

Cambridge English

EMPOWER

Insights into learning and assessment

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Learning Oriented Assessment: putting learning, teaching and assessment together

Challenges in the modern classroom

For most teachers, student needs such the ones voiced in the following comments are probably hardly surprising:

'I want to speak like real people... I mean real language – not classroom language.'

'I want my teacher can tell me what to do after class - for extra work. Because I need to improve my language.'

'I think my English is pretty ok. I know what I need to work on and it is useful when you do some exams 'cos it tells you how well you are compared to generally. Even though I don't like tests so much.'

These statements raise – among other things – the issue of developing communicative language skills

that are necessary for social purposes and 'survival' outside of classroom, of extending learning beyond the classroom, and of the ambivalent relationship that students often have with exams and assessment.

First of all, an on-going issue for students is the desire to use 'natural', communicative language – the kind they hear in real life situations. They want to be able to achieve realistic communication – and not a 'cleaned up' version with neatly packaged grammar and vocabulary. They know – especially nowadays where they have exposure to websites, films and media using English as lingua franca – that a certain type of language works well in the classroom but doesn't always prepare them for the messy, real life language they are hoping to acquire.

Students can also have difficulty with study skills and autonomous learning. Even highly motivated students can struggle to understand what to do outside of the classroom when they are not being directed by the teacher. And teachers don't always have the opportunity to design personalised learning for every student. Learner autonomy is a contemporary issue – but students – and teachers too – struggle to achieve this.

Finally, students often have a 'love-hate' relationship with exams. 'Love' because they often want to know how they are doing in measurable terms – that is, in relation to an external standard (e.g. the Common European Framework of Reference

for Languages (CEFR)), or to other students locally and internationally. But also 'hate' because exams can sometimes be disconnected from the learning process and students feel they would be better focused on learning rather than testing.

At the same time, teachers are faced with their own challenges in the contemporary classroom setting. Teachers are aware that in an ideal scenario they need to:

- Set clear learning outcomes;
- Identify suitable tasks (from course books, published or home-made materials) and deliver them effectively;
- Assess how the students are doing and encourage them to self-assess their own performance and needs;
- Provide feedback on performance – both positive and developmental – and encourage self and peer feedback;
- Adjust future learning outcomes and lessons in response to this (e.g. by creating personalised practice for students to address their needs).

In practice, however, they may not be able to follow all of the above consistently or all the time due to, for instance, lack of time to prepare activities and keep detailed records of students' achievement and progress; due to large classrooms and limited time for feedback or suggestions for personalised work; or because of lack of sufficient technological support (e.g. limited facilities for multi-media activities, such as voice recording, video or mobile learning).

The traditional view on assessment

Addressing these student and teacher challenges has not been aided by the traditional view on assessment, which has dominated the field up until recently. It conceptualises assessment as a series of dichotomies and divisions. On the one hand, there is formative assessment, classroom-based assessment or assessment for learning. It is on going, emphasises interaction, support and development, thus responding to the evolving needs of the learner. However, it is often seen as lacking reliability and validity, making it difficult to generalise findings beyond a specific classroom context. This contrasts with what has been referred to as summative assessment, standardised assessment or assessment of learning. It typically comes at the end of a period of study and is linked to a syllabus or an external measure. It is designed with validity and reliability in mind but it is often perceived as just "grading", and in its most restricted form, it consists of allocation of grades without meaningful or adequate interpretation.

The formative-summative distinction has served a number of purposes, but it poses, we will argue here, a false dichotomy, since summative assessment can be used formatively and formative assessment can be used summatively. All well-constructed and valid assessment tasks can be learning tasks, and learning tasks can be used as a means of assessing where learners currently are and deciding where they need to go.

Learning Oriented Assessment

Moving away from such unhelpful dichotomies and in response to the student and teacher needs outlined earlier, Cambridge English has put forward a model of Learning Oriented Assessment which encompasses all forms of assessment with the aim of capitalising on their individual strengths and counterbalancing their limitations to promote better learning. It is:

