelming majority of the participants in both groups either disagree (26% for BE and 20% for AE) or strongly disagree (62% for BE and 56% for AE).

Regarding the item “I feel close to the L2 culture and the L2 accent is part of it”, Fig. 27.4 illustrates that the results in both groups are very similar with only very few students rejecting the statement. In the case of the BE students, merely 3% of the participants disagreed, and in the case of the AE group, 9% slightly disagreed. Overall, there is convincing evidence across both groups displaying a similar degree of proximity to the culture associated with the respective L2 accent.

When analysing the potential link between item 9 (“I feel close to the L2 culture and the L2 accent is part of it”) and item 8, the wish to achieve the best possible native-like accent, a significant positive correlation can be detected. This correlation is significant ( $r_s = .346$ ,  $p = .004$ ) at the 0.01 level, as Spearman’s Rank Order

**Table 27.7** Mann-Whitney U test results for concept of identity

Item	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
(2)	675.000	1.009	.313
(5)	596.500	0.019	.985
(6)	631.000	1.562	.118
(9)	570.000	0.318	.750
(10)	530.000	0.665	.506



**Fig. 27.3** Group comparison of identity as a non-native speaker

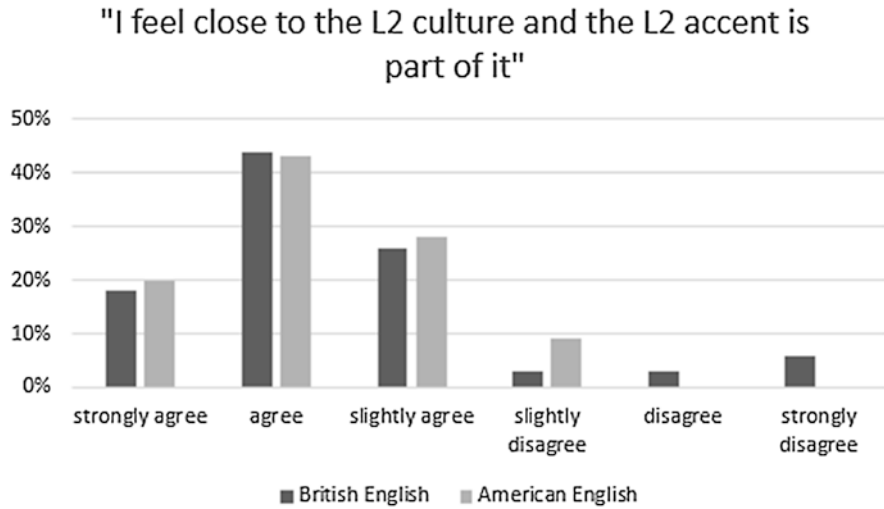


Fig. 27.4 Group comparison of closeness to L2 culture and L2 accent

correlation analysis showed. Accordingly, those who feel closer to the target culture also seem to be more likely to aim at the best possible accent.

A further aim of this project was to answer the question whether the adult learners use role models to work on their accent in English. Hence, the question “Do you have a role model who you are trying to imitate when you speak English” (item 16) was subject to further scrutiny. The findings show that whereas 80% of the AE PPOCS 1 students claimed to have a role model, only 50% of the BE PPOCS 1 students used this method to improve their accent in English. For AE, Ellen DeGeneres, Leonardo di Caprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Michelle Obama, and Hillary Clinton were named as role models. For BE, Emma Watson, Keira Knightley, Colin Firth, Ed Sheeran, and Jenna Coleman were listed.

A Chi-square test for independence indicates that there is a significant difference between the two groups,  $\chi^2(2) = 6.74$ ,  $p = .034$ ,  $\phi = 0.34$ . For the student population in this project, this means that the learners in the AE PPOCS 1 class were more inclined to choose a role model. As a next step, possible differences in students' grades at the final oral exam were analysed based on whether or not they had a role model. The results of a Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the difference between both groups was only just not significant ( $U = 645.000$ ,  $Z = 2.312$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Those students (across both groups) who claimed to have a role model tended to receive a higher grade than those learners who did not. Still, care needs to be taken in interpreting this finding and future studies will have to determine if having a role model in one's pronunciation class indeed leads to better grades (i.e., if there is a causal link between both variables).

## 27.5 Discussion

To explore the potential link between foreign accent, identity, and achievement, two groups of PPOCS 1 students (one group aiming at ‘British English’ and one group aiming at ‘American English’) were asked about their views on aiming to sound like an L1 user of English and their perceptions of identity.

Regarding the attitude towards their own foreign accent in English, the analysis of the data revealed that the students felt that although they had a noticeable foreign accent in English, they would prefer not to be recognised as such. The main reasons for this were rooted in the belief that this would show their lack of pronunciation skills, their failure to achieve their goals, and that all the hard work in PPOCS 1 was in vain. If they were complimented on their native-like accent in English, however, they would be very pleased since this confirmed that they had put a tremendous amount of work into PPOCS 1 and also because their aim was to sound like an L1 user. If they suddenly woke up with a native-like accent, most students would be very happy as this accent is their ultimate goal and because this would decisively reduce the heavy workload in PPOCS 1. By and large, these findings support previous research conducted at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck, & Smit, 1997; Müller, 2012; Pöcksteiner, 2019). Already in 1997, Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck, and Smit, who investigated learner attitudes in PPOCS 1 classes (then called *Sprechpraktikum*), found that their subjects held negative attitudes towards their own foreign accents in English. This was later confirmed by Müller (2012), who focused on the role of the language lab in PPOCS 1, and more recently by Pöcksteiner (2019), whose diploma thesis compared motivational differences in successful and less successful PPOCS 1 learners.

In terms of learning goals and achievement, the majority of the students agreed that they were comfortable with their current pronunciation abilities (i.e., their English accent right before the oral exam). Perhaps the most revealing item in this category of questions was the definition of the learners’ own goals. All except for one learner asserted that they wanted to attain the best possible native-like accent. Overall, it appears that those students who aimed at the best possible native-like accent received better grades than those who claimed that they liked their foreign accent in English. Along the same lines, Müller (2012) remarked that in his PPOCS 1 survey, the majority of the students “strongly wish to sound like a native speaker of English” (p. 63). This pronounced inclination towards achieving native-like proficiency seems to verify that the standard model of teaching English pronunciation based on native-speaker norms still has a strong presence in many highly proficient Austrian learners of English.

The investigation of the potential link between identity and achievement further revealed that most students felt that they perceive themselves differently when they speak English; this, however, does not endanger their identity as a non-native speaker. These findings are substantiated by Pöcksteiner’s (2019) results, according to which none of her respondents viewed the aim of the pronunciation class “as a

threat to their linguistic heritage and native identity” (p. 81). This suggests that rather than replacing a firmly established identity, taking on a new (L2) accent means expanding one’s repertoire of identities rather than jeopardizing existing ones. This observation, however, could also be related to the specific student population of this study and the fact that more than two thirds were enrolled in the teacher-training programme. Teachers, as some students pointed out, often consider themselves as role models who can have a lasting, positive or negative, effect on their learners’ pronunciation skills. This responsibility they assume towards future generations could to a certain extent also account for their strong wish to achieve the aim of sounding like an L1 user. In addition, it was observed that those who feel closer to the L2 culture also wish to approximate L1 users’ pronunciation most. A comparison of the two main groups revealed that more AE PPOCS 1 students had role models, and those who had a role model tended to achieve a higher grade, which was in fact the only slight difference found between the groups. One reason why the learners in the AE group were more likely to resort to role models could perhaps lie in the fact that the teacher of the AE group explicitly addressed this aspect of pronunciation learning in class.

Research into PPOCS 1 at the Department of English and American Studies has spanned over more than two decades (e.g., Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck, & Smit, 1997; Müller, 2012; Pöcksteiner, 2019; Thir, 2014). During this period of time, far-reaching pedagogical, political, and socio-economic developments have left their imprint on the way pronunciation is taught and learned. There is little doubt that advances in technology (most notably smartphones) and the convenient and immediate access to L1 English through the internet have greatly expanded English learners’ potential means of exposure to and engagement with the target language (e.g., Sundqvist & Sylven, 2016). Another aspect which is closely related to the increased accessibility and usage of English as a common means of communication concerns its role as a global language or lingua franca (e.g., Thir, 2014), which has triggered fundamental questions of norms, models, and aims of pronunciation teaching (see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)). As a consequence, PPOCS 1 has admittedly undergone a decisive shift in its approach to L2 phonology instruction from a norm-based (with the ‘native speaker’ as the norm) to a more model-centred view (considering the ‘native speaker’ as a model towards which the learner’s pronunciation should develop). All these aspects have clearly left their mark on not only the PPOCS 1 course design but also the assessment criteria. For the students, however, very little seems to have changed in the way they feel about their foreign accent and how they define their goals for this course, as this study convincingly confirms.

What this project has also revealed is that, contrary to expectations, there are generally very few differences between students opting for an American and those choosing a British accent. Nevertheless, the findings point towards one possibly influential factor that might lead to more favourable results at the final exam: the students in the AE group are more inclined to find and use role models to help them improve their foreign accents, which in turn can potentially have a positive effect on the grades they receive at the end of the course.

Another common thread consistently present in both groups concerns the view that the work expected from the students in PPOCS 1 requires a tremendous amount of effort. Accordingly, students repeatedly asserted that they invested a vast amount of time and effort not only to achieve a favourable grade in PPOCS 1 but also to reach their personal aim, which, in most cases, was a 'native-like' accent.