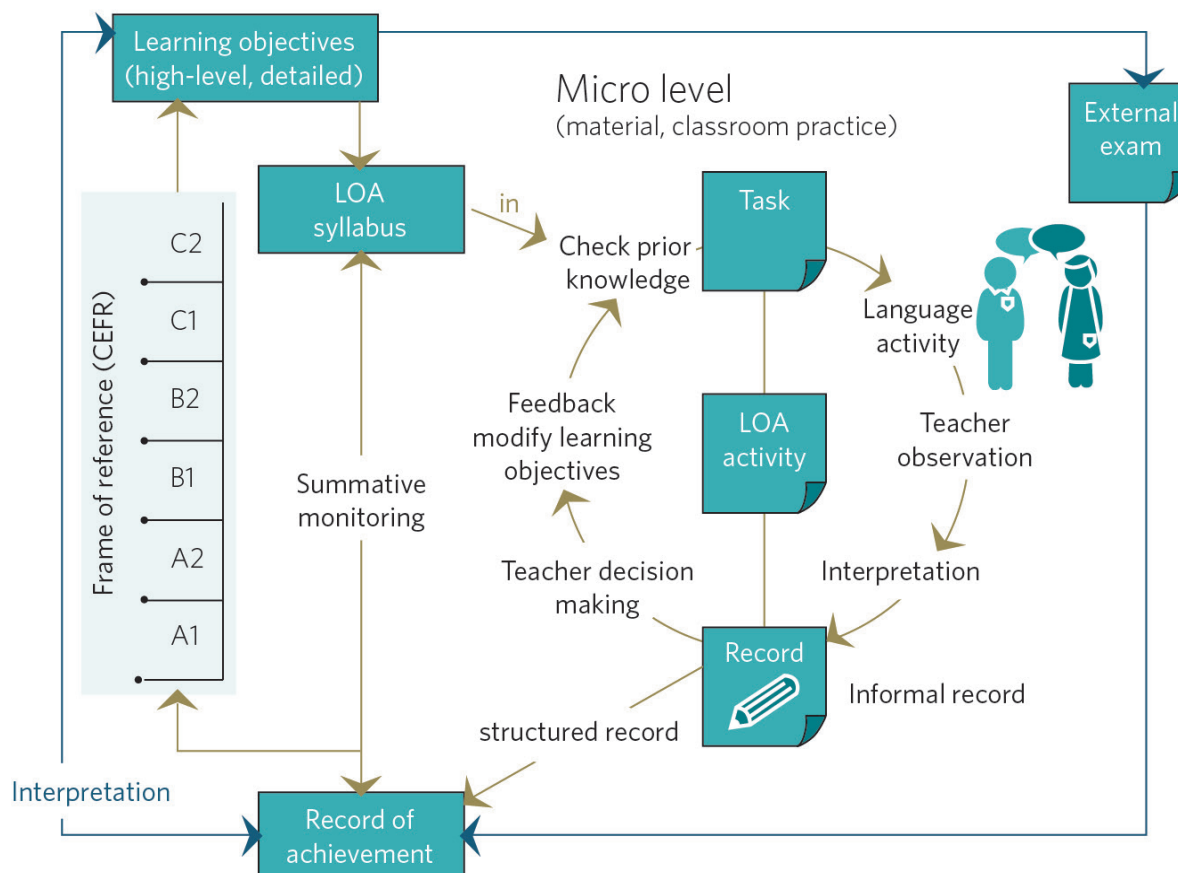
a systemic model in which all levels of assessment, from the classroom up to the large-scale exam, are brought into a complementary relationship and coordinated to provide maximum positive impact: providing evidence to support better learning, as well as better measurement and recognition of learning outcomes.

(Jones and Saville 2014: 4)

Figure 1 illustrates a Learning Oriented Assessment cycle as applied in a classroom setting. The cycle covers activity at two levels. It starts at the macro level where higher-level, key learning objectives are set at the beginning of a course. These objectives may be linked to external standards such as the CEFR. From the objectives, a syllabus and course are created. The cycle then moves into the micro level of the classroom where the course is delivered and learning takes place. In each lesson, the teacher identifies a task designed to help students to work towards one of the learning objectives – for example, the use of past simple and present perfect. The students carry out the task in class and engage in a language activity – this may be individually, in pairs or in larger groupings. The teacher observes and monitors the activity and interprets the students' performance, and makes an informal record about the students' task performance and their achievements in the lesson.

Macro level

(Setting and monitoring targets)



The teacher uses classroom observations and the informal record of the students' performance to make decisions about what to do next. This could include giving students feedback on their performance and their progress. But the teacher could also decide to modify or adapt the learning objectives in the lesson. This could mean changing the next task according to students' needs. The teacher can also keep a more structured record after the lesson, noting information about the learning objectives, the language and the activities from the lesson, as well as the students' performance, including their progress and any difficulties they had. This means the teacher is building a structured record of achievement for the student and the class.

A formal or external proficiency exam may be used at the end of the course to measure the students' language level. The results of this can also go into the record of achievement to provide a more complete picture of the students' profile. In this way, both external proficiency assessment, which focuses on quantitative measurement and interpretation of learning outcomes, and classroom

assessment, with its focus on qualitative monitoring and tracking of classroom-based learning – in other words, both evidence of learning and evidence for learning – contribute to the students' progress record. For this complementarity to work harmoniously, however, the external proficiency exam needs to be informed by and constructed to the same external standard and high-level learning objectives as classroom assessment.

The structured record of achievement can then be compared with and interpreted against the learning objectives that were set at the beginning of the cycle and the external standards which informed these objectives, such as in this example the CEFR 'Can Do' descriptors. Finally, the students' record of achievement also loops back to the syllabus specification, allowing more summative monitoring of how well particular curricular objectives have been mastered by students.

Some examples of Learning Oriented Assessment in practice

How can this Learning Oriented Assessment cycle be applied in practice? Let us take a look at some examples from a Learning Oriented Assessment-based six level course (A1-C1): Empower. The examples will be discussed in relation to four key elements in the Learning Oriented Assessment cycle (but are by no means an exhaustive illustration of the cycle in practice):

Integration of learning and assessment as well as classroom and standardised proficiency assessment (assessment for learning and assessment of learning)

In the Empower course, assessment is integrated into the course unit content so at the end of every unit students take a progress (achievement) test. This progress test looks back at the points of the unit and is benchmarked to the CEFR levels by assessment experts to ensure reliability and validity. This is in line with Learning Oriented Assessment principles, since it presents a systematic approach to include assessment tasks alongside teaching, and use performance on the assessment tasks to inform teaching. Assessment tasks become learning tasks because they are integrated into the course of study. At the same time, the learning tasks which students have been doing become assessment tasks, so there is no mismatch between classroom learning and assessment.

As well as progress tests that are part of the cycle of learning that takes place in every unit, students also have the opportunity to take a four-skill test at the mid and end of course point. These standardised, proficiency tests are also benchmarked to the CEFR and give teachers and students the chance to see how they are performing in terms of CEFR levels overall and across the four skills. In terms of Learning Oriented Assessment, this is an example of integration between classroom and standardised tests through their link to an external criterion – here the CEFR – as well as their alignment to the same higher-level learning objectives set for the course.