## 27.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to shed light on the relationship between advanced L2 pronunciation learners' concepts of identity, their learning goals in terms of their foreign accent and their achievement in a university pronunciation class. To this end, an empirical study including quantitative and qualitative methods was conducted at the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna. The findings of this project have demonstrated that for the chosen student population the perception of identity and their language learning aims cannot be regarded as reliable predictors in determining a learner's success or failure. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of the students surveyed did not feel threatened in their 'non-native' identity when trying to reduce their foreign accent. Instead, they seemed to have added a further type of identity to an existing repertoire. It has also been shown that for those adult language learners who do not feel endangered in their linguistic and cultural identity as foreign language users, imitating role models could be an innovative and beneficial means to obtain more favourable results.

Since ID variables are manifold in number, combination, and intensity when it comes to determining an individual's success in L2 learning, phonological achievement cannot be attributed solely to one single variable. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study can contribute to the growing body of literature on individual differences in language learning in general and the question of how the relationship between second language learning goals and the concept of identity might affect phonological achievement.

Still, the findings presented here naturally have to be seen in the light of a number of limitations. Perhaps the most crucial one is related to the fact that this empirical investigation explored one highly specific L2 learning context. Thus, interpreting the findings beyond this small sample needs to be done with great care and caution. It would be interesting to scrutinise the impact of identity on the learners' pronunciation achievement in other environments. Apart from context, another limitation could be the focus on the ID variable identity, which essentially limits the perspective from which achievement is viewed. It is likely that there are other more deeply-seated factors involved which have not been taken into account. These potential imprecisions and limitations clearly make room for further discussion and empirical research to refine and improve the conceptual understanding of phonological acquisition in the adult EFL classroom. As such, this study can only be a small piece in the much larger puzzle of how pronunciation is learned.

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# Chapter 28

## Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English: Exploring Students' Needs



Armin Berger

**Abstract** The policy of teaching English in and through English has become standard in many educational systems across the globe, stimulating renewed interest in the role of language proficiency in teacher expertise. In this connection, teacher language proficiency is being reconceptualised as a specialised set of language abilities required in addition to general communicative ability. Against this backdrop, a new speaking competence course for future teachers of English has been developed for the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. This chapter explores the perceived learning needs of 73 pre-service English teachers in relation to speaking ability for classroom purposes. Data collection involved a group-administered questionnaire to elicit opinions about English teachers' speaking ability in general, the students' own speaking ability, the speaking module of ELC, and potential topics the new course should cover. Learning needs emerged particularly in relation to three areas: feedback, mediation, and scaffolding. The findings are discussed in the light of their implications for syllabus design. At a general level, the study reflects the growing recognition that students should be involved in curriculum and syllabus design from the planning stage on.

**Keywords** English-for-Teaching · Syllabus design · Needs analysis · Teaching mediation skills · Scaffolding

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A. Berger (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
e-mail: [armin.berger@univie.ac.at](mailto:armin.berger@univie.ac.at)

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343

## 28.1 Introduction

In 2015, the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna implemented a major curriculum reform. The then existing diploma programme for teacher education was gradually being replaced by two new teaching degrees, the Bachelor and Master of Education (BEd and MEd), which started to be offered alongside the other Bachelor and Master degrees in the department. This reform also effected a change in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme, the language study component of all curricula. Whereas prior to the reform, all students at the department, regardless of degree focus, attended the same language competence courses, there are slightly different course paths now (see Berger, “Advanced English Language Competence at the Intersection of Programme Design, Pedagogical Practice, and Teacher Research: An Introduction,” [this volume](#)). In particular, a new language competence course has been introduced for students taking an MEd: Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (ASSET). This course is designed to give pre-service English teachers a grounding in the characteristics of spoken language, including classroom discourse, and to develop students’ oral presentation, interaction, and mediation skills (for details, see Richter, “Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers,” [this volume](#)).

Prior to the reform, the ELC speaking component consisted of two courses: Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 1 and 2 (PPOCS 1 and 2). PPOCS 1 focuses on the main aspects of English pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels, and PPOCS 2 is designed to improve students’ formal presentation and interaction skills (for details, see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)). Whereas the speaking module has not changed for students pursuing a BA, BEd students take PPOCS 1 and MEd students take ASSET.

In the process of designing the syllabus for ASSET, the decision was made to adapt the existing PPOCS 2 course to the specific needs of future English teachers rather than to develop an entirely new concept from scratch. The PPOCS 2 syllabus had proved to be effective and well received over the past years. In addition, many aspects of spoken language and oral communication taught in PPOCS 2, such as knowledge of the characteristics of spoken language, fluency, the ability to give a formal (academic) presentation, and the ability to interact successfully in the context of formal discussions, were deemed relevant to students of all degree programmes. The course developers therefore decided to adopt the basic parameters of the PPOCS 2 course in terms of structure and organisation, and adjust the focus, language functions, and topics.

Conceptually, the new course is based on the premise that teaching English in and through English is a distinct target language use domain (i.e., a particular situation or context in which the language is used) which requires specific language knowledge and skills that differ from other areas of language use, and that future teachers of English need to develop such knowledge and skills through explicit instruction. While drawing on their general communicative ability, language teachers also need domain-specific knowledge of discourse events related to instruction

as well as functional language skills in relation to these events (Elder, 2001; Freeman, 2016; Young et al., 2014), a relationship that has recently regained attention in second language teacher education through the focus on teacher cognition and teaching knowledge (Richards, 2017). If the language ability needed to teach English through English should indeed be the focus of explicit instruction, the question arises as to how this type of competence can be conceptualised, how it differs from general or academic language competence, and how it can be developed. Highlighting the difficulty of modelling the target use domain, Elder (2001, pp. 152–154) concludes that there is no choice but to define it for each specific context at the expense of a theoretically defensible model. As it is typically course developers who define the target use domain for their purposes and design their syllabi accordingly, students are usually not part of this process. However, there is a growing recognition that students should be more actively involved in curriculum and syllabus development as early as the planning stage (Oscarson, 2014), notably in the form of participating in needs analyses.

This chapter revolves around a questionnaire survey which aimed to involve students and explore their perceived language learning needs in relation to speaking. Whereas the ELC team had a firm grasp of our students' needs with regard to academic speaking in university contexts, there was less understanding of the specific needs of our students when using English in their roles as language teachers. The survey is situated in this context of characterising the specific language competence of English teachers and identifying the learning needs of pre-service teachers in relation to speaking. The chapter first examines the issue of conceptualising the specific language competence needed by English teachers, then proceeds to present the findings of the survey, and finally discusses some implications for syllabus development.

## 28.2 Theoretical Background

Language teacher education programmes have often assumed that raising students' general language proficiency and improving their academic English will automatically equip them with the skills they need to teach English through English (Sešek, 2007). Curricula tend to be designed on the assumption that highly proficient language users have, by nature, the discourse competence necessary to deliver effective lessons in the target language. By the same logic, native speakers are often considered to be at an advantage in terms of language teaching as they are deemed communicatively competent for the classroom merely by virtue of being native speakers, an assumption that mirrors "a legacy of the valuing of 'nativeness' as criterion for being a 'good' language teacher" (Freeman, 2016, p. 182). Richards (2017), however, emphasises that language proficiency is not the same as teaching ability, and that teaching a foreign language through that language requires specialised knowledge and skills which need to be developed by native and non-native speakers alike.

It follows that language teacher education programmes should provide specific courses in which the language ability required to teach through English is the focus of explicit instruction. The difficulty for such programmes is to define and operationalise this construct of teacher language competence in their local contexts.

Characterising the specific language ability needed by language teachers is a challenge, not least because it draws on three interrelated domains of knowledge and skill: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and discourse skills (Richards, 2017), a distinction which has its root in Shulman's (1987) description of teacher knowledge. The content knowledge of language teachers refers to their understanding of the subject, which comprises areas such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, literature, and cultural studies. Pedagogical knowledge pertains to the teachers' knowledge of teaching, including their repertoire of techniques and strategies as well as the theories, principles, values, and beliefs they draw on to teach the subject matter. It involves the ability to deploy content knowledge in relation to the specific context, the learners, the curriculum, and the teaching methods. Discourse skills, finally, refer to the teachers' ability to communicate successfully for the purpose of teaching a foreign language through that language. These three areas are interrelated, and the boundaries might not always be clear. Richards (2017) gives the example of a grammar course, which could cover either content knowledge if it targets grammar as a linguistic domain or pedagogical knowledge if it focuses on teaching grammar to language learners. Teacher discourse skills, in turn, facilitate specific classroom language, building on what is known about the subject and pedagogy. Although the three areas are intertwined, the main focus here is on discourse skills.

One early attempt to investigate the kind of English that teachers need was Elder (1994). She proposes four "aspects of language and language-related ability" (1994, p. 9), namely the ability to use the target language as both the medium and target of instruction, the ability to modify target language input to render it comprehensible to learners, the ability to produce well-formed input for learners, and the ability to draw learners' attention to features of the language (Elder, 1994, pp. 9–11). Building on needs analyses carried out by Elder (1994) and Viète (1998), Elder describes teacher language competence as an underspecified domain which comprises "everything that 'normal' language users might be expected to do" (2001, p. 152) along with a number of specialist skills, including a command of subject-specific and metalinguistic terminology as well as the discourse competence necessary to deliver the subject content effectively in the classroom. Effective classroom delivery, in turn, requires a command of linguistic features such as directives, questioning techniques, rhetorical signalling devices, and simplification strategies to communicate subject content in a comprehensible way.

Illustrating Elder's four aspects, Richards (2017) offers a sequential breakdown of language knowledge and ability in relation to three stages: *before*, *during*, and *after* teaching, as well as a comprehensive list of examples illustrating classroom activities that require specialised discourse skills for each of these stages. *During* the teaching process, for example, teachers need to be able to explain lesson goals, give instructions, use formulaic expressions for classroom routines, define

terminology related to language, monitor students' work, provide corrective feedback, adjust their language for difficulty, illustrate how words are used, develop students' responses, and lead discussion activities, to name but a few. Such activities are examples of instructional scaffolding, which is the process of providing the support learners need in order to reach levels that they would not be able to reach without assistance (Richards, 2017).

Another recent attempt to characterise teachers' classroom language is captured by the notion of *English-for-Teaching* (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015; Young et al., 2014). Dismissing the common misconception that "the more fluent in English, the more effective the teacher," Freeman (2017, p. 32) promotes the concept of English-for-Teaching as one form of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In this view, traditional models of general language proficiency are insufficient to prepare future teachers for using English specifically for teaching purposes. Instead, teachers need to learn the specific English-for-Teaching, that is "the essential English language skills a teacher needs to be able to prepare and enact the lesson in a standardised (usually national) curriculum in English in a way that is recognizable and understandable to other speakers of the language" (Young et al., 2014, p. 5). English-for-Teaching unfolds in the interaction between the teachers' language knowledge, the national curriculum providing the content, and the social and pedagogical encounters in which language use is situated. Within this triangle, teachers use language in three functional areas: managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing students and giving them feedback. Speaking is an important skill in this model, which features in all functional areas. Classroom management, for example, involves the routine of organising students to start an activity. The language involved in such a routine is characterised by directions to students to settle down and start their work. Other speaking-related classroom routines include greeting students, giving instructions and explanations, introducing new vocabulary, and responding to students' oral output during a role play activity (Freeman et al., 2015, p. 137). While this ESP approach to defining classroom language might be criticised as being too focused, narrow in scope, and impoverished, thus representing a somewhat 'reduced' variety of classroom language (see Walsh, 2013), it foregrounds the teachers' tasks and can raise their confidence that their language is appropriate to accomplish their work in English (Freeman et al., 2015).

Another source for characterising the language specific to the classroom is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020). Although the original version of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) has been criticised as being too general a language proficiency framework for the purpose of defining the specifics of language use in the classroom (Freeman et al., 2015), the extended version (Council of Europe, 2020) can be useful in specifying learning outcomes in relation to teachers' language development. In particular, new descriptors for mediation, conceptualised as communicative language activities in which the language user acts as a social agent helping others to create or convey meaning (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90), may have great potential in this respect. Such activities include 'mediating concepts,'

which is defined as “the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others, particularly if they may be unable to access this directly on their own” and characterised as “a fundamental aspect of parenting, mentoring, teaching and training” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91). This type of mediation has two main aspects: “constructing and elaborating meaning” and “facilitating and stimulating conditions that are conducive to conceptual exchange and development.” Pertinent mediation activities include managing interaction (e.g., taking on different roles according to the needs of the participants and providing appropriate individualised support) and encouraging conceptual talk (e.g., guiding the direction of the talk by targeting questions and encouraging others to elaborate on their reasoning; Council of Europe, 2020, p. 113). Likewise, the mediation strategies listed in the CEFR *Companion Volume*, such as linking new information to previous knowledge, adapting language, breaking down complicated information, or amplifying a dense text (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 118–122), may be helpful in characterising the specific language competence needed by teachers of English. In contrast to the models mentioned above, mapping out as they do a horizontal dimension consisting of possible parameters of teacher language competence, the CEFR also offers a vertical dimension of ascending reference levels for describing teacher language proficiency. For example, the ability to amplify a dense text progresses from a focus on providing repetition and additional illustrations at B1 and B2 to conceptual elaboration, explanation, and helpful details at the C levels (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 122).

The conceptualisation of English teachers’ language competence as a specialised set of abilities has potential implications for teacher education programmes. Rather than, or in addition to, general (academic) language proficiency, courses should focus on the specific language abilities teachers need for their work in the classroom. The survey presented in the following sections is situated in this context of reshaping the design of language competence courses for pre-service teachers of English.

### 28.3 Research Questions

The specific purpose of the survey was to analyse the perceived learning needs of pre-service English teachers in relation to speaking ability as a basis for designing the ASSET course. While university language courses are often developed intuitively based on the expertise and experience of the teachers, the ASSET course designers exploited the benefits of consulting students at the planning stage. In line with the concept of the negotiated curriculum (Nunan, 1988), students contributed to defining the course content by participating in a needs analysis. This form of participation has the potential to create a sense of involvement and to support a constructive evaluation of what happens in the classroom, as content that is considered to accord with the perceived needs is more likely to be endorsed by the students (Oscarson, 2014). The survey was designed to answer the following research questions:



1. What are the perceived language learning needs of pre-service teachers of English in relation to speaking ability?
2. How should the existing speaking course (PPOCS 2) be adapted to suit the perceived language learning needs of pre-service teachers of English?

## 28.4 Methodology

### 28.4.1 Participants

The study was conducted in the form of a questionnaire survey, with data gathered in the summer semester 2016 among 73 undergraduate students in the old teacher education programme who had just completed the PPOCS 2 course. With 57 female (78.1%) and 16 male (21.9%) participants, the gender imbalance was considerable but mirrored the overall gender ratio of students at the department. The respondents had been studying at university for a minimum of five semesters, with about one third ( $n = 27$ ) studying for more than eight semesters.

As regards teaching experience, 46.6% ( $n = 34$ ) of the participants reported to be doing what they were required to do as part of their degree programme (at the most, they would have observed ten and taught five English lessons, the latter possibly in tandem with peers); 53.4% ( $n = 39$ ) of the participants indicated that they had additional teaching experience. Only a minority of participants (11.0%,  $n = 8$ ) reported to be practising teachers in an Austrian school context alongside their studies.

### 28.4.2 Questionnaire

The main instrument used in this survey was a pencil-and-paper questionnaire administered in class with a series of attitudinal items. Most items were selected response; two were in an open-ended format. A small number of factual items at the end of the questionnaire concerned the participants' demographic characteristics, including gender, semester of study, and teaching experience. In accordance with the research questions, the questionnaire focused on the topics and specific speaking skills needed by teachers of English as well as students' opinions about the existing PPOCS 2 course.

The body of the questionnaire was divided into five parts: Part one contained multi-item Likert-type scales with six answer categories: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) partly agree, (4) slightly disagree, (5) disagree, and (6) strongly disagree (Tseng et al., 2006). The statements referred to the respondents' beliefs about English teachers' speaking skills (5 items), their attitudes towards the PPOCS 2 course (6 items), and a self-evaluation of their own speaking skills (4 items). To minimise response bias and prevent participants from simply repeating previous



answers, the items were presented in a random order. Part two consisted of a percentage rating scale for students to evaluate their level of confidence in a number of language functions for classroom purposes, for example giving instructions, simplifying a complex topic, explaining an abstract idea, checking for understanding, and eliciting responses from others. Students rated how confident they are in their ability to perform each of these activities in English on a percentage rating scale from 0% ('no confidence') to 100% ('high confidence'). Part three was a selection task in which students chose the top ten topics out of 32 that a speaking course for future teachers of English should cover. Part four was a ranking scale item in which students ranked eight key areas of expertise for teachers of English from most important to least important. Part five included two open-ended short-answer items in relation to what students need to do to improve their English for classroom purposes and what they would do to make PPOCS 2 more relevant to future teachers of English.

The questionnaire items were based on a review of the relevant literature (see Sect. 28.2). They were honed in several loops of feedback and revision involving comments from colleagues as well as informal trialling with a class similar to the target population. The questionnaire was administered in four groups as part of a regular lesson.

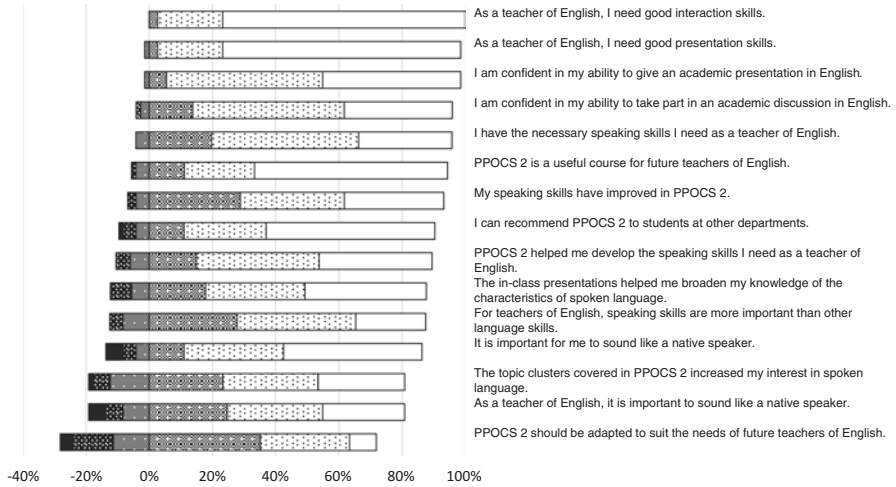
## 28.5 Results

### 28.5.1 *Student Opinions About Key Points*

The first part of the questionnaire concentrated on students' attitudes towards English teachers' speaking ability, the PPOCS 2 course, and their own speaking ability. The results of this part are presented in Fig. 28.1. The following subsections describe these results grouped according to the main constructs.