Learner autonomy

Ensuring that students think about their own learning and progress is important because learners who take more responsibility tend to make more progress. To achieve this students need to have good learning skills – in other words, they need to ‘learn how to learn’. This will make it easier for them to set some of their own learning goals and be more independent learners. Learner autonomy can be built in a number of ways. Empower, for instance, encourages student self and peer assessment. This can take the form of using check lists of ‘Can Do’ statements

so that students identify what they can do well or need to work on, getting students to complete diaries to encourage self-awareness, peer checking after activities and the like.

Evidence and record-keeping

Evidence is the information about learning that we need to collect in the Learning Oriented Assessment cycle so we can check student understanding and monitor learning against learning objectives. Both the teacher and the students are responsible for collecting different types of evidence and recording it to build a rich learning profile and to check that students are on target and making progress. But collecting and maintaining information can be demanding if attempted without adequate technological support. In Empower, using a Learning Management System, both the teacher and the students have access to a full online record of the student performance in the form of a gradebook. Students’ results from course and assessment tasks are systematically recorded and compiled which allows the teacher to assign and track tasks and see how both the whole class and individual students are progressing. Such regular record-keeping is in line with Learning Oriented Assessment and the importance of systematic keeping of records of achievement and progress.

Feedback

Evidence and records are useful to make decisions about teaching and learning. But just as importantly, the teacher also has to provide feedback to learners and make learning recommendations to help them meet their objectives. And often student needs, even within the same group and level, can be fairly diverse and make the provision of individualised feedback and suggestions for individualised learning a necessity. This can be done in a number of ways. In Empower, for example, as discussed earlier, students are encouraged to complete a progress (achievement) test at the end of each course unit which revisits the language points covered in the unit. This unit progress test is linked to a personalised learner pathway which adjusts their practice in response to their score. For instance, if students have performed well, the practice they are directed to will be more challenging. If they need to review some areas they have covered in the unit, they will be offered different practice materials. They can then do personalised work which is targeted to what they need. After this stage, they can take the test again and compare their original result with their second attempt. Finally, they finish off with reviews and extension pages and can reflect on how successful they have been in reaching their original learning objectives. This is an important Learning Oriented Assessment feature, since it explicitly integrates assessment and learning content and offers opportunities for learning adapted to students’ needs.

Conclusion

So what are the implications and benefits of adopting and implementing a classroom-based Learning Oriented Assessment model for teachers? Even though the key principles and practices of Learning Oriented Assessment are not entirely new to teachers – particularly experienced teachers – teacher training and familiarisation still remains an important element for understanding and fully adopting the model. Sufficient technological support for the teacher in implementing Learning Oriented Assessment in the classroom is equally critical for successful outcomes.

Teachers adopting a learning-oriented approach to assessment and supported by training and purpose-built Learning Oriented Assessment classroom materials and tools will, in turn, be empowered to:

- Set both higher-level learning outcomes and more specific curricula objectives, acknowledge their complementary aims, and understand the necessity that these two ought to be aligned in terms of goals, constructs and frames of reference for learning to work;
- Identify the different types of assessment and their purposes;
- Use them to elicit complementary evidence *for* and *of* learning (e.g. from an informal classroom interaction which yields feedback on curricula objectives to large-scale assessment which links performance to higher-level learning goals);
- Collect this evidence in a systematic way and make appropriate interpretations;
- Turn evidence into individualised learning by providing feedback and necessary scaffolding to help learners operate within their *zone of proximal* development; and
- Ultimately, build learners' ability to learn, producing *better learning* and *better outcomes*.

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Figure 1: Model showing macro and micro levels in the Learning Oriented Assessment cycle (from Jones and Saville 2014: 22) © Cambridge English Language Assessment

Emotional engagement for adult language learners

Herbert Puchta

Most of us have become so accustomed to expressing ourselves in our mother tongue that we use it to communicate without conscious thought. But if an adult starts to learn a new language they suddenly find themselves – linguistically at least – back in a world that they had last experienced as a baby. That world was a world of raw emotion untempered by anything much in the way of rational thought – so it's hardly surprising that the challenges faced by adult learners can loom large, and their successes can generate intense pleasure while what they see as their failures can be deeply frustrating.

Paul, a former colleague of mine – a highly respected maths teacher with a deep interest in political science, very well read, and an eloquent and entertaining communicator in his mother tongue – mentioned his difficulty with learning Spanish as a foreign language:

It's alright as long as I am in one of those typical travelling situations, when I order a meal, check in at an airport or something like that. But as soon as I want to have a real conversation with someone things become so tedious. Then small talk is not enough – but what do you do when small talk is all you have? As soon as people start talking about more interesting things, I can first of all hardly follow what they are saying, and even when I can... by the time I've worked out a sentence

that doesn't even get close to what I really wanted to say, the conversation has moved on, and I'm lost. That's when I start feeling like an idiot!

What Paul is saying here is probably not unusual for quite a few adult learners who are used to expressing themselves eloquently in their mother tongue, and who, in the earlier stages of learning a foreign language, find themselves incapable of taking part in an intellectual conversation in that language. But despite plenty of anecdotal evidence that emotional factors are an integral part of learning and using a new language, success in the foreign language class is usually seen as being dependent on our students' cognitive capabilities rather than on emotional factors.

However, recent findings from neurosciences (neurobiology in particular) show that we need to be wary of that perception. These findings help us to understand better the nature of our students' learning successes (and also their failures), and at the same time give us concrete pointers that can lead to enriching our teaching and enhancing their success rate.

Learning is about creating neuronal networks

Learning is a physical-chemical process (Zull, 2002:92). The brain's networks are made of physical, tangible matter, formed from many millions of neurons (nerve cells) and networks of neurons, which meet one another at tiny gaps known as synapses. A synapse is 'bridged' by new knowledge, and each time that particular bit of knowledge is revisited, the bridge between the neurons becomes stronger.