#### 28.5.1.1 English Teachers' Speaking Ability

As can be seen in Table 28.1, the vast majority of the respondents (87.5%,  $n = 63$ ) agreed or tended to agree that speaking is the most important language skill for teachers of English, with 22.2% ( $n = 16$ ) agreeing strongly. The level of consensus was particularly high in relation to two types of speaking skills: interaction and presentation skills. All participants thought that teachers of English need to have good interaction skills, with more than three quarters (76.7%,  $n = 56$ ) agreeing strongly. The equivalent item relating to presentation skills yielded practically identical results. Opinions were more divided on the question as to whether English teachers should be able to speak like native speakers, although with 56.1% ( $n = 41$ ) expressing agreement without reservation, the overall tendency was still clearly in favour of a native-like accent. When this question was related to their own pronunciation (as opposed to that of English teachers in general), students valued a



**Fig. 28.1** Students’ attitudes towards speaking ability and PPOCS 2 (answer categories from left to right: strongly disagree [black], disagree, slightly disagree, partly agree, agree, strongly agree [white])

**Table 28.1** Students’ attitudes towards English teachers’ speaking ability

Items	Total count	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
For teachers of English, speaking skills are more important than other language skills.	72	22.2	37.5	27.8	8.3	4.2	0	2.35	1.05
As a teacher of English, I need good interaction skills.	73	76.7	20.5	2.7	0	0	0	1.26	0.50
As a teacher of English, I need good presentation skills.	73	75.3	20.5	2.7	1.4	0	0	1.30	0.59
As a teacher of English, it is important to sound like a native speaker.	73	26.0	30.1	24.7	8.2	5.5	5.5	2.53	1.40
It is important for me to sound like a native speaker.	73	43.8	31.5	11.0	4.1	4.1	5.5	2.10	1.41

*Note.* Category values: (1) strongly agree – (6) strongly disagree

native-like accent even more highly: while 26.0% ( $n = 19$ ) strongly agreed that it is important for English teachers to sound like a native speaker, as many as 43.8% ( $n = 32$ ) strongly agreed when it came to their own pronunciation.

### 28.5.1.2 Attitudes Towards the PPOCS 2 Course

The items relating to PPOCS 2 revealed that students were generally quite satisfied with the course and its outcomes. Table 28.2 shows that, overall, 80.8% ( $n = 59$ ) agreed or tended to agree that the topic clusters they covered (for example, accents and attitudes, culture and social interaction, spoken language and the media, new developments in pronunciation) had stimulated their interest in spoken language. Furthermore, 87.7% ( $n = 64$ ) agreed or tended to agree that the compulsory in-class

**Table 28.2** Students' attitudes towards PPOCS 2

Items	Total count	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The topic clusters covered in PPOCS 2 increased my interest in spoken language.	73	27.4	30.1	23.3	12.3	5.5	1.4	2.42	1.25
The in-class presentations helped me broaden my knowledge of the characteristics of spoken language.	73	38.4	31.5	17.8	5.5	6.8	0	2.11	1.19
PPOCS 2 is a useful course for future teachers of English.	72	61.1	22.2	11.1	4.2	1.4	0	1.63	0.94
PPOCS 2 helped me develop the speaking skills I need as a teacher of English.	67	35.8	38.8	14.9	6.0	4.5	0	2.04	1.08
PPOCS 2 should be adapted to suit the needs of future teachers of English.	71	8.5	28.2	35.2	11.3	12.7	4.2	3.04	1.28
I can recommend PPOCS 2 to students at other departments.	73	53.4	26.0	11.0	4.1	4.1	1.4	1.84	1.18

*Note.* Category values: (1) strongly agree – (6) strongly disagree

presentations, which were accompanied by a range of reflection, feedback, and revision activities, had helped them to broaden their understanding of the characteristics of spoken language. Although PPOCS 2 does not have an explicit teaching focus, the respondents found the course highly relevant to language teachers. As many as 94.4% ( $n = 68$ ) considered PPOCS 2 to be useful for future English teachers, with 61.1% ( $n = 44$ ) even agreeing strongly; 89.5% ( $n = 60$ ) thought the course was helpful in developing the speaking skills required as a teacher of English. The perceived suitability of PPOCS 2 for future teachers of English was evidenced by the fact that the responses to the question as to whether the course should be adapted to the needs of future teachers of English were more tightly clustered around the central answer categories compared to the other items referring to PPOCS 2. The negative answer categories reflecting no need to change the course were selected relatively frequently as well, with 28.2% ( $n = 20$ ) disagreeing or tending to disagree. Nevertheless, about one third (36.7%,  $n = 26$ ) agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to the syllabus should be made to meet teachers' needs. Overall, 79.4% ( $n = 58$ ) would recommend PPOCS 2 to students at other departments without reservation.

### 28.5.1.3 Students' Own Speaking Ability

With regard to their own speaking ability, the students generally seemed quite confident. From the data in Table 28.3, it can be seen that as many as 93.1% ( $n = 68$ ) agreed or strongly agreed that they are confident in their ability to give academic presentations, which is in line with the strong emphasis PPOCS 2 places on that skill. The agreement was somewhat less strong in relation to discussion skills, with 34.2% ( $n = 25$ ) agreeing strongly that they are confident in their ability to take part in an academic discussion in English, compared to 43.8% ( $n = 32$ ) agreeing strongly in relation to presentation skills. Particularly pertinent to the purposes of this study, 76.1% ( $n = 54$ ) agreed or even strongly agreed that they have the necessary speaking skills required as a teacher of English; however, with one fifth of the respondents (19.7%,  $n = 14$ ) agreeing only partly, there was less consensus compared to the previous items. Finally, the students believed that their speaking skills had improved in PPOCS 2, although at 28.8% ( $n = 21$ ) the number of students agreeing only partly is the highest in this set of items. Table 28.3 presents the results in more detail.

### 28.5.2 Confidence in Teaching-Related Speaking Skills

When rating their level of confidence in a number of teaching-related language functions on a percentage scale, where 0% indicates no confidence and 100% indicates high confidence, students selected on average between 70% and just under 90% for the most part. Only one function, namely reprimanding others for poor work, had a comparatively low mean rating of 63.9% ( $SD = 25.55$ ). The opposite

**Table 28.3** Students' self-evaluation of their speaking ability

Items	Total count	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am confident in my ability to give an academic presentation in English.	73	43.8	49.3	5.5	1.4	0	0	1.64	0.63
I am confident in my ability to take part in an academic discussion in English.	73	34.2	47.9	13.7	2.7	1.4	0	1.89	0.84
I have the necessary speaking skills I need as a teacher of English.	71	29.6	46.5	19.7	4.2	0	0	1.99	0.82
My speaking skills have improved in PPOCS 2.	73	31.5	32.9	28.8	4.1	2.7	0	2.14	1.00

*Note.* Category values: (1) strongly agree – (6) strongly disagree

activity, praising others for good work, ranked at the other end of the spectrum ( $M = 87.9$ ,  $SD = 13.74$ ). Table 28.4 lists the skills and functions according to their mean ratings, ranging from highest to lowest confidence.

### 28.5.3 Topics to Be Covered

According to the participants, the top ten topics that a speaking competence course for future teachers of English should cover comprise giving feedback, oral fluency, classroom interaction, speaking activities, classroom management, acquisition of pronunciation, teaching of pronunciation, elicitation techniques, assessing speaking, and motivation through body language. Table 28.5 provides the complete list of topics in order of priority. As can be seen, the first five topics listed were selected by more than half of the respondents. At the opposite end, theoretical models of speaking, coursebook analysis, teaching-related spoken genres, multi-modal talk, and examiner behaviour were the least frequently selected topics.

**Table 28.4** Students' confidence in teaching-related speaking skills

Language skills and functions	Total count	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Praising others for good work	73	87.9	13.74
2. Checking for understanding	73	83.8	15.42
3. Passing on factual information	73	82.3	14.29
4. Eliciting responses from others	73	80.4	14.85
5. Giving constructive feedback	73	80.1	17.68
6. Asking questions that help others respond correctly	73	79.5	15.54
7. Summarising a written text orally	73	78.5	14.50
8. Encouraging participation in activities	73	78.1	17.13
9. Giving clear instructions	73	77.4	13.23
10. Managing group activities	58	76.9	18.47
11. Simplifying a complex topic	73	75.6	14.72
12. Elaborating on someone else's idea	73	75.5	15.28
13. Guiding others towards a particular response	73	74.2	15.89
14. Telling an exciting story	73	73.3	23.92
15. Illustrating an abstract concept	73	72.7	14.55
16. Using different questioning techniques	73	72.2	19.31
17. Encouraging others to construct new meaning	72	71.9	16.33
18. Reformulating incorrect language without drawing attention to the error	73	71.5	20.32
19. Explaining an abstract idea	73	71.0	14.55
20. Reprimanding others for poor work	71	63.9	25.55

Note. 100% = 'high confidence'; 0% = 'no confidence'

### 28.5.4 Areas of Expertise

The results of the ranking task, in which participants ordered eight key areas of expertise in relation to teaching speaking from the most important to the least important, revealed that teaching speaking skills was considered to be the most important area of expertise relative to the other ones. Expertise in spoken genres, by contrast, was by far the least important category. The detailed results are summarised in Table 28.6.

### 28.5.5 Further Suggestions

The two open-ended questions, "What would you need to do to improve your English speaking skills for classroom purposes?" and "If you could change PPOCS 2 to make it more relevant to future teachers of English, what would you do?", yielded a small corpus of 611 tokens.

**Table 28.5** Preferred topics in order of priority

Topics	Total counts	Percent
1. Giving feedback	50	68.5
2. Oral fluency	50	68.5
3. Classroom interaction	47	64.4
4. Speaking (fluency) activities	41	56.2
5. Classroom management	39	53.4
6. Acquisition of pronunciation	33	45.2
7. Teaching of pronunciation	31	42.5
8. Elicitation techniques (e.g., questioning)	30	41.1
9. Assessing speaking skills	30	41.1
10. Motivating through body language	30	41.1
11. Teacher talk	27	37.0
12. Intercultural communication	27	37.0
13. Teaching multicultural classrooms	25	34.2
14. Non-verbal classroom management	22	30.1
15. Turn-taking in the classroom	22	30.1
16. Getting attention through body language	19	26.0
17. English for specific purposes (e.g., business meetings, technical presentations)	19	26.0
18. Providing different levels of support	18	24.7
19. Use of meta-language	17	23.3
20. Creating bonds through body language	17	23.3
21. Teaching English as a Lingua Franca pronunciation	16	21.9
22. Speaking test tasks	16	21.9
23. New developments in teaching speaking	15	20.5
24. Genres in conversation (e.g., storytelling, gossiping)	14	19.2
25. Reinforcing learning through body language	14	19.2
26. Speaking tests	11	15.1
27. Media genres (e.g., interviews, reality shows)	10	13.7
28. Examiner behaviour	9	12.3
29. Multi-modal talk (e.g., text messaging, social networking)	8	11.0
30. Teaching-related spoken genres (e.g., school assemblies, lessons)	5	6.8
31. Coursebook analysis	4	5.5
32. Theoretical models of speaking	0	0.0

Note.  $N = 73$

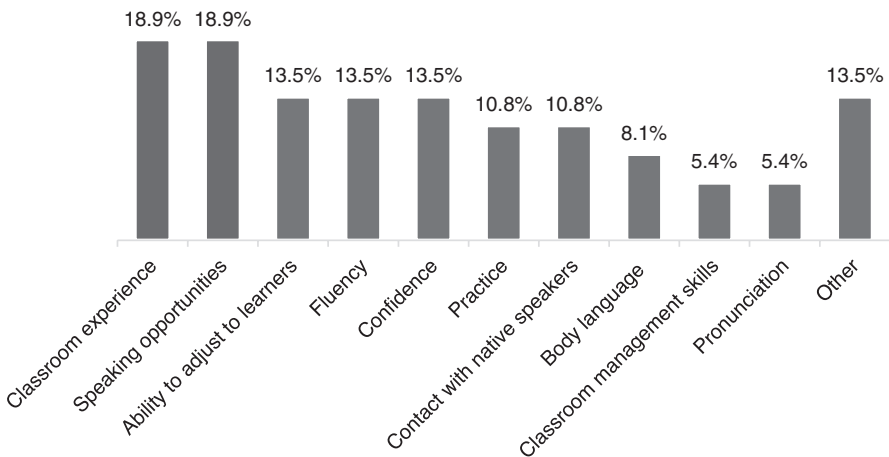
### 28.5.5.1 Improving Speaking Skills for Classroom Purposes

From a content analysis of the question concerning students' needs, ten key themes emerged. As can be seen in Fig. 28.2, classroom experience and additional opportunities to speak and interact in English were the most frequently mentioned needs. Of all the students who answered this question ( $n = 37$ ), 18.9% ( $n = 7$ ) mentioned that

**Table 28.6** Areas of expertise ranked in order of importance

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Teaching speaking skills	33.8	19.7	15.5	5.6	15.1	1.4	5.5	2.8	2.90	2.00
2. Classroom management	29.6	11.3	11.3	11.3	12.7	9.9	7.0	7.0	3.59	2.33
3. Classroom discourse	14.1	25.4	15.5	7.0	12.7	9.9	8.5	7.0	3.77	2.21
4. Giving feedback	7.0	12.7	23.9	21.1	14.1	9.9	9.9	1.4	3.99	1.75
5. Culture and social interaction	14.1	12.7	9.9	14.1	14.1	11.3	12.7	11.3	4.42	2.30
6. Body language	8.5	9.9	12.7	11.3	9.9	22.5	14.1	11.3	4.85	2.17
7. Assessing speaking skills	2.8	7.0	8.5	14.1	9.9	19.7	19.7	18.3	5.51	1.99
8. Spoken genres	1.4	4.2	1.4	12.7	12.7	12.7	19.7	35.2	6.24	1.84

Notes. 1 = the most important; 8 = the least important  
 Frequencies in percent  
 N = 71



**Fig. 28.2** Perceived learning needs in relation to speaking for classroom purposes

they would appreciate the opportunity to speak in a classroom setting: for example, “more experience in the classroom,” “speak English in the classroom,” “more classroom interaction.” Just as many referred to the need for additional speaking opportunities: for example, “more conversations,” “basically just talk more in classes,” and “a lot of speaking time.” The next most frequently expressed needs were the ability to adjust one’s language to the learners’ levels, increased speaking fluency, and confidence, mentioned by 13.5% ( $n = 5$ ) each. This was followed by further practice and more interaction with native speakers (10.8%,  $n = 4$  each). Minor topics listed were body language (8.1%,  $n = 3$ ), classroom management skills (5.4%,  $n = 2$ ), and better pronunciation (5.4%,  $n = 2$ ).



### 28.5.5.2 Changes to PPOCS 2

When asked to suggest ideas for improving the existing PPOCS 2 course to make it more relevant to future teachers of English, the students mentioned six types of changes. As illustrated in Fig. 28.3, by far the most frequently suggested change was to cover pedagogical topics. Of all the students who answered this question ( $n = 29$ ), one third ( $n = 10$ ) would place greater emphasis on pedagogically oriented topics. For example, one participant suggested spending “more time to focus on teaching-specific topics;” another one would “draw the attention to teaching topics and away from the academic context.” As many as 20.7% ( $n = 6$ ) explicitly stated that no changes to the current course concept were necessary. One participant, for example, noted that “the course is highly relevant, covering necessary topics to a great extent.” Another one made a clear distinction between language competence courses and teaching methodology courses when she wrote, “I think [PPOCS 2] already fits the needs; having good presentation and interaction skills helps at being a teacher. Other skills like conducting a lesson are part of other classes.” Another recurrent theme in the responses was teaching practice, with 17.2% ( $n = 5$ ) advocating integrating real-world teaching into the current syllabus. Less frequently suggested changes included a greater focus on what could be subsumed under the general headings of classroom management (e.g., “focus on language and body language for managing a group that might not be 100% cooperative;” “give more information on how to speak with students, certain ways of dealing with more ‘complicated’ students”), organisational changes (e.g., separate courses for MA and MEd students, double the number of hours per week, two semesters instead of one), and changes to the exam.

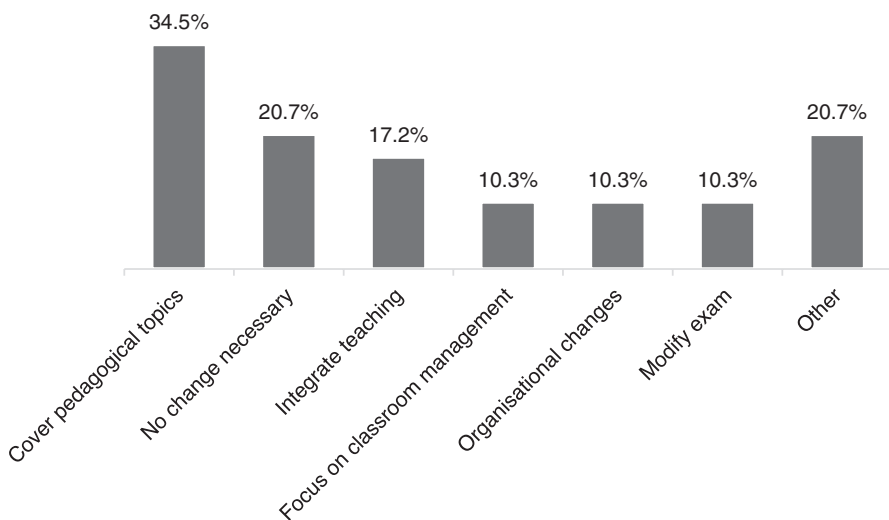


Fig. 28.3 Suggested changes to PPOCS 2

## 28.6 Discussion

The findings from the questionnaire survey clearly show that the participating students consider speaking to be a very important language skill for teachers of English. In particular, good interaction and presentation skills are regarded as absolutely crucial in the context of language teaching. The great value attached to speaking skills seems to justify, at least from the students' perspective, the provision of speaking competence courses specifically designed for future teachers. It also supports the view that the speaking ability required to teach English in and through English should be the focus of explicit instruction and offered as part of pre-service teacher education as opposed to on-the-job learning.