At the heart of these physical changes in the brain are chemical processes. Emotional engagement leads to the release of a range of chemicals called neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, adrenalin and serotonin, and it is these that are responsible for the growth of neuronal networks; it is these chemicals that actually create the bridges between the neurons.

So it is clear that the human brain is *not* just a container or a structure that simply stores information. Likewise, students do not at a later stage simply retrieve from their brain the knowledge they have stored as outcomes of their learning processes. Yes, the neuronal networks in the brain are used for information retrieval, but they are also used for integrating new information with what we already know, a process that creates knowledge and in turn leads to the building of more neuronal networks. This creates more connections, a better appreciation of the context surrounding the learning being undertaken, and thus more permanent learning.

The more the brain changes through such neuronal activity, the more our students will remember, the more they will learn, and the more the brain itself will develop, leading to a wider and more balanced perspective overall.

The question for us as teachers, then, is to find what we can do to help facilitate the building of neuronal networks in our students' brains. The answer is to be found in Zull's research, which suggests that 'change is most extensive and powerful when emotion is part of the learning'.

Emotional engagement through progress

Emotion gets triggered first when students notice that they are making progress in their learning. There would seem to be a connection between the release of dopamine and action, both physical and mental (Zull, 2002: 61 and 2011:149). According to this argument, students enjoy the learning process because what is inherent in the process is movement (metaphorically speaking). This happens when we get engaged in a process that starts

when we are faced with a challenge, and finishes at the point when we manage to resolve it to our satisfaction.

This might well be the explanation of why *self-testing* is such an important element of learning (languages) successfully and has been found to be the single most efficient study technique (Dunlosky et al 2013).

Emotional engagement through content

Since the mid-eighties, ELT has seen a radical change as far as the texts used in the foreign language class are concerned. This has to a certain extent happened because the communicative approach has gained more ground over structuralist teaching concepts, and that has led to querying the usefulness of what used to be the staple diet of ELT – texts that were 'artificial and pragmatically meaningless' (c/f Widdowson 1998).

The trend these days is in the opposite direction, towards more 'real' language and text genres. This is partly because of the influence of corpus linguistics and its research into spoken English that has shown coursebook writers and curriculum planners what people are really likely to say in certain situations (see, for example, the groundbreaking research of Carter and McCarthy, 2006).

One of the outcomes of this move is that we are now finding more 'real English' in coursebooks, and it seems that teaching materials for the adult classroom are at the forefront of this development. But does the trend towards more 'real texts' support what was said above about the need to engage students emotionally? Not everybody will agree that it does. Medgyes (2002) for example carefully analyses ELT materials and notices that they are lacking in humour. He stresses that including more humour eases tension in the classroom, strengthens motivation, has a positive effect on the group dynamics, and helps foster the students' creativity.

The search for 'serious' content that is perceived to be relevant for adults often leads to texts or text genres that students might be happy to read in their mother tongue. However, in order for students to successfully decode such texts in the new language, they often need not just their knowledge of the language and relevant reading or listening skills but in addition a range of complex conceptual, contextual and cultural knowledge and understanding. If their foreign language level is still rather low, this extra burden can just be too much for them to handle.

Widdowson (1998: 711) maintains:

'I would [...] argue against using authentic language in the classroom, on the fairly reasonable grounds that it is actually impossible to do so. The language cannot be authentic because the classroom cannot provide the contextual conditions for it to be authenticated by the learners. The authenticity or reality of language use in its normal pragmatic functioning depends on its being localized within a particular discourse community. Listeners can only authenticate it as discourse if they are insiders. But learners are outsiders, by definition, not members of user communities. So the language that is authentic for native speaker users cannot possibly be authentic for learners.'

Reinforcing what he said, Widdowson (1998: 712) adds:

'This objection is so obvious that it seems odd that the authenticity argument should ever be taken seriously.'

Whereas this may seem an extreme position – because it does not differentiate between learners who are, say, students at elementary or lower intermediate level, and students at university preparing for an international exam at C2 level – classroom experience shows that 'pedagogical overload' may indeed lead to frustrating emotional experiences that achieve the opposite of what was intended.

As Perry (2006: 26) stresses, adult learners, as well as younger ones, have a powerful reflex called the 'fear response' deeply ingrained in their brains. We feel that reflex in moments of existential threat such as hunger, pain or danger – and quite frequently in the classroom equivalent, shame. At that point, all our mind can focus on is whatever we need

in order to get out of the unpleasant situation. Under such circumstances, there is no way the human mind is going to be open to new information; something new is seen as a further threat, and even though the threats in the classroom are very different from those our brains are wired to recognize, the classroom situation is no exception.

Speaking from the perspective of neuroscience, Perry (2006: 27) states:

'When the learner feels safe, curiosity lives. When we are safe and the world around us is familiar, we crave novelty. Conversely, when the world around us is too new, we crave familiarity. In such situations, we are more easily overwhelmed, distressed, frustrated. Therefore we want familiar, comforting and safe things.'

I myself started learning Italian as a foreign language, and a few months into the learning process, a friend gave me a simplified reader – a lightweight romance, not something I'd normally read. Yet I devoured the story and derived considerable satisfaction from reading it, which on reflection was quite a surprise to me. There is no way I would have kept on reading the same kind of story in my mother tongue – I would most probably have put it aside in half a minute. Why did I not do that with the reader? Why did I actually enjoy the activity?

Let's turn again to what was discussed above. Understanding demanding texts is impossible without fairly sophisticated language knowledge and skills. But my Italian was at elementary level, and one explanation for the pleasure I got out of reading a text whose content I'd normally have viewed as humdrum might be the 'sense of movement' or progress I gained from successfully decoding it.