With respect to the first research question, which relates to the perceived language learning needs of pre-service teachers of English, it was established that the students were generally quite confident about their speaking skills, not only in regard to formal presentations and interactions, but also as far as more specifically teaching-related speaking skills are concerned. The majority believed that they have the speaking skills they need for their roles as English teachers, both holistically in terms of their overall speaking ability and analytically in terms of a number of language functions. In contrast to findings in other contexts (Butler, 2004; Elder, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), only a small minority reported a lack of language competence needed for their roles as English teachers. On the one hand, these findings seem to demonstrate the effectiveness of the PPOCS 2 approach, not just for students in the BA programme but also for students doing a teaching degree. This is supported by the fact that, unexpectedly, many students did not feel that PPOCS 2 should be adapted for future teachers. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind a possible bias in the responses: although the self-assessment of advanced-level learners can be reasonably accurate (Oscarson, 2014), students may, due to their inexperience or lack of pedagogical knowledge, have had a somewhat limited understanding of what speaking skills the teaching job really involves, therefore overestimating their competence and failing to recognise gaps in their skill set.

What many students did recognise is their need for additional speaking practice, especially in terms of fluency. Both a larger number of speaking opportunities and explicit practice were among the most frequently stated learning needs. These findings accord with Thornbury's (2012) observation that even advanced learners of a language with a sound knowledge of the target language systems often find it hard to activate this knowledge in a real-time speaking situation. The students' self-reported needs thus seem to reflect the view that learning to speak a second language is an incremental, long-term project in the course of which the process of accessing and applying the knowledge that is relevant to speaking becomes automatised through loops of practice and feedback (DeKeyser, 2007). Many students would like to combine speaking practice with classroom experience, pointing towards a "situational approach" to speaking instruction (Thornbury, 2012, p. 203), where typical speech events characteristic of a classroom context are presented and practised, for example in the form of peer teaching and classroom simulation.

More specifically, explicit instruction seems to be desirable in relation to three areas: feedback, mediation, and scaffolding. Firstly, students may benefit from instruction in giving feedback. While they feel confident about praising others for good work and giving positive feedback, they are less confident about negative or more complex forms of feedback, such as expressing disapproval or reformulating incorrect language without drawing attention to the error.

Secondly, students seem to need focused instruction in mediation. As can be seen in Table 28.4, students felt less confident about encouraging others to construct meaning, illustrating an abstract concept, or simplifying a complex topic, which are examples of what the *CEFR Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) refers to as ‘mediating concepts’ and ‘mediation strategies.’ Whereas the process of mediating concepts includes activities that help others access knowledge and concepts they would normally be unable to access by themselves (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91), mediation strategies represent the techniques chosen by a mediator to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 117–118), such as linking unknown content to familiar content, breaking down complex ideas, and adapting language to make it more accessible. Such accommodation to support learning is roughly equivalent to what Elder (1994) refers to as “the ability to modify target language input to render it comprehensible to learners” (p. 9). Based on these findings, a mediation component addressing such functions should feature prominently in a language competence programme for future teachers of English.

Finally, instructional scaffolding seems to be an area that deserves attention. The students did not feel entirely confident about using different questioning techniques, guiding others towards a particular response, or elaborating on someone else’s ideas. All these functions are related to the support teachers give to learners to enhance learning, usually in an interactive process of co-constructing meaning that is specifically tailored to the needs of the learners and is said to take place in the learners’ zones of proximal development, a concept that goes back to Vygotsky (1978) and is typically understood as the learning that emerges when students are given adequate assistance and guidance (Walqui, 2006). Providing adequate assistance that helps learners to accomplish tasks that they would not yet be able to do on their own may involve specific language skills such as questioning techniques to elicit an expected response or to monitor understanding, which are among the specialist skills identified by Elder (2001). In this regard, the results are consistent with Richard’s (2017) observation that “language proficiency can be presumed to play an important role in determining the effectiveness with which the teacher can provide support for scaffolded learning” (p. 17).

With respect to the second research question, which was intended to elicit students’ views on how the current PPOCS 2 course should be adapted to meet the perceived needs of future English teachers, the questionnaire survey yielded two important insights. On the one hand, the students seemed to be well satisfied with the existing syllabus, both in terms of the course foci and the learning outcomes, with a relatively clear consensus about the usefulness of the course for future teachers of English. This finding empirically justifies the decision made by the course designers to adapt the existing syllabus rather than to devise an entirely new concept.

On the other hand, some students did recommend adapting the syllabus to suit future teachers' needs. The suggested changes primarily concern the choice of topics covered in the course. The topic clusters, which form the basis of the students' in-class and exam presentations, should ideally be more pedagogical in orientation. The desired topics clearly reflect a preference for teaching-related, practically relevant topics, such as giving feedback, oral fluency, classroom interaction, speaking activities, and classroom management, over more theoretical topics, such as models of speaking, coursebook analysis, or genre analysis. Incidentally, the preferred topics roughly correspond to students' perceived needs in relation to their own speaking skills: classroom experience, speaking opportunities, and fluency. These findings support a content-based approach to language teaching, which integrates content and language learning by exposing students to relevant content in context and to meaningful activities or scenarios that mirror the students' future professional realities more closely.

The findings have to be seen in the light of some limitations. Besides the small sample size, perhaps one of the most important limitations lies in the fact that the survey revealed only *perceived* needs of pre-service teachers of English, which may not necessarily tally with the students' *real* needs. A complementary methodology involving some form of diagnostic assessment could provide a fuller picture of what students really need. Furthermore, the small amount of teaching experience of many participants may have affected the results; the responses may have been based on vague or erroneous impressions of the speaking tasks and routines that students will face in their future classroom settings. Syllabus design in teacher education programmes should therefore be informed by the needs and views of other stakeholders as well, including lecturers, coordinators, teacher educators, and in-service school teachers. Finally, the results are based on students who had already taken PPOCS 2. It would be interesting to explore the needs of students prior to any speaking course.

## 28.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a questionnaire survey conducted at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna to explore the perceived learning needs of pre-service teachers of English in relation to speaking. Although students generally felt they are well equipped with the necessary speaking skills to function as English teachers, some learning needs emerged. These needs can be subsumed under three categories: feedback, mediation, and scaffolding. Firstly, while students feel confident about their ability to express praise in English, this is not so much the case when more complex forms of feedback are involved. Secondly, some learning needs seem to exist in relation to the ability to mediate concepts (i.e., the ability to make knowledge and concepts accessible through language in a co-constructive process). Thirdly, learning needs seem to arise in connection with the speaking skills required for effective scaffolding (i.e., the support teachers give to

learners during the learning process which helps the latter to narrow the gap between their current level of ability and the targeted level of ability).

The findings of this survey provided a sound basis for the development of the ASSET syllabus (see Richter, “Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers,” [this volume](#)). They shaped the design of the course in terms of the topics covered and the specific discourse skills targeted. Major course topics that emerged from the findings include effective feedback, oral fluency, classroom interaction, speaking activities, and classroom management. Relevant functional areas besides giving feedback, mediating, and scaffolding include communicating (complex) lesson content and organising classroom activities. Delineating topics and functions in this way helped the course designers to formulate tangible, student-centred learning outcomes based on students’ perceived needs. Future directions for the course design might include a stronger integration of content and language learning, of pedagogical knowledge and language competence, with possibly more systematic cooperation between ELC and the Centre for English Language Teacher Education and Research, the specialist group responsible for the pedagogical content at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna.

At a more general level, this study represents a deliberate attempt to involve students in syllabus development from the planning stage on. Participating in a needs analysis gives students the opportunity to contribute to defining the course content. Such student involvement not only has great face validity; it also has the potential to yield more realistic and student-oriented learning outcomes. This empirical approach involving students complements the largely intuitive approach to curriculum and syllabus design in tertiary language education. A key policy priority for curriculum and syllabus designers should therefore be to integrate student input in all phases of the development process.

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# Chapter 29

## Conclusion



Armin Berger

**Keywords** Framework for advanced English language competence · Programme design · Teacher research · Pedagogical practice · Comprehensive case study

### 29.1 A Language Programme Shaped by Design, Practice, and Research

In delineating some of the work undertaken by members of the English Language Competence (ELC) team at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna over the past few years, the preceding chapters have presented a systematic approach to developing the advanced English language competence of its students. Taken together, the chapters offer a comprehensive case study of a tertiary-level language programme in its historical, institutional, and professional context, where practice is generally understood as something which is communal, locally situated, and has evolved over time. What has profoundly shaped the programme in recent years is the team's crossing of traditional boundaries between programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research. It rests on the idea that the key players cooperate at the intersection of these areas in a mutually rewarding relationship. Embedded in an English department in a Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, the ECL programme resides side by side with several other departmental units, namely linguistics, literature, cultural studies, and teaching

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A. Berger (✉)

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

e-mail: [armin.berger@univie.ac.at](mailto:armin.berger@univie.ac.at)



English as a foreign language. Although the units have developed relatively independently of one another over time, the ELC programme, with its explicitly language-educational focus, provides a vital link between the more strongly content-focused units and lays the groundwork for students to succeed in an exclusively English-taught degree programme.

While the introduction to this volume outlines the background to the programme and its specific approach, the three main parts of the book capture the pillars of this approach. Part I describes the design of the programme, providing details about individual courses and two standardised language tests created in-house. Each course is presented in its curricular and theoretical context, along with the main contents and teaching methods, feedback and assessment procedures, and challenges and future directions. Overall, the programme is designed to teach high-level language courses to university students who are not only advanced in proficiency terms but also have a great professional and academic interest in the English language as well as in anglophone literatures and cultures. In addition to advanced functional proficiency, the courses promote linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic knowledge, along with metalinguistic awareness. Besides a considerable emphasis on academic reading and writing, the programme has a strong speaking component with a focus on academic presentation and interaction skills as well as pronunciation. The ELC programme also concentrates on mediation: Students learn to act as social agents who can help bridge linguistic gaps and convey or construct complex meaning, particularly in relation to the mediation of texts and concepts (see Council of Europe, 2020). In order to educate students for a range of occupational domains, a module on English in a professional context is dedicated to developing the knowledge and skills required to deal with professional genres in various fields, along with transferable language and employability skills. The ultimate goal of the programme is to help students mature into confident and highly competent users of English.

Part II of the book depicts examples of pedagogical practice which are illustrative of the way individual lecturers realise specific teaching and learning objectives as set out in the standardised curriculum. Rather than giving a representative account of the teaching that takes place, these chapters exemplify how different teaching methods, activities, and materials are put into action. Each chapter in this part is organised into a brief contextualisation, a statement of the objectives, a description of the procedure, and an evaluation of the practice, thus providing the designs and rationales behind the practice, but also an appraisal including student voices. The chapters are not meant to be treated as fully representative of how certain aspects of the curriculum are tackled in the ELC programme generally, nor do they claim to be models of exemplary teaching to be imitated. Instead, they are illustrative, not just in the sense that they reflect individual lecturers' interests and choices, but also in the sense that they are only snapshots of how lecturers deal pedagogically with these aspects. The fact that these chapters are illustrative rather than representative in nature should not be seen as running counter to the overall commitment to a systematic account of how the programme works. Rather, the chapters highlight the dynamic and open-ended nature of the approach. Lecturers enjoy comparative



freedom in their choice of teaching methods and materials; they can exercise a great measure of independence within the standardised curriculum.

Finally, Part III presents seven chapters of teacher research carried out in the ELC programme, where teacher research is understood to include any systematic inquiry undertaken by the lecturers in their own professional environments with a view to better understanding certain aspects of their work (see Borg, 2015). What these chapters have in common is that they all address questions of immediate practical relevance and that the findings have implications for pedagogical practice or programme design in the ELC context. The research questions are governed not so much by a purely theoretical interest or academic curiosity as by an orientation towards practically useful outcomes, and the data are derived from genuine ELC classrooms rather than experimental settings that are created specifically for the purpose of research. The studies are firmly anchored in the local professional context of language teaching and programme design, dealing with ‘real-world problems’ in that context. From that perspective, the studies epitomise teacher research in the best sense of the term. While some studies investigate specific details of the curriculum, such as vocabulary development or rhetorical structure and the use of connectives, others engage with a specific pedagogical practice, such as the use of vocabulary logs for expanding vocabulary knowledge. Yet others can be characterised as needs analyses intended to inform course design or as validation studies providing validity evidence to support the effectiveness of assessment instruments commonly used in the programme. Methodologically, the chapters reflect the great diversity of quantitative and qualitative strategies that is typical of teacher research (Borg, 2015).

## 29.2 The Interplay Between Design, Practice, and Research

Although programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research are in and of themselves fruitful areas of activity, leaving their mark on what is happening on the ground, the full programmatic potential is realised primarily through the interplay between these areas. The educational value of the approach presented in this book lies in the integrated nature of design, practice, and research. Perhaps one of the most important lessons to be learnt from the ELC approach is that deep understanding is more likely to emerge where the three areas are integrated and aligned by those implementing them. To complete the basic framework for developing advanced English language competence that was established in the introduction to this volume, the relationships between design, practice, and research can be presented visually as shown in Fig. 29.1. When the relationships are mapped onto this framework, the interplay among the three components, as well as some underlying theoretical concepts, is more evident.

The chapters in this volume can be characterised in relation to Fig. 29.1. The diagram indicates three types of relationship, which are reciprocal in nature and covered to varying degrees in this book. Firstly, the relationship between programme

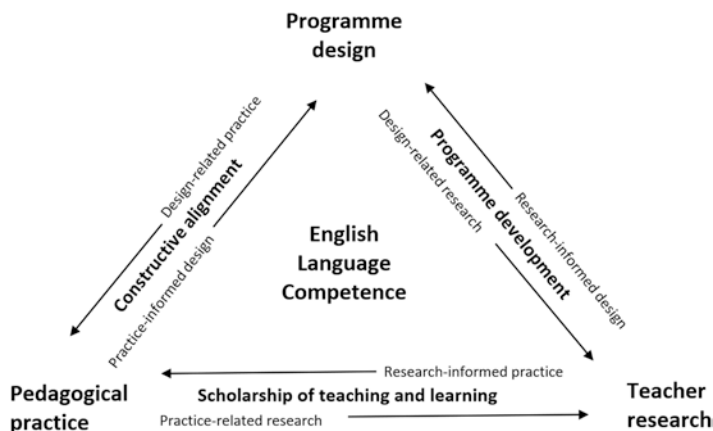


Fig. 29.1 The interplay between programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research

design and pedagogical practice is reciprocal in the sense that the standardised course syllabi, rationales, and intended learning outcomes, as presented in Part I, form the basis for devising the teaching, learning, and assessment activities that students need to undertake (*design-related practice*), as illustrated in Part II. Conversely, pedagogical practice has an effect on programme design through continuous and iterative cycles of development (*practice-informed design*). The course descriptions in Part I outline and contextualise the learning outcomes, which in turn provide the basis for the pedagogical practice inclusive of assessment. The contributions in Part II illustrate design-related practice by describing a range of activities that lecturers ask their students to engage in so as to develop the skills, knowledge, and understanding as set out in the course descriptions. Prillinger ([this volume](#)), for example, gives an account of a creative approach to teaching essay structure to help students acquire the ability to argue a position in a coherent and cohesive text, one of the major objectives in Integrated Language and Study Skills (ILSS, see Martinek & Savukova, [this volume](#)). Similarly, Savukova and Richter ([this volume](#)) illustrate how they devise teaching and learning activities to help students interact successfully in formal discussions, a central learning outcome in Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills (PPOCS, see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)). Bruno-Lindner (“Improving Students’ Writing and Mediation Skills in English in a Professional Context,” [this volume](#)), in turn, describes several learning activities designed to help students acquire a range of mediation strategies to adapt specialist texts from the occupational domain for a non-specialist audience, one of the major learning outcomes in English in a Professional Context (see Bruno-Lindner, “English in a Professional Context,” [this volume](#)).

However, lecturers in the ELC programme do not simply follow a prescribed curriculum; in fact, they profoundly shape this curriculum on the basis of their day-to-day practice. While no contribution in this book is primarily concerned with

practice-informed design, several chapters in Part I touch upon the impact that pedagogical practice has had on programme design. For example, Martinek and Savukova mention regular lecturers' meetings at the beginning of each semester, which, among other things, provide an opportunity for the ILSS team to revise the design of the module in the light of their practical experience, for instance by weeding out those details of the curriculum which are difficult to implement. Similarly, in Language in Use 1 and 2, described by Schwarz-Peaker ([this volume](#)), the ratio of text analysis to text transformation activities in the two courses is the outcome of the team's deliberations on the best possible distribution given the practical constraints.

One of the major principles underlying the relationship between pedagogical practice and programme design is *constructive alignment*, a design principle which takes the intended learning outcomes as the starting point and deliberately aligns teaching and assessment practice to those outcomes (Biggs, 2003). Based on constructivist learning theory, the principle recognises that knowledge is not directly transferable from lecturer to learner but constructed by the activities in which the learners engage. Accordingly, teaching aims to engage students in activities that help them attain the intended outcomes, and assessment is designed to provide clear statements about how well the outcomes have been achieved (Biggs, 2014, pp. 5–6).

Another relationship exists between pedagogical practice and teacher research. It is reciprocal in the sense that not only do teachers carry out research to better understand certain aspect of their work (*practice-related research*), but the results of this inquiry also feed back into their teaching (*research-informed practice*). The starting point for the teacher research is a specific aspect of the ELC programme, and the findings have immediate practical implications. Several chapters in Part III of this volume can be characterised as practice-related research, where practice is understood not just in a narrow sense as a particular teaching procedure but more generally as any practically relevant question, issue, or problem which, potentially or actually, influences the lecturers' work in one way or another. Rieder-Bünemann and Resnik ([this volume](#)) investigate to what extent the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course changes students' perceptions of academic writing. Schiftner-Tengg ([this volume](#)) explores what is perceived to be a major challenge by many students in the ELC programme, namely rhetorical structure, and the question whether connectives contribute to the coherence of ILSS essays. Heaney ([this volume](#)) examines students' and lecturers' views on the usefulness of vocabulary logs as a specific area of pedagogical practice in ILSS 1. Ghamarian ([this volume](#)), in turn, provides a diachronic perspective on vocabulary development across ILSS 1, ILSS 2, and EAP. Finally, Richter ("Foreign Accent and the Role of Identity in the Adult English as a Foreign Language Pronunciation Classroom," [this volume](#)) explores the relationship between students' identity perceptions and achievement in the PPOCS 1 course.