So in your adult classroom, especially in the earlier stages of the learning process, consider making use of less cognitively challenging types of text – ones that your students would have enjoyed in their formative years – with wacky humour, strong emotional contrasts, inspiring stories about real-life heroes and heroines, and the extreme, the absurd, and the weird and wonderful. This will enable you to offer your students the familiarity, comfort and safety they need as a springboard to launch them into the cognitive challenge of their language learning.

Emotional engagement through freedom and ownership

Positive emotion also gets triggered when we develop a sense of ownership. One important element that supports this is learning through personal discovery. This is because such discovery releases more of the reward chemicals into the body, so learning is more enjoyable for students – and it lasts longer, as well. When students discover something new, when they develop an idea that they feel is theirs, and become aware that they are the creators of that idea, they begin to have a sense of ownership of their creation.

Let's digress for a moment into the world of the arts. The perception of art leads to emotional processes; when we feel that a piece of music, a painting, a dance performance or whatever else we are focusing on actually 'speaks to us' we feel pleasure. The creation of a work of art triggers even deeper emotions, as its creator will have been more deeply involved in it:

'since creativity is based on the decisions made by the creator, the reward system kicks in when we are in control and inventing things that we have thought of ourselves. Freedom and ownership are part and parcel of the neurochemistry of arts.'

(Zull, 2003a: 2)

It is not difficult to see the importance of these neuroscientific findings to the process of learning another language. This means that as far as reception is concerned, we as teachers need to find texts that 'speak' to our students in terms of being relevant and accessible to them, which seems to support strongly what was said above about the choice of texts. And just like an artist, a student who has come up with a new idea – that 'Aha!' moment – will normally feel great pleasure. That sense of pleasure is a clear indication that new learning has taken place, and the deeper and more lasting the pleasure, the deeper and more lasting the learning.

The realization that the brain's reward system depends on the activation of the sense of freedom and ownership

has far-reaching consequences for students' writing skills, too. Currently, in the early years of the 21st century, writing programmes for adult learners usually follow a systematic syllabus based on the principle of genre writing. In this approach, students are trained to write various kinds of real-life-style texts, including invitations to a social gathering, emails, various kinds of letters, complaints, discursive texts, etc. This kind of writing is often regarded by both teachers and students as highly relevant and important, especially if students are preparing for international exams. However, as important as the different genres of texts are, if we want to make best use of what neurosciences tell us about the workings of the brain, this genre-based type of writing alone might not be enough.

This is because, important as the writing of 'real' text types may indeed be, it is unlikely to arouse emotional engagement in most learners. So in order to generate effective learning, it seems equally important to engage our students in spontaneous, personal, free or creative writing tasks, as these are more likely to create that sense of freedom and ownership that the neuroscientific research stresses as so important. This is not, however, a suggestion to replace genre-based writing with creative writing, but rather an advocacy for using both.

Conclusion

As Egbert (2006: 505) notices, 'enjoyment' and 'playfulness' are terms that 'scholars do not usually apply to the experience of or research on classroom language learning'. There seems, however, to be enough evidence from both neuroscientific research and educational theory to support an approach that advocates the use of 'lighter' texts in adult classrooms – especially in the earlier stages of learning. Likewise, it seems we are well advised to call upon adult students' prior knowledge more systematically and regularly than it is currently done in most classrooms.

In addition, spontaneous speaking and especially writing activities will help to create those important feelings of freedom and ownership in the students. Making time for such an approach might not only lead to better academic results for the students, but to more fun in the classroom – and greater satisfaction for the teacher.

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Being Strategic: Adult Learners and Speaking

Adrian Doff
& Craig Thaine

Most adult learners who enrol in an English language course are keen to learn how to speak the language. While it is important for them to develop listening, reading and writing skills, speaking is frequently a priority. In twenty-first century English classrooms, teachers more often than not provide their learners with a good array of speaking activities in the form of discussions, information gap activities and the like. These activities can provide practice of target grammar, vocabulary and functional language, and can also offer learners spoken fluency practice. However, the skill of speaking involves more than just production of oral language. In the process of developing speaking skills, it's useful if adult learners can learn to become effective communicators in English as well.

Speaking in the classroom

Before investigating what we mean by effective oral communication, it is useful to outline typical classroom speaking activities and to think about what their aims are.

Many lessons begin with some kind of *lead in* activity. While aiming to prime learners for the content or context of the lesson, it also usually aims to provide spoken fluency practice. In other words, learners practise speaking without worrying too much about specific language items and language accuracy. Spoken fluency practice can also take place at other stages in a lesson. For example, learners might read or listen to a text and respond to the information in the text by expressing their opinion or perhaps personalise the content by responding to a question like:

| What would you do in that situation?

However, a lot of speaking activities are connected with the practice of language (grammar, vocabulary and functional language) that a teacher is focusing on. This oral practice can range from being very controlled (such as a drill) through to something that is much freer (such as a role play). When oral practice is highly controlled, learners are usually repeating an example utterance or changing it slightly. The aim is often to focus on producing a good phonological model of the language so that learners practise pronunciation as well as the target grammar (or vocabulary). When practice is freer, learners are adding more language of their own and the focus is more on fluency rather than accuracy.

The design of a practice activity can affect the degree to which a learner's language production is controlled, as can the instructions and the way in which the activity is set up. A large majority of these activities contain an *information gap* element (each learner in a pair knows something that the other learner does not and this gives them a reason to talk) or a *discussion* element (learners have different opinions or experiences). Irrespective of the degree of control, all these activities have a core aim: the practice of language items which provide learners with a useful opportunity to put recently learnt language items into productive use. It can also provide teachers with useful information about learners' acquisition of new language items.