At the same time, all of these contributions discuss the practical implications of the findings and conclude with recommendations for practice. Based on the results of their study, Rieder-Bünemann and Resnik, for example, call for systematic integration of students' beliefs, particularly in relation to writer identity, and a better

vertical coordination between the module teams to achieve greater coherence in students' conceptions. Schiftner-Tengg suggests that, as the effectiveness of connectives is closely linked to the meaning relations they indicate, connectives should always be taught in association with these meaning relations. Heaney describes how the vocabulary log was streamlined as a result of her survey; she also recommends a concerted effort to raise students' awareness of the purpose of each task, to incorporate vocabulary learning into the classroom, and to exploit diagnostic tools and online tests for the analysis of students' vocabulary knowledge. Likewise, Ghamarian highlights the importance of explicit vocabulary teaching, particularly at the lower levels of the programme, emphasising that the vocabulary learning process should be structured and guided yet flexible enough for individual learning styles. Finally, one of the concrete practical suggestions made by Richter is that students could benefit from working with relatable role models as opposed to listening to anonymous speakers. Many of the findings-based recommendations discussed in Part III of this volume are currently being implemented in the ELC context, either programmatically or on the level of individual courses.

The conceptual underpinning of practice-related research and research-informed practice can be captured by the notion of *scholarship of teaching and learning*, an emerging model in higher education that comprises the intentional inquiry into one's own teaching, learning, and assessment practices with a view to improving these practices and enhancing student learning. Influenced by Boyer's (1990) seminal reconceptualisation of scholarship as something that crosses the traditional divide between teaching and research, the concept of scholarship of teaching and learning has emerged in the post-secondary sector in recent years as a way of recognising and promoting excellence in teaching, thereby adding more legitimacy to the full range of academic work. Although the concept still lacks definitional clarity, the activities undertaken in the ELC programme share key characteristics with work done under the banner of scholarship of teaching and learning: They are about practice development, curriculum enhancement, and student learning; they function as a vehicle for institutional change and boundary-crossing, particularly in relation to professional development and the old dichotomies between teaching and research, theory and practice; and they aim at dissemination and impact, especially at the micro level but also beyond (see Fanghanel et al., 2016).

Finally, there is a reciprocal relationship between teacher research and programme design. These two areas mutually influence each other in that some of the research conducted by the ELC team addresses questions concerning the design of the programme (*design-related research*), just as the results of that research have an effect on the ELC programme (*research-informed design*). Two chapters in Part III of the volume can, in large part, be characterised as design-related research. To begin with, Berger's comparative study ("Assessing Oral Presentations and Interactions," [this volume](#)) investigating the effectiveness of two different types of rating scales used operationally in the ELC programme is an example of validation research which language programmes should routinely perform. The findings provided the basis for an evidence-based reform of the rating process in some of the programme's speaking courses. Also Berger's study on the perceived learning needs

of pre-service English teachers (“Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English,” [this volume](#)) represents design-related research. The study set out to explore the construct of speaking ability for classroom purposes with the express aim of providing an empirical basis for the syllabus of a new course termed Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (ASSET). The corresponding chapter representing research-informed design is Richter’s course description of ASSET in Part I (“Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers,” [this volume](#)). Richter refers to the functions and topics relating to classroom-specific speaking ability that emerged from Berger’s survey and which made their way into the course syllabus. Her chapter illustrates that programme design is based not just on an interpretation of the work done by others but also on programme-specific research conducted in-house.

Conceptually, this relationship reflects a form of programme development which integrates research and management perspectives (see Kiely, 2009). The research activities are not an end in themselves but are designed to suggest ways in which the programme can be further developed. The local context and the participants are not sidelined in this process, as is often the case in language programme development and evaluation; on the contrary, they are considered to play a central role. From this perspective, programme development is not an external top-down enterprise but a locally and socially situated cycle of inquiry and action.

### 29.3 Future Directions

The volume demonstrates how the ELC programme is operationalised through programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research. It has become clear that these areas do not merely exist side by side, and that those involved do not treat them sequentially in the sense that programme design always comes first, followed by practical implementation, and finally systematic inquiry. Rather, design, practice, and research interact with one another to form a rich, integrated, and organic whole that is successful in the local context. At the same time, this volume also opens up several avenues for future work in the three areas. Relating individual chapters to the ELC framework has shown that not all types of relationship are represented to the same degree. In particular, practice-informed design is underrepresented in this volume. Although some chapters allude briefly to the influence that pedagogical practice has had on programme design, no chapter investigates this dimension of the framework at greater length, nor does the volume at large provide a representative account of the actual role that practice plays in shaping the programme. Future work will have to bring this aspect into sharper focus. At the same time, the programme should remain open to new designs. For example, a new syllabus is currently being developed for Creative Writing, a new language competence course in the most recent version of the master’s programme *Anglophone Literatures and Cultures*.

Another dimension that could be explored more extensively is research-informed practice. While the authors of the research chapters in this volume have discussed the practical implications of their findings, future projects could focus on research-informed practice more specifically. Besides giving findings-based recommendations for teachers, future work could elaborate on how practice is actually transformed by the teacher research. Demonstrating the real impact of research results is considered to be an emerging characteristic inherent in the scholarship of teaching and learning (Fanghanel et al., 2016, p. 6), and information about the impact on the participants, policy, and practice should be disseminated. Furthermore, the team could cooperate more closely with other departmental units. The present volume has captured the ELC programme in its historical, institutional, and professional context. The programme has evolved its own way of working over the years, with many people leaving their mark. The influence *across* departmental units, however, has traditionally been only marginal. For the future, there is surely potential for increased cooperation and synergy to integrate ELC courses more systematically with other scholarly perspectives housed within the Department of English and American Studies, such as content and language integrated learning, teaching English as a foreign language, English as a lingua franca, historical linguistics, literature and cultural studies, to name but a few. The ELC programme is, and should be, an independent unit, as it offers more than just auxiliary language training for future academics in certain language-related subjects: It provides language education more generally to help students participate fully in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of the twenty-first century. However, a stronger integration between the ELC programme and other units at the department could lead to a mutually rewarding relationship between language learning and content learning.

Finally, in relation to teacher research, the ELC framework can help the team to identify research priorities and establish a more systematic research agenda in the future. The current volume offers a collection of contributions in which lecturers pursued their personal research interests. While the different insights that emerged from those multiple perspectives have enriched our understanding of tertiary-level language education, future research could be more programmatic in orientation, paying particular attention to the most pressing questions that need answering in order to enhance the quality of the programme and implement, encourage, or accelerate educational reform. Such programmatic inquiry geared towards understanding programme-wide issues may have a more substantial impact on programme design and pedagogical practice, as well as the people involved, than individualistic approaches. Furthermore, the teacher research conducted in-house could benefit from involving learners more actively in the process. While student engagement in the present volume is largely confined to identifying learning needs or providing feedback on teaching, it could also take the form of partnerships where students are engaged in language learning through research activities, for example by carrying out mini projects in their language classes analysing written or spoken performances. In this way, students are not just research subjects, but partners and co-researchers aiming to enhance their own learning. At the same time, one could explore the ways in which student involvement can be extended to pedagogical

practice and programme design so as to take adequate account of their learning experiences and how they shape design and practice.

## 29.4 Learning from Local Practice

This comprehensive case study offers a rich description of a tertiary-level language programme embedded within its local context. It addresses programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research from a highly situated point of view, discussing the practices with due regard to contextual factors. Although the approach presented here has proved to be successful in the local setting, it is not meant to imply superiority over other ones, nor does it invite direct imitation. It is obvious that simply transferring a concept to another context without adequate localisation is likely to disappoint the expectations of those involved. While it would be naïve, if not outright hubristic, to claim that the approach should serve as a model for other language programmes, it can nevertheless be a useful source of inspiration. Rather than blueprint fidelity, however, a worthwhile aim is to use this volume as a catalyst for reflection and discussion on how complex language programmes work, as well as for wider dissemination of curriculum designs. The following points summarise some lessons and observations which might be useful for language educators in similar situations:

- (a) The programme is more likely to fulfil its potential if programme design, pedagogical practice, and teacher research do not operate independently from one another but form a dynamic, reciprocal, and mutually rewarding relationship.
- (b) Accordingly, the three dimensions should not be considered in isolation, but in terms of their combined effect on the usefulness of the programme. The interplay between design, practice, and research is thus a key unit of analysis.
- (c) An important corollary to this is that the role of language teachers needs reconceptualisation. Their role should be sufficiently expanded to embrace the whole range of academic work, including the core activity of teaching but also other academic and managerial responsibilities.
- (d) Expanding the range of activity is a form of professional development which is considered vital for both individuals and the profession as a whole (Ding & Bruce, 2017).
- (e) The approach has, in large part, changed local teacher identity from practitioners implementing a curriculum to a scholarship-based identity. The key actors are not just consumers of research done by others but active producers of knowledge in the areas of language teaching, curriculum design, and teacher research.
- (f) Developing this approach was a grassroots initiative in a context where teaching-only contracts are the norm. The bottom-up dynamic, which would not have been possible without the professionalism and idealism of the authors, has clearly fostered commitment and ownership among those involved. However,



for it to be sustainable, the bottom-up effort needs to be supported by top-down measures.

In the end, this volume is an invitation to readers to relate the ELC approach to their own contexts. We hope that the book can contribute to the current debate in English language teaching theory and practice on how to engage more fully with local and localised concepts and practices, and perhaps even encourage others to publish their local approaches, so that we can develop a more comprehensive and contextualised understanding of English language education globally.

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