These different speaking activities usually involve interaction between learners. However, none of them necessarily focus on the interactional nature of spoken language. In order to find out what we mean by this, let's briefly examine the nature of second language spoken language.

The nature of spoken language

Goh and Burns (2012) provide a useful description of characteristics that comprise “second language speaking competence”:

1. Knowledge of language and discourse
2. Core speaking skills
3. Communication strategies

(Goh and Burns 2012: 53)

These characteristics can, in turn, be broken down into more discrete micro-skills:

CHARACTERISTIC	SUB SKILLS
Knowledge of language and discourse	Phonological knowledge, lexical knowledge, grammatical knowledge, discourse knowledge.
Core speaking skills	Production of pronunciation, performing speech functions (requests, offers etc.), interaction management, discourse organisation of extended spoken texts.
Communication strategies	Cognitive strategies (e.g. paraphrasing, circumlocution), metacognitive strategies (e.g. planning speaking), interaction strategies (e.g. checking comprehension, repeating an utterance).

(Goh and Burns 2012: 54 - 66)

At first glance, there appears to be overlap between the first two characteristics. However, it is important to note that the first characteristic is concerned with knowledge of language while the second characteristic focuses on the implementation of that knowledge when speaking. There are also similarities between the core speaking skills of interaction management and interaction strategies (a sub-skill of communication strategies). While this may be

the case for a few sub-skills, it is worth bearing in mind that interaction management is more concerned with the active management of a conversation or discussion while an interaction strategy is more typically used when there has been some kind of misunderstanding resulting in a breakdown in communication. Goh and Burns note that these sub-skills of speaking are interdependent and second language speakers are likely to need to deploy different sub-skills at the same time (Goh and Burns 2012: 52).

Thornbury (2005) also breaks speaking down into a series of sub-skills such as conceptualising and formulating information, articulation, self-monitoring and fluency. In line with Goh and Burns, he acknowledges the importance of language knowledge and emphasises the importance of *extralinguistic knowledge*. In effect, this is what second language speakers know about a particular topic or the cultural knowledge that they might assume that the person (or people) they are speaking to might know (Thornbury 2005: 11-12). Thornbury also discusses *interaction management* using the term *managing talk* (Thornbury 2005: 8) as well as referring to *communication strategies* (Thornbury 2005: 29).

When we compare Goh and Burn’s and Thornbury’s descriptions of second language spoken competence with our description of classroom speaking, it becomes immediately apparent that sub-skills associated with interaction management and with interaction strategies are missing. We see the development of these sub-skills as central to the interactional nature of spoken language. Rather than make a distinction between the terms *interaction management* and *interaction strategies*, we will use the term *interaction strategies* to refer to both for the rest of this article.

One of the reasons that we feel that interaction strategies are not dealt with in English language classrooms is that many teaching materials take a limited view of the nature of speaking. They usually offer plenty of opportunities for learners to speak with personalised language practice or fluency activities. However, if they contain a speaking syllabus, it is typically a list of language functions, and interaction strategies are not usually included.

Interaction strategies

What exactly are interaction strategies? They are small chunks of language that allow speakers to do something in a conversation or a discussion. They often provide the answer to a *How can I ...?* question that a learners might have in her mind. For example, how can I get someone's attention? or how can I signal that I'd like to say something in this discussion? These expressions and the way in which they are deployed tend to differ between languages.

Below are some examples of the kind of language we mean:

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE UTTERANCES
1. Changing what you want to say	No wait.
2. Checking what other people say	Are you sure?
3. Asking someone to wait	Just a minute.
4. Showing interest	Really?
5. Breaking off a conversation	I must run.
6. Keeping to the topic of the conversation	Anyway, to go back to...
7. Responding to an idea	Yes, that makes sense.
8. Taking a turn	If I could just say...

This is a very small and random sampling of interaction strategies. However, looking more closely at these examples, some key points become evident. A lot of this language is idiomatic in nature and the literal meaning of the language changes when it is used in context as an interaction strategy. For example, in the first utterance a speaker who is changing her mind does not want her interlocutors to wait in a literal sense. It is more likely that the phrase would be said to herself, but interlocutors would know that the speaker is thinking and about to change her mind. In example 5, the speaker may not actually run having completed the conversation. However, the interlocutor understands that the speaker has to finish the conversation and leave.

Importance for adult learners

We believe that a focus on this kind of language answers real-world needs of adult learners. As we have noted above, there is often a mismatch between the literal and contextual meaning of this language. Adult learners may not automatically understand these chunks of language

when they are in an English speaking environment. In a very simple, real-world context such as checking into a hotel, a second language speaker might hear or perhaps use the first three strategies from our list above. This shows that it is useful to focus on this language for both receptive and productive purposes. It also suggests the value of focusing on interaction strategies at low levels.

Many adult learners study English because they need it in workplace settings, where they communicate with English-speaking colleagues. These learners would benefit from a wide repertoire of strategic language, in order to be able to communicate effectively. Conversely, some adult learners follow an English course in preparation for some kind of further study in an English-medium environment. While English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes usually provide some kind of focus on interaction strategies, it helps if learners have already had some kind of exposure to this kind of language.

Focusing on speaking strategies in the classroom

A first step is finding material that contains examples of interaction strategies. This is likely to be some kind of dialogue or listening material. It is worth checking the tape scripts of the course book that you are using. While this language is often not focused on, it is sometimes included in dialogues. An alternative is to write or improvise your own listening dialogues that contain examples of interaction strategies.

As a general approach we suggest the following:

1. Make sure learners understand the context in which the language appears
2. Focus on the meaning of the strategic language as it is used in context
3. Highlight any key aspects of form (for example, in example 6 above, the strategy expression would normally be followed by a noun phrase)
4. Highlight any aspects of pronunciation that are important (for example, in example 4 above a learner will not sound very interested if her intonation is flat)
5. Provide some kind of controlled practice such as gapped mini dialogues or guided dialogues and make sure they are used for oral (rather than written) practice
6. Provide learners with role play / discussion scenarios where they can produce this language themselves.

Focusing on interaction strategies does not necessarily require a radical change to methodology. This language can be dealt with in a similar way that you might focus on grammar or functional language.

However, here are two extra ideas that you might like to try out with your learners. They are both suitable for a range of levels:

1. Personalised surprise

- Give a series of facts about yourself (on PowerPoint) and ask learners to choose the ones they find surprising.
- Elicit how they could respond with (a) all-purpose phrases (e.g. *Really?*) (b) echo Qs (e.g. *Have you?*).
- Focus on intonation.
- Get learners to write a few facts about themselves they think will be surprising. They tell their partner and respond with surprise and find out more.

You could use the same technique for showing interest or sympathy, finding points in common, responding to an idea or checking that they've understood.

2. What's next?

- Use a standard dialogue which contains interaction strategies. Play (or show) it line by line, pausing and asking students to predict what the other person will say.
- Then play (or show) the next line to check and ask why she says that (e.g. she isn't sure, she's surprised, she wants time to think).
- Show the dialogue on a handout with gaps and get participants to complete them.
- Play to check.

In summary, we are not suggesting that teachers change the speaking activities they already do in the classroom. It is more a question of amplifying that solid core and including some work on interaction strategies as well. This will strengthen learners' speaking skills and provide them with more learning opportunities that should support them when they have to speak in real-world situations.

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E-genres and the relevance of writing

Craig Thaine

The way in which Information Technology (IT) has grown and developed in the past twenty five years means that today's English language learners are probably writing more than their peers of days gone by. When not communicating in their first language, learners might be communicating in English, which suggests a new relevance for writing and a need to reconsider their writing skill needs. Olshtain (2014) points out the value of emphasising digital tools in writing lessons while still ensuring learners produce texts that are easy to understand. Learners do not always see the connection between digital tools and writing skills. As one learner noted, "that's not writing, it's Facebook!"

E-genres

As Thornbury (2013) notes, 'genre' is a slippery term. Hyland suggests that it is a way of 'grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations (2009: 15). He goes on to suggest that determining genre often involves a degree of intuition and common sense.

In line with this definition, it is possible to determine what can be termed 'e-genre'. Most literate users of any language will probably be able to identify an email message, a social media posting, a text message, a tweet, a contribution to a discussion board or a blog, all of which are written forms of communication that use IT.

Often it is the format or the layout of a written text that enables us to do this. However, it is also possible to recognise these genres when they are taken out of context. For example, "meet for coffee 10am?" is likely to be a text

message, while "sarahb@extra.mail Catch up Hi Sarah It was great to have your news ..." will probably be understood as an email message. Many of these genres have what Crystal (2011) calls 'norms of language', in other words, linguistic conventions associated with a particular genre. In the text message example above, the abbreviations are examples of the norms associated with messaging.

Genres and goals

An alternative definition of genre focuses on the function of written texts. Martin (1992, cited in Hyland 2003) defines them as a 'goal-oriented, staged social process'. This emphasises the idea that genres are texts created in specific contexts that have a communicative goal. The table below outlines some example goals of e-genres.

E-GENRES	GOAL
email message	request detailed information for a course of study you are interested in
social media posting	narrate the events of a holiday
text message	invite someone to a social event
tweet	share an opinion about a film you've just seen
discussion board contribution	persuade readers to agree with your point of view on a specified topic
blog	describe something that impressed you such as a delicious meal

Table 1

The range of possible goals for each e-genre is potentially quite wide. For example, all the goals listed in the table above could be applicable to an email message. However, not all goals would be applicable to all e-genres. For example, it is less likely that a discussion board contribution would have the goal of inviting someone for coffee.

ELT writing tasks

The example goals in table 1 are the kinds of writing tasks we might get our learners to carry out in a general English teaching programme. We often use these writing tasks as a way of focusing on core text types included in ELT teaching materials: narrative, descriptive, explanatory, discursive and persuasive. In turn, we can map the goals onto core ELT text types:

GOAL	ELT TEXT TYPES
request detailed information for a course of study you are interested in	explanatory – outlining what you want
narrate the events of a holiday	narrative – tell the story of your holiday
invite someone to a social event	persuasive – say why you would like the person to come
share an opinion about a film you've just seen	descriptive and discursive – describe elements of the film and put forward your opinion
persuade readers to agree with your point of view on a specified topic	discursive and persuasive – argue a point of view on a topic and try and get readers to agree with you
describe something that impressed you such as a delicious meal	descriptive – describe the look and taste of the food.

Table 2

This suggests that while the format, layout and norms of e-genres are new, the goals and text types that underpin them are familiar. As a result, if a lesson aims to focus on a social media posting in which the events of a recent past holiday are outlined, there is still some value in focusing on narrative verb forms together with norms associated with that e-genre.

It is also worth noting that some e-genre conventions focus on linguistic issues and not only those associated with format or layout. We can compare the following (invented) contributions to a discussion board:

1. Thank you for your reply and I completely agree with your posting. In reply to your question, I do not believe there is an easy answer. In theory, I would like to think I would take a principled course of action. However, in practice, I appreciate such a decision may not be straightforward.
2. Great posting and I couldn't agree more. Don't know what I'd do – strike a deal or act on my principles. It's a tough one.

The second posting is likely to be seen as more natural because it is perceived as being closer to spoken language. (However, it is possible that the first posting might be viewed as appropriate in a more academic context.) Telling our learners that the language they use in online discussion boards is like spoken language may not provide them with tangible support. The language itself resembles spoken language, but the nature or mode of communication differs because speech is ephemeral, while written language leaves a trace. Students might feel that the stakes are higher because their writing does not disappear after they have produced it. Their dilemma may be what they should leave in and what they should leave out.

An analysis of the second example above highlights discourse features:

^ Great posting and I couldn't agree more ^. ^ Don't know what I'd do – strike a deal or act on my principles. It's a tough one.

The caret (^) indicates ellipsis, the underlined words are contractions and the word in italics is an example of substitution. It is also worth pointing out the dash as an example of less formal punctuation. In effect, e-genre norms have their own rules and conventions, and focusing on these in the classroom develops writing skills associated with this e-genre.

A social media posting and writing skills

It is interesting to explore the linguistic implications of a popular e-genre: a social media posting. The advent of this form of written communication has seen the emergence of experts and consultants who give advice to individuals and companies. This advice is aimed at fluent speakers of English rather than learners.

On her blog, Mari Smith, a Social Media Expert, outlined some key strategies for making social media postings more effective:

- 1. Use an eye catching image
- 2. Keep the narrative short
- 3. Keep first person to a minimum
- 4. Include a call to action
- 5. Write about timely topics with helpful hints and resources
- 6. Experiment with longer content
- 7. Share a great cause

(Smith 2011)

What are the linguistic implications of all but the first of these suggestions? English language teachers are likely to perceive these as *language-focused* writing skills (as opposed to *process-oriented* writing skills that focus on strategies such as planning, drafting and revising.)

The table below outlines what these might be:

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY	LANGUAGE-FOCUSED WRITING SKILLS
1. Keep the narrative short	Efficient use of narrative verb forms as well as clear use of time linkers.
2. Keep first person to a minimum	Ability to use passive forms as well as impersonal pronouns 'it' and 'there'.
3. Include a call to action	Ability to persuade readers with both direct calls to action (imperatives) as well as less direct calls to action (e.g. <i>I believe it'd really help to ... It's likely to change the way ...</i>).
4. Write about timely topics with helpful hints and resources	Questions about topics that aim to get the reader's interest (e.g. <i>Have you ever wondered why banks charge such high fees?</i>); conditional structures and modals to provide tips (e.g. <i>If you feel you've been cheated, you really should contact ...</i>)
5. Experiment with longer content	Awareness of the organisation of text types normally associated with 'longer content'; use of cohesive devices; ability to paragraph.
6. Share a great cause	Specific use of punctuation to suggest enthusiasm (<i>CAPITAL LETTERS and !!!</i>); use of the present perfect that reports on outcomes associated with a specific cause (<i>So far we've raised \$12,000...</i>).

Table 3

E-genres and audience

It could be argued that a focus on the linguistic features in table 3 is unnecessary and it is enough for learners to communicate their intended message. As has already been suggested, this point of view may not support learners' needs. Another point worth considering is that of audience.

The development of IT has meant the potential audience for a piece of writing has widened considerably. This is mostly a positive advance because it means learners can write with a greater sense of purpose. However, it suggests that learners need more control of their message.

The case of Justine Sacco highlights the dangers of losing control of your message. In 2013, as she was about to catch a flight to Cape Town, she sent the following tweet: 'Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!'. By the time she had landed, eleven hours later, her tweet had gone viral and resulted in tens of thousands of outraged retweets. Sacco's message was intended for a small circle of friends, and she maintains she was aiming to critique white privilege (Ronson 2015). However, it was not perceived in this way.

While learners have the opportunity to share their writing in English with a real audience, they also need to be equipped with skills that will allow them to communicate what they really want to say. Once an e-genre is posted or sent, it can be extremely difficult to delete it or get it back. Teachers need to develop learners' awareness of this possibility, but they also need to develop learners' writing skills so they are equipped to take control of their message.

Classroom implications

The advent of e-genres perhaps means that we need to focus more systematically on developing writing skills than in the past. In general, learners usually find it more motivating if writing is integrated with other skills, and, during the course of a writing lesson, they also get opportunities to read, listen and speak.

Teachers can help learners by focusing on a varied diet of e-genres on a regular basis. A general approach for a variety of e-genres could be as follows:

- 1. Provide a model text with reading comprehension tasks. One of these tasks could focus on the intended audience of the text, the goal of the text and the degree to which the message is clearly conveyed.

2. Highlight and clarify key features of the genre.
This might include a focus on two or three of the following: format, layout, norms associated with the genre, specific language items associated with genre (verb forms, cohesive devices etc.)
3. Practice of the features clarified in the previous step.
4. Writing their own text using process writing strategies (brainstorming, planning, drafting, getting feedback, revising)
5. Reflection questions that get learners to consider the audience of their text and the degree to which their message is clear (e.g. *Who can read this text? Is it possible for someone to get the wrong message? Are you happy for people you don't know to read this text?*).
6. Final draft and sending / posting of the e-genre.

Step 4 above tends to mitigate against the instantaneous nature of much e-communication. However, in terms of supporting and preparing students for the real e-world, this more scaffolded, process-oriented approach may help build learners' confidence.

Clearly, when focusing on e-genres, it is motivating for learners to actually use the media that are available. Teachers can:

1. Get students to set up microblogging accounts (e.g. Twitter)
2. Create a social media group for your class with an English-only rule (e.g. Facebook, Edmodo)
3. Set up collaborative writing tasks as homework (e.g. Google docs)
4. Encourage learners to start their own English language blogs (e.g. Blogger or WordPress)

In summary, the general English language learner in a twenty-first century classroom is probably writing in English often. While they need to engage and learn about norms associated with e-genres they still need to focus on core linguistic writing skills. In fact, doing so on a systematic basis may make them more effective communicators in a digital world.

